

## Minutes of the Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

6 July 2023

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

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<b>Vice Chairperson:</b>	<b>Councillor D.Thomas</b>
<b>Councillors:</b>	N.Goldup-John, J.Henton, J.Jones, C.Lewis, R.Mizen, P.A.Rees and S.Renkes and R.Wood
<b>Councillor Apologies:</b>	R.Phillips, S.H.Reynolds and D. Whitelock
<b>Co-opted Voting Members:</b>	L.Newman
<b>Co-opted Voting Members Apologies:</b>	A.Amor, M Caddick
<b>Officers In Attendance</b>	I.Guy, H.Lervy, H.Lewis, C.Millis, Thomas, K.Jones, A.Spooner-Cleverly, P.Chivers, S.McCluskie and K.Windsor-Brown and P.Chivers
<b>Cabinet Invitees:</b>	Councillors J.Hurley, N.Jenkins and C.Phillips

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### 1. **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

It was confirmed that the committee would be scrutinising items 7 and 9 from the Cabinet Board Agenda.

### 2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None received.

### 3. **PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY**

#### Employability Hub in Aberavon Shopping Centre.

The Officer gave an overview of the report as detailed in the circulated Cabinet Board agenda pack.

Members supported the recommendation and commented that it was right to maintain a presence in the shopping centre where there was footfall. Members thanked officers and staff for their work in making the Hub a success but questioned whether there were plans to open a similar hub in Neath to serve Neath and Swansea Valley communities. Officers confirmed that the possibility of opening further hubs at Neath and Pontardawe libraries was being explored; if agreed, the hubs would replicate the services offered in the Port Talbot Hub.

Following scrutiny, members were supportive of the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet Board.

#### Quarter 4 Performance Indicators

Members acknowledged that absenteeism was not only a local issue but also a national one. The monitoring of school attendance is required as many pupils have missed a considerable amount of school due to the pandemic; this may have an impact on groups of pupils, particularly those who are currently studying for and taking examinations.

The Head of Service gave an overview of exclusions which has contributed to the attendance issues. Neath Port Talbot has a high level of exclusions with 677 pupils receiving a fixed term exclusion this academic year; missing approximately 3200 days of learning, this has added to the attendance issue. All schools are working to bring children back into school, but it was acknowledged that families also need support as family based activity is a contributing factor in non-attendance.

In relation to permanent exclusions, consultations are being undertaken regarding a proposal to form an All Wales Panel; this expert panel would discuss whether a child can return to school following multiple permanent exclusions. There are positive and negative consequences to this proposal, it would ensure an all Wales

approach but there would be additional pressures on governing bodies. More information will be provided when it is available.

The Head of Service stated that there was a link between exclusions and attendance; in Neath Port Talbot, 277 pupils have been excluded three or four times. To address this, there are plans for teams of officers to attend secondary schools in September to meet with at least 10 children whose attendance is 80% or less, from every school. Officers from Educational Psychology, School Based Counselling Service and Education Welfare Service will work with pupils and support them with any issues which may contribute to their non-attendance. This approach has been reported to and is supported by NAASH. It is hoped that as the officers will be independent of the school community, they will be able to work with children to support them and learn lessons on what Neath Port Talbot may be able to do differently. The outcome of this work will be brought back to this committee.

There is a huge amount of work going on behind the scene in Neath Port Talbot to improve attendance, however, there is not a one size fits all solution and it will take time before improvements are seen. It was acknowledged that pupils from year nine have been adversely affected due to the period of school that they missed during the pandemic. The Head of Service mentioned many forthcoming areas of change such as; examination changes, the roll out of the new curriculum for Wales, Additional Learning Needs reform and the ability to recruit high quality staff and noted that in addition to these changes the family behind the child needs help, not just the child.

Following scrutiny, members noted the item for information.

4. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24**

This item was noted.

5. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items

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**Councillor**

**Chairperson**