

**JOINT MEETING OF THE CABINET / EDUCATION SKILLS AND
CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

27 March, 2019

Chairperson: Councillor A.L.Thomas

Vice Chairperson: Councillor L.C.Jones

Councillors: M.Crowley, S. ap Dafydd, S.Harris, M.Harvey,
N.T.Hunt, S.K.Hunt, H.N.James, A.Llewelyn,
S.Miller, R.Mizen, J.D.Morgan, S.Paddison,
S.M.Penry, S.Rahaman and M.Caddick

Officers In Attendance S.Phillips, A.Evans, A.Jarrett, H.Jenkins,
G.Nutt, K.Jones, C.Griffiths, S.John, D.Giles
C.L.Davies and J.Woodman-Ralph

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors R.G.Jones, E.V.Latham, P.A.Rees,
A.Wingrave and A.R.Woolcock

1. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRPERSON AND VICE CHAIRPERSON**

Agreed that Councillor A.L.Thomas be appointed Chairperson and that Councillor L.C.Jones be appointed Vice Chairperson for this joint meeting.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

The following Members made declarations of interest at the commencement of the meeting.

Councillor D.Jones Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning - Education through Regional Working (ERW) – as she is a Governor at Cilfrew Primary and Llangatwg Community Schools and confirmed he has dispensation to speak and vote.

- Councillor E.V.Latham Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) – as he is a Governor at Tywyn Primary and Ysgol Bae Baglan and confirmed he has dispensation to speak and vote.
- Councillor P.A.Rees Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) – as he is a member of the ERW Board.
- Councillor P.A.Rees Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) – as he is a Governor of Cefn Season Comprehensive School and Crynallt Primary School and confirmed he has dispensation to speak and vote.
- Councillor R.G.Jones Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) – as he is a member of the ERW Board.
- Councillor R.G.Jones Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) – as he is a Governor at Ysgol Cwm Brombil and Coed Hirwaun Primary School and confirmed he has dispensation to speak and vote.
- Councillor L.C.Jones Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) – as she is a Governor at Melin Primary and Tonnau Primary School.

- Councillor S.K.Hunt Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) – as he is a Governor at Blaendulais and YGG Blaendulais Primary Schools. Also, his daughter works at Ysgol Castell Nedd.
- Councillor C.M.Crowley Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) – as he is a Governor at Tywyn Primary School and Awel y Mor Primary School and confirmed he has dispensation to speak and vote. In addition, he has family members working in Neath Port Talbot Schools.
- Councillor A.Llewelyn Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) he is a School Governor and confirmed he has dispensation to speak and vote.
- Councillor N.T.Hunt Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) – as he is a Governor at Rhosafan Primary School.
- Councillor J.D.Morgan Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) – as he is Chair of Governors at Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Cwn-Nedd and confirmed he has dispensation to speak and vote.

- Councillor S.M.Penry Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) – as she is Vice Chair of Melin Primary School and a Governor at Cefn Season Comprehensive School and confirmed she has dispensation to speak and vote.
- Councillor S.Miller Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) as she is Chair of Governors at Melin Primary School and confirmed she has dispensation to speak and vote.
- Councillor H.N.James Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) as he is a Governor at Ysgol Bro Hir and Ysgol Carrig Hir and confirmed he has dispensation to speak and vote.
- Councillor S.Harris Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) as she is a School Governor and confirmed she has dispensation to speak and vote.

- Councillor S.AP Dafydd Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) as he is a Governor at St. Joseph’s Comprehensive School and Ysgol Bae Baglan and confirmed he has dispensation to speak and vote.
- Councillor R.Mizen Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) as he is a Governor at Cwmafan Primary School and Ysgol Cwm Brombil and confirmed he has dispensation to speak and vote.
- Councillor M.Harvey Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) as he is Chair of Governors at Abbey Primary School.
- M.Caddick (Co-opted Member) Re: Joint Report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning – Education through Regional Working (ERW) as she is a Governor at St Joseph’s Comprehensive School and confirmed she has dispensation to speak and vote.

