

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

14 March 2024

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

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<b>Chairperson:</b>	<b>Councillor P.Rogers</b>
<b>Councillors:</b>	W.Carpenter, N.Goldup-John, J.Henton, D.Keogh, P.A.Rees, S.Renkes, S.H.Reynolds, R.Phillips and R.W.Wood
<b>Co-opted Voting Members:</b>	M.Caddick and L.Newman
<b>Officers In Attendance</b>	I.Guy, H.Lervy, H.Lewis, C.Millis, R.Crowhurst, J.Burge, C.Saunders, C.Morris, P.Chivers, A.Griffiths, D.A.Lewis, S.McCluskie, A.Spooner- Cleverly and M.Trigg, B.Blackmore, S.Griffiths and P.Chivers
<b>Cabinet Invitees:</b>	Councillors J.Hurley, N.Jenkins and C.Phillips

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

It was proposed, seconded and agreed that Cllr. Phil Rogers would chair the meeting.

The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

It was confirmed that the committee would be scrutinising items 9, 11, 12 and 13 from the Cabinet Board Agenda.

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

There were none.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meetings held on 8 January 2024 and 1 February 2024 were approved as true and accurate records.

4. **PUPIL ATTENDANCE UPDATE**

Members questioned whether attendance issues had been identified linked to pupils who are ineligible for school transport.

The Head of Education Development confirmed that transport issues were one of many reasons given for non-attendance/lateness. It was noted that attendance figures had improved compared to the same period last year.

Following scrutiny, members noted the report.

5. **PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY**

Admission to Community Schools – School Admission Policy (back from Consultation)

Members expressed concern that some schools are oversubscribed due to the admission of preferred placements; pupils moving into the area during the academic year may have to travel great distances for a school place. Members asked whether representation could be made to Welsh Government for increased in-year availability.

The Head of Education Development noted the comments.

Following scrutiny, the committee supported the recommendation to Cabinet Board.

Adult Learning

Members asked for further information in relation to the spread of courses available in outlying communities.

Officers confirmed that a large number of courses were run at the main Tir Morfa centre due to difficulties in securing suitable venues. Welsh Government guidelines require a minimum of eight participants

per course, where this is not possible, courses are offered on a hybrid basis. An Engagement Officer has been employed to work with hard to reach communities. Digital inclusion officers are working in communities to support people to increase their digital skills.

Members questioned whether the service had links to Flying Start parenting courses as a means of supporting parents to improve school attendance.

Officers advised members that work has been undertaken in partnership with Flying Start, Community Focused Schools, Family Information Service and Team around the Family to signpost people to relevant courses. The Learning Engagement Officer regularly attends events in outlying areas and learning events are arranged where there is sufficient demand. Communities are consulted via Social media channels to identify what courses are required. Officers advised members that the Engagement Officer would welcome communication from members to identify any training gaps in their areas.

Members asked if there were any links to adult learners through youth groups.

Officers confirmed that there was a good working relationship between Adult Learning and the Youth Service and links between the services would be explored further.

Members commented that the amount of available courses was encouraging but suggested it would be useful for the information to be disseminated to all members. Officers agreed to forward information to all members in relation to their engagement work and further discussions with members would be welcomed.

Members referred to page 230 of the report contained within the agenda pack, and asked for clarification regarding the role of the Adult Learning in the Community Manager in co-ordinating a project aimed at promoting and supporting local 'retrofitting' opportunities.

Officers confirmed the work was being undertaken in partnership with schools and colleges to help people to upskill and gain qualifications. The project has been ongoing for under a year and has helped to promote the energy agenda and allow people to upskill.

Following scrutiny, the committee noted the report.

## Comedy Festival

Members questioned whether there would be an appropriate cross section of small venues throughout the county borough.

The Head of Leisure, Tourism, Heritage and Culture advised members that it was hoped the festival would grow over the coming years. A small amount of funding was available through the Shared Prosperity Fund but details of any other funding opportunities would be welcomed.

Officers advised members that work has been ongoing to secure acts at the main theatres with other events planned for smaller venues in valley communities. Venues are yet to be finalised but will include a mix of rugby clubs, community centres and private venues for mid-week performances. Tickets for each venue will be subsidised and the aim is for audiences of 30/40 people at the smaller venues. Members expressed concern regarding the potential for inappropriate content and expressed the importance of some family friendly events.

Officers confirmed that all parties would be briefed to understand the inclusive aim of the festival. Some of the fringe activities will involve performances directly aimed at children. Performances are planned for town/village centres and also residential homes. Comedy will be of an appropriate type for the venue.

Members supported the festival and commented that Aberafan beach could be used for future events to hold open air shows. Members noted the importance of increasing the tourist draw to Aberafan beach and suggested comedians could be used to promote the seafront.

The Head of Leisure, Tourism, Heritage and Culture thanked members for their comments. The initial festival would be limited by the funding available but it is hoped the festival will grow in subsequent years.

The Cabinet Member for Nature, Tourism and Wellbeing thanked officers for their work to date. The festival would be an event for the whole of Neath Port Talbot with a diverse variety of venues and include the Welsh language.

Following scrutiny, the committee noted the report.

## Annual Pupil Performance Report

Members acknowledged that the rise in exclusion rates was a national issue but noted the above national average exclusion data for pupils in Neath Port Talbot. In relation to the new Curriculum for Wales, members queried how information would be gathered going forward as teacher assessments were no longer being submitted to the local authority or Welsh Government.

The Head of Education Development confirmed that there has been a move from testing pupils; schools are working towards continual progression and assessment, to better support young people and their families. Further information from the Welsh Government in relation to qualifications is awaited. In relation to exclusions, comparisons are not made to other authorities. The focus is on working with partners to support pupils, families and schools within Neath Port Talbot in a timely way. Work is ongoing to improve the quality of teaching which will impact on the quality of learning. Work is also ongoing to improve provisions to ensure pupil's needs are met and with the Early Years team on early identification.

Members asked for further clarification on how information is captured and feedback into the system.

The Head of Education Development advised members that progression steps are being measured, schools will have an idea of the potential of individual pupils or cohort of pupils. Work is ongoing on Educational Learning Pathways; children who are not following the curriculum may be educated at skill centres or work with businesses as junior apprentices. A continuous monitoring system is in place but information is not collated as it was previously. The aim is to provide positive feedback to enable pupils to make daily progress.

Members expressed interest in Key Stage 3 results in relation to Welsh first language pupils, this was the only area where indicators had not dropped compared to the previous year. Members questioned why this was the case and whether there were any other correlations.

The Head of Education Development advised members that work is ongoing to learn from the data and try to replicate the results in other schools. However, the profile of Welsh medium schools shows significantly lower number of pupils entitled to Free School Meals and lower levels of Additional Learning Needs.

Members commented that work was needed to encourage various categories of families to attend first language Welsh education to ensure a good spread in those schools.

The Cabinet Member for Education stated it was important to look at the contextual data, Neath Port Talbot has some of the most deprived areas in Wales, with high levels of free school meals and additional learning needs. The Cabinet Member stated that many pupils who wouldn't be succeeding previously have moved up into higher qualifications. There is a need to tie in with the Childrens pathway, with earlier intervention and support for the family.

The Chair thanked officers for their hard work in this area and acknowledged it was a difficult task.

Following scrutiny, the committee noted the report.

6. **COMMITTEE ACTION LOG**

The committee action log was noted.

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

Members requested a paper be brought to the next meeting outlining the make-up and Terms of Reference of the working group on Celtic leisure, and verbal progress of the group, if available.

The forward work programme was noted.

8. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items

**Cllr. P. Rogers  
Chairperson**