

EDUCATION SKILLS AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Council Chamber - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

14 September 2017

Chairperson: Councillor A.L.Thomas

Vice Chairperson: Councillor M.Crowley

Councillors: S.ApDafydd, S.Harris, N.T.Hunt, H.N.James, R.Mizen, J.D.Morgan, M.Protheroe, R.L.Taylor, D.Whitelock and C.Williams

Officers In Attendance A.Thomas, J.Burge, N.Evans, I.Guy and Ms.A.Harris

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

Observers Councillor A. Woolcock

1. **TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 20TH JULY 2017.**

The Scrutiny Committee noted the minutes.

2. **TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE LEISURE AND CULTURE SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE HELD ON 11TH JULY 2017.**

The Scrutiny Committee noted the minutes.

3. **TO RECEIVE THE SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18.**

The Committee considered the work programme for 2017/2018 and requested that further work be undertaken with a view to adding the following items to the work programme.

- Review of the Music Service following the recent changes to service delivery;
- Schools Budget Forum to consider any information that may be relevant to the scrutiny committee;

- Physical Education and the uptake across the County Borough at both primary and secondary level;
- Welsh Language and what the department is currently doing to assist the Council in meeting the Welsh Government suggestion that there will be 1m welsh speakers in Wales by 2025;
- A report highlighting the successes of new school builds in terms of education;
- Report on the achievements of Looked After Children in Further or Higher Education.

It was agreed that the scrutiny officer would liaise with the Committee and the relevant officer to ensure the correct information was presented to the Committee.

4. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following Cabinet Board items:

4.1 Commissioning of Families First Funded Services

Members considered a report that sought delegated authority for the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning to embark on a tendering process to secure new Families First funded services for 2018 onwards.

Officers highlighted that the aims of the programme were to ensure there was a mix of service providers that included internal providers, third sector and private sector. It was further stated that the negotiations would take place between October and March and that this was a short period of time and that was the reason behind the request for delegated authority.

Members asked was there confidence that the grant will remain in existence and it was confirmed that there is always a risk with grants but as part of any new contracts there would be a clause included that should the grant to the Council be reduced then the grant to the relevant organisation would be reduced by a similar level.

Members asked for clarity on what was meant by the statement “the most economically advantageous tenders” and whether this would just be the lowest price tenders. Officers confirmed that any tenders that are awarded will be on a price/quality assessment.

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

4.1 Pupil Attendance Update

Members considered a report that contained data in relation to pupil attendance during the 2016/2017 academic year.

Officers highlighted that there had been a slight increase in primary school attendance and a slight decrease in secondary attendance when compared against the previous year figures.

Members noted there was still a potential issue with parents taking their children on holiday during term time due to the costs. Officers confirmed that this was not an issue they could address individually but Welsh Government were lobbying the tourism businesses in respect of their prices when it is school holidays. It was noted that Head teachers in Wales do have some discretion on allowing absences within term time for holidays.

Members stated that in today's society the problems could exacerbated due to the make up of families and pupils could have more than one holiday a year if they are part of an extended family with step parents for example.

Members asked for clarity on persistent absenteeism and officers confirmed that generally these were pupils with attendance levels below 80%. A significant number of persistent absentees were also subject to free school meals.

Following scrutiny the report was noted.

4.3 Quarterly Performance Management Data 2017/2018 – Quarter One Performance (1st April 2017 – 30th June 2017)

Members considered the quarterly performance monitoring report that covered the Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Directorate.

Officers advised that a report would be brought to a future meeting as there were concerns in relation to the figures captured for two libraries as the figures were down more than could reasonably be expected and further research was required on why this was the case.

Members asked whether any investigations or conversations are had in relation to partnership working and it was confirmed that wherever possible the conversations are held and the relevant actions are taken.

Following scrutiny the report was noted.

CHAIRPERSON