3. **EDUCATION THROUGH REGIONAL WORKING (ERW) REPORT
(ENCLOSED WITHIN THE CABINET PAPERS)**

Pre-Scrutiny

The Committee scrutinised the following matters.

Cabinet Proposal

The Joint Committee received information on the Education through Regional Working – Regional School Improvement Consortium and the Council's future participation in the (South West and Mid Wales) Regional School Improvement Consortium (ERW) as detailed in the circulated report.

Discussion took place on the process that had resulted in the proposal to serve notice of the intention to withdraw from ERW with affect from 31 March 2020. It was explained that officers of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (NPTCBC) had raised concerns to the Consortium and the Welsh Government in relation to three areas of concern Governance, Quality and Financial over the last 2 years and the proposal before Members today was the last resort. Evidence was available for Members to scrutinise if required.

Following on, it was explained that the support currently provided by ERW was in relation to school development, self evaluation and professional coaching. In addition, one area that ERW was to focus on was the plans to roll out the new curriculum, to date no information had been made available. Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning explained that as a result Neath Port Talbot Education Department was taking steps to arrange plans for the new curriculum locally as this would have a significant impact on the life chances of the young people of Neath Port Talbot.

Reassurance was given that links with schools outside of Neath Port Talbot would continue. Strong links currently exist between NPTCBC and the City and County of Swansea as both councils have similar geographically and demographical makeups. ERW has a system of partner schools but these were not arranged by the matching of areas, in some instances head teachers travelled from Neath Port Talbot to Cerdigion where the schools did not face similar issues.

Lliw Afan Nedd Primary Head Teachers (LLAN) views had been sought in addition to a School Survey undertaken where the feedback was that the support received from the Education Department within NPTCBC was excellent but raised issues in connection to the support received from ERW which was in line with the issues that Education Officers had previously raised.

The Chair of the ERW Joint Committee identified a new model for working in her letter to the Minister for Education in February 2019. To date no response had been received from Welsh Government or ERW to the letter or to the requests for meetings to discuss a way forward. Emphasis was given that work would continue to try to resolve issues and to develop an improved model for regional working and that the decision to withdraw was the last option for the Council to take.

Officers confirmed that there was no penalty for withdrawing from the consortium stated in the Contract. “ *Any Authority may withdraw from the Agreement by giving notice in writing to each of the other Authorities to expire 12 months from the end of the date Financial Year in which the notice is given.*” But that Neath Port Talbot was acting contrary to Welsh Government’s national policy and it was possible that school improvement funding could be withheld. Officers confirmed that a dialogue would take place with Welsh Government identifying the potential risks if the funding was withheld.

Concern was expressed that a risk assessment had not been completed in regard to the proposal. Members were reassured that a risk assessment would be completed if or when the final decision to withdraw from the Consortium was being considered. Following, discussion it was agreed that a report be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee if/when any significant change/s occurred in regard to the contributing factors. In addition, a further report would be submitted prior to the end of the Notice period addressing all the issues as a consequence of withdrawing from the Consortium.

Clarification was given that the support to Welsh Medium Schools would not be compromised, it would be enhanced and that the collaboration between schools across Wales would continue.

The Committee was concerned at the four fold increase in the Council’s contributions to ERW core costs from £40,000 to £160,000 per annum. In the current economic climate the Council could not justify the increase that could potentially put school staff at risk of

redundancy. ERW had also notified the Council of a current underspend of some £590K.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet subject to the additional recommendations. That these reports be added to the relevant scrutiny committees forward work programme.

- That a report be brought to a Joint Meeting of the Education, Skills and Culture and Cabinet Scrutiny Committees if/when any significant change/s occur on the factors that have led to this decision.
- That prior to the expiry of the notice period a full report be brought to a Joint Meeting of the Education, Skills and Culture and Cabinet Scrutiny Committees addressing all issues as a consequence of our exiting the Education through Regional Working Consortium (ERW).

At the end of the meeting Members expressed best wishes to Steve John, Head of ICT on his forthcoming retirement and thanked him for his commitment to Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council over his many years service.

CHAIRPERSON