

## Education Skills and Culture Scrutiny Committee

(Remotely via Teams)

**Members Present:**

**17 February 2022**

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

**Vice Chairperson:** Councillor R.Mizen

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

**Co-opted Voting  
Members:** M.Caddick, A. Amor and L.Newman

**Officers In  
Attendance** C.Millis, H.Levry, R.Crowhurst, H.Lewis,  
A.Spooner-Cleverly, I.Guy, L.Jones, C.Davies  
and T.Davies

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

---

1. **Welcome and Roll Call**

The Chair welcomed those present and a roll call was taken.

2. **Chairs Announcements**

The Chair noted which items from the Cabinet Board agenda the Committee had agreed to scrutinise.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

Cllr. Sonia Reynolds

Re: Childcare Capacity and the Effect of the Pandemic, Childcare Facilities within Schools in Neath Port Talbot and Think Family Partnership update as she is a Governor at YGG Gawun-Cae-

Gurwen but has dispensation to speak and vote.

Cllr. Sian Harris –

Re: Childcare Capacity and the Effect of the Pandemic, Childcare Facilities within Schools in Neath Port Talbot and Think Family Partnership update as she is a Governor at Creunant Primary School and her daughter is employed at Ysgol Cwm Brombil but has dispensation to speak and vote.

Cllr. Marcia Spooner –

Re: Childcare Capacity and the Effect of the Pandemic, Childcare Facilities within Schools in Neath Port Talbot and Think Family Partnership update as she is the Chair of Rhos primary School and she has dispensation to vote.

#### 4. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes from the meeting held on 19 January 2022 were approved.

#### 5. **Consider the impacts that the pandemic has had on Schools (Verbal update)**

The Committee received a verbal update regarding the impact of the pandemic on the local schools. It was expressed to the Committee that there had been a significant impact on the local schools, children, parents, communities and the staff; however, after 24 months of the pandemic, the recovery had begun. This was both an academic recovery, and also the mental health, anxiety and confidence of both the affected children and adults.

It was explained to the Members of the Committee that Wales were now on alert zero from 28 January 2022, which meant there was a reduced amount of risk assessment happening within Wales and within Neath Port Talbot. It was noted that attendance had been affected. On 7 February 2022, the average attendance was 87.83%, with 336 children with confirmed Covid-19 and 162 children off due to

isolation. In comparison, just before the change in risk assessments in January, the average attendance was 82% with 874 children with Covid-19 and 314 in isolation. It was noted that five to 15 year olds had been hit the hardest due to the vaccinations; it had recently been reported in the press that a rollout of vaccinations for the over fives was being considered.

The Committee were informed that the Education Support Officers had visited every local school and had taken a sample selection of comments made by senior leaders about how Covid-19 had affected them. The presenting officer read some extracts of these to the Committee, which included details on the impact on pupils social and communication skills, the management of pupils' and members of staffs' mental health and anxieties, and the effects on examinations.

The presenting officer concluded by stating that he personally believed schools had not been given the right recognition for their resilience, the children's resilience, and the staff's resilience during this pandemic. He noted that vaccinations were likely to be rolled out soon and recovery could now begin in the local schools. He stated to the Committee that the schools would get all the support they needed from the local authority.

The Chair and the Committee thanked the officer for his update and noted their recognition for the huge effort that had been put in by staff in schools and to the local authority supporting them.

6. **Childcare Capacity in the County Borough following the effect of the pandemic**

The Committee considered an update report regarding the childcare capacity in Neath Port Talbot and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the sector.

Members of the Committee noted a comment in the report which referred to low morale within the sector due to the lack of recognition by Welsh Government for childcare and asked whether this had been addressed with the Welsh Government. Officers confirmed that they had proposed the adjustment of salaries to reflect the testing time that the sector had faced and the additional statutory duties which had been agreed for childcare providers. The local authority had been working with childcare providers to look at new pathways and had revise internal structures and staffing to ensure the best level of support was being provided. It was also noted that the Early Years

team had been providing training, which had been well attended, and the team had continued to support staff with their mental health and wellbeing.

It was noted that funding had been received from Welsh Government to support the sector, as detailed in the report, and the officer requested that Members of the Committee contact her if they would like further information regarding this.

The Committee thanked the officers for their report.

## 7. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following items:

### Childcare Facilities in Schools

The Committee considered the update report which sought to gain authorisation for the ongoing and continuing development of childcare facilities on school sites and to allocate delegated powers to the Head of Early Years, Inclusion and Partnerships to authorise childcare developments on school sites.

In regards to the capital builds, the officer confirmed that most of the programs were on target, and were likely to be completed by the dates set out in the report. It was noted, however, there could be a slight delay to Blaendulais Welsh/Bilingual and Cwmavon, but only by a few months, due to groundworks unavailability.

In response to queries raised by the Committee, the officers explained that current childcare sufficiency audit information had been looked at to see what provision was needed in each area and whether it was currently a Flying Start area. Where appropriate, on-site schools, governors and the parents had been consulted on what they felt was needed and the provider would then determine the provision required for each site.

Members of the Committee noted the importance of not competing with existing childcare settings in areas but to ensure the gaps were being filled, particularly as a number of settings had been lost during the Covid-19 pandemic. The officers agreed and explained that if there was already childcare in place, this would be extended with capital if a need had been identified through the childcare offer and in line with the Welsh Education Strategic Plan. If there was not a

childcare setting in place, then the expressions of interest would be considered.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

### Annual Pupil Performance Report 2021

The Committee extended their congratulations to the staff for their hard work and wished them well for the forthcoming exams and other tests that would be taking place in the near future.

### Quarter 3 Performance Report

The Committee considered the report which provided Members with quarter 3 performance management data, complaints and compliments for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 December 2021 for Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Directorate.

Members of the Committee noted the positive data contained within the report, particularly in regards to the percentage of children learning Welsh, the youth service and the communities for work, and thanked the officers for their hard work.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

### Think Families Partnership Update

The Committee received an update on the work of the Think Family Partnership, including delivery of key programmes and services for children, young people and families.

The Members of the Committee queried why the Welsh in Childcare Award was to launch in five new English settings, as opposed to Welsh language settings. The officers explained that the aim of the award was to encourage English medium settings to hopefully become bilingual.

It was noted by the Committee that the childcare offer was worth £4.50 per hour which, despite being higher than the standard rate which was approximately £3-£4, was still very low. It was queried whether the Welsh Government had given any indication of increasing the rate going forward as the fuel and cost of living

continued to increase. It was confirmed that there was a current rate review ongoing across the childcare sector by the Welsh Government, however, officers had not been informed yet of the outcome.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

8. **Forward Work Programme 2021/22**

The Work Programme of the Education, Skills and Culture Scrutiny Committee was noted.

9. **Urgent Items**

Because of the need to deal now with the matters contained in Minute No. 10 below, the Chairman agreed that these could be raised at today's meeting as urgent items pursuant to Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Reason:

Due to the time element.

10. **Access to meetings**

**RESOLVED:** that pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

11. **Pre-Scrutiny**

The Committee scrutinised the following Private urgent item:

**Cabinet Board Proposals**

Members received an update in relation to Godregraig Primary School, as detailed in the private circulated report.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

**CHAIRPERSON**