

# **Education Skills and Culture Scrutiny Committee**

## **(Remotely via Teams)**

## **Members Present:** 25 November 2021

**Chairperson:** Councillor S.H.Reynolds

**Vice Chairperson:** Councillor R.Mizen

**Councillors:** M.Crowley, S.Harris, D.Keogh, S.Miller,  
M.Protheroe, S.Renkes, M.Spooner,  
D.Whitelock, R.W.Wood and J.Hale

**Officers In Attendance** H.Lewis, I.Guy, T.Davies, J.Burge,  
R.Crowhurst, M.Daley, C.Glover, A.Harris,  
K.Jones, A.Spooner-Cleverly and C.Plowman

**Cabinet Invitees:** Councillors A.R.Lockyer and P.A.Rees

## 1. Declarations of Interest

The following Members made a declaration of interest at the commencement of the meeting:

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Cllr S Harris    | Re: Admissions/Capacity in Schools as she is a Governor at Creunant Primary School but has dispensation to speak and vote                                   |
| Cllr D Keogh     | Re: Admissions/Capacity in Schools as he is a Governor at Ysgol Cwm Brombil but has dispensation to speak and vote.   |
| Cllr S Miller    | Re: Admissions/Capacity in Schools as she is a Governor at Melin Primary School and Gnoll Primary School but has dispensation to speak and vote.            |
| Cllr M Spooner   | Re: Admissions/Capacity in Schools as she is a Governor at Rhos Primary but has dispensation to speak and vote.   |
| Cllr M Protheroe | Re: Admissions/Capacity in Schools as he is a Governor at Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School and Melin Primary School but has dispensation to speak and vote. |
| Cllr S Renkes    | Re: Admissions/Capacity in Schools as she is a Governor at Baglan Primary School and Blaenbaglan Primary School but has dispensation to speak and vote      |
| Cllr D Whitelock | Re: Admissions/Capacity in Schools as he is a Governor at Ysgol Cwm Brombil but has dispensation to speak and vote.   |
| Cllr R Wood      | Re: Admissions/Capacity in Schools as he is a Governor at   |

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
|                | Ysgol Bae Baglan but has dispensation to speak and vote.  |
| M Caddick      | Re: Admissions/Capacity in Schools as she is a Governor at St. Joseph's Primary School, Neath but has dispensation to speak and vote                    |
| Cllr A Lockyer | Re: Admissions/Capacity in Schools as he is a Governor at Gnoll Primary and YGG Castell Nedd but has dispensation to speak and vote.                    |
| Cllr P Rees    | Re: Admissions/Capacity in Schools as he is a Governor at Crynallt Primary School and Cefn Saeson Comprehensive but has dispensation to speak and vote. |

## 2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of previous meetings held on 14 October 2021 and 1 November 2021, were approved.

## 3. Admission/Capacity in Schools

The Committee was provided with a follow-up report on the matter of admission/capacity in schools; Members had requested further data in regards capacity numbers and placements to Neath Port Talbot schools.

Concerns were raised in regards to the class sizes in some of the primary schools; the circulated report detailed that some classes had over 30 pupils in one class, which could become unmanageable in some cases. Officers noted that schools aim for up to 30 pupils in a class, however this was not a mandatory figure for junior aged pupils and over; Local Authorities weren't involved in setting the class sizes, this was determined and set by individual schools. It was added that Local Authorities could support and advise schools on the numbers; however, the final decision was made by the schools.

In terms of the capacity figures, it was highlighted that these change on a daily basis; as of now there was capacity in the majority of schools, excluding three schools which exceed capacity. Members were informed that once a capacity limit was reached, and before completing a regular admission, Officers would liaise with the schools to identify if the school could accommodate additional pupils in any way; for example by changing class room set ups. It was mentioned that in each case where a school was nearing capacity, the Head Teacher had agreed to further admissions; the Council does not enforce this, however Officers would approach the school to ask them to consider it.

Members expressed their concerns in regards to the future capacity of schools; in particular those which were already at full capacity, and taking into consideration new housing developments which would generate more children into the area. It was asked if there was solution to this problem. Officers stated that it was very difficult to predict and identify growth in the community, and in which locations this will occur; and further to this, the capacity levels in which schools should be built at. It was mentioned that there were many issues with building new schools that were larger than the numbers in current schools. However, Members were assured that Officers had regular meetings with developers and planners, and were involved in the work of the new Local Development Plan (LDP); this meant that Officers were aware of the locations in which new housing developments would be built. It was noted that a calculation was used to try and predict how many children would be generated from specific housing estates, and it was surprising how small of a number that could often be.

Further to this, it was explained that Officers meet on a regular basis with the Council's Admissions Team; whenever new schools proposals were being considered, there were various Officers that were involved to inform the process.

It was explained that Officers re-visit the capacity levels once they had been established to identify if the capacity calculations meet what was needed in the area.

Members were informed that the Council was also currently consulting on the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP), which was looking at introducing three new Welsh Medium schools into the area.

Officers assured Members that they were monitoring the situation very closely.

It was noted that children care providers in the local area had increased, or were in the process of increasing, their registration for under two year olds; Officers were asked if they had taken this into consideration for future plans, as it will affect schools further down the line. It was confirmed that Officers were aware of this matter and work closely with child care colleagues to monitor their capacity levels.

Officers were thanked for the detail included in the report; and Members requested to receive updates on this information, as and when appropriate, in order to monitor the figures.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

#### **4. Forward Work Programme**

The Education, Skills and Culture Scrutiny Forward Work Programme was noted.

**CHAIRPERSON**