

Minutes of the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

25 January 2023

Multi-Location Meeting - Council Chamber, Port Talbot & Microsoft Teams

Chairperson:	Councillor R.Phillips
Councillors:	W.Carpenter, M.Crowley, J.Henton, J.Jones, C.Lewis, R.Mizen, P.A.Rees, S.Renkes, S.H.Reynolds and D.Whitelock
Co-opted Voting Members:	M.Caddick, L.Newman
Officers In Attendance	I.Guy, H.Lervy, C.Millis, Thomas, A.Thomas, P.Walker, R.Crowhurst, W.John and J.Burge, S.Griffiths, M.Daley, E.Dennis, A.Spooner-Cleverly, H.Jones, N.Blackmore, Z.Ashton, L.Clement-Jones, D.Lewis, S.McCluskie and A.Thomas
Cabinet Invitees:	Councillors N.Jenkins and J.Hurley

1. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr. N. Gold-Up John and Cllr D. Thomas.

The Chair confirmed, Members of the Committee would scrutinise all items on the Cabinet Agenda.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were received from Cllr. D Whitelock, Cllr R. Mizen, Cllr. J.Jones, Cllr. P. Rees and Cllr. W. Carpenter who declared they were Members of the SACRE Committee.

Cllr. S. Reynolds made a declaration of interest against agenda item 14 of the Cabinet Board Agenda.

3. **CONSULTATION ON 2023/24 BUDGET PROPOSALS**

Members were presented with the consultation on 2023/24 Budget Proposals, as outlined and contained within the report circulated. Members were reminded the report was presented in it's full entirety and were to focus on the information relating to this specific Committee.

Members were requested to table any income generation suggestions along with potential savings opportunities.

Members of the scrutiny committee raised questions relating to the funding of schools and the support of pay awards to school staff for the year 2023/24.

Officers were able to clarify Schools would see a figure of 8.6% in terms of funding, currently over and above the current rate of 7.1%. Officers also outlined funding provided by Welsh Government during the Covid recovery process, and Officers confirmed schools were in receipt of all the funding, of which, assisted against the reserves budgets.

Officers highlighted the forthcoming industrial strike action, but at present due to the uncertainty of the outcome and potential implications, should the pay award go above the funding already available were unable to clarify the situation to members.

Members next raised a query surrounding the home to school Transport and the proposed 9% figure. Officers were asked if there were any contingency plans available should the figure increase due to the ongoing cost of living crisis and secondly if inflation rates should also remain at a high.

Officers confirmed the 9% increase was noted to consider the current inflation costs with an additional budget pressure of £1.276 million for school transport. Officers outlined; the costs were proposed to

support current rates in the hope inflation would see a reduction over subsequent years with contracts proposed to increase by 5%. Members were given a brief update in terms of a contingency plan, with Officers stating that following a scoping exercise and that fact budgets were at present balanced it was not viable to proceed any further. Schemes to reduce travel costs and demands were outlined to Members, in particular those for Children transitioning into adulthood.

Members queried the insourcing of Leisure Services and the impact this would have on the budget. Officers confirmed the implementation had been proposed to delay this for a further twelve months. The costs however are reflected within the medium term budget plan. A reduction of energy costs in terms of solar panels and proposed schemes was discussed with Members informed, Officers were currently assessing buildings surrounding this topic.

4. **POST COVID UPDATE**

Members were presented with an overview to the report by Officers. Members noted the positive effects of recent appointments made in terms of child psychology officers. Officers also outlined members the opportunity of appointing speech and language therapists. This as prioritised post pandemic and , done via funding granting sources.

Members highlighted the difficulties of children in terms of transition periods returning to school following the pandemic. Officers were pleased to inform Members of appointments made in terms of child psychologists, re-engaging with children and families, assisting with mental health issues raised due to the effect of the pandemic. Members were informed a report would be expected in the near future in conjunction with Social Services.

Officers went on to state a Covid-19 forward action plan, was to continue as an ongoing document, and Members would be updated with future information reports.

The report is for information purposes, therefore the report was noted.

5. **PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY**

Agenda item 7 – Participation and Engagement Strategy

Members were informed the Strategy had involved many stakeholders within the engagement process. Particular responses were seen from children and young people. Officers were keen to highlight the importance of involving these specific stakeholders in the development stages.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet Board.

Agenda item 8 – The Agreed Syllabus for Religion, Values and Ethics in Neath Port Talbot Schools.

The recommendation was supported to Cabinet Board.

Agenda item 9 – School Improvement Team

Members raised a question in terms of schools within Neath Port Talbot of special measures and improvements. Officers were able to clarify, there were currently none requiring these. Officers confirmed investigations of this nature would be formally carried out by Estyn.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

Agenda item 10 – Employability and Skills Update report

Officers were able to clarify to Officers that the Communities plu, would be replaced by the new Welsh Government funded programme as of the 1st of April 2023, covering young people from ages 16 above.

Members were updated on ongoing collaborations between departments in Directorates in terms of providing information to young people of available programmes.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

Agenda item 11 – Margam Castle Cadw Grant Funding.

Members were provided with an overview of the grant funding in terms of emergency works to repairs to the fabric of the building. Officers went on to explain, the works once complete were anticipated to allow public access which was at present unavailable.

Officers further updated Members to a 5-year ongoing project fully funded by Heritage Lottery, that would see the project in receipt of £10k.

Members congratulated officers on the successful funding.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

Agenda item 12 – Leisure Services Report

Members were provided with an update on the report. Members were informed due to financial constraints, the initial timeline date had been delayed by twelve months, and was now proposed to be 1st of April 2024, as opposed to 2023.

Members queried financial details of insourcing Leisure Services and the effect on the budget gap.

Officers responded that Members would be able to source information from the devised Business plan, which would be circulated following the meeting. Members were informed of potential income generation and energy efficiency saving measures.

Members were given a brief overview of the Council's expectations once the service had fully been established back into the Authority.

Following scrutiny, the report was noted.

Agenda item 14 – Supplementary report – Expansion of Flying Start Childcare – Phase 2.

Members made enquiries on the capital bill situated at Cwmavon, and asked Officers for an update to this. Officers confirmed all surveys were now complete and the proposed completion date of March 2024 was on track.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to Cabinet Board.

6. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23**

That the Forward Work Programme 2033/23 for Education, Skills and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

7. **URGENT ITEMS**

No urgent items were received.

Councillor R.Phillips

Chairperson