



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday,
14 September 2023 at 5.00 pm.

This meeting was live streamed, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

County Borough Councillors – The following Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee Councillors were present in the Council Chamber:-

Councillor S Evans (Chair)

Councillor M Maohoub Councillor C Preedy

The following Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee Councillors were present online:-

Councillor K Webb Councillor J Brencher
Councillor J Cook Councillor J Elliott
Councillor S Hickman Councillor C Lises
Councillor M Maohoub Councillor C Preedy
Councillor D Wood

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr P Booth, Voting Diocesan Authorities Representative
Mr M Cleverley, Representing NASUWT and Teachers' Panel
Mrs R Lydon, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
Mr M Thomas, Representing NEU
Mr M Veale, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Officers in attendance:-

Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Ms L Howell, 21st Century School Organisation and Business Manager
Ms A Richards, Service Director for 21st Century Schools and Transformation
Mrs T Watson, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence were received from County Borough Councillors Ashford, Emanuel and Smith, Co-opted Member, Mr L Patterson, the Head of Access & Inclusion Services, Ceri Jones, the Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation and Welsh Language, Cllr Lewis and the Service Director, Democratic Services and Communications, Christian Hanagan.

17 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Agenda item 4 – Consultation on a proposal to develop a new 3-19 special school in Rhondda Cynon Taf

- County Borough Councillor C Preedy - Personal - 'One of the Schools named in the report, Ysgol Ty Coch, sits in my ward'
- Mr R Lydon, Co-opted Member – Personal – 'I am Chair of Governor of Park Lane Special School'

Agenda Item 5 - Consultation on the proposals to realign Additional Learning Needs mainstream Learning Support Class provision within Rhondda Cynon Taf

- County Borough Councillor S Evans – Personal – 'The school that my son attends is named in the report'
- County Borough Councillor C Lises – Personal – 'I am Chair of Governors at Hawthorn Primary and Member of the Governing body at Hawthorn Secondary School'

Mr M Veale, Co-opted Member – Personal – 'I am Governor at Hawthorn Highschool and of the temporary Governing Body for Ysgol Afon Wen'

18 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 19th July 2023 as an accurate reflection of the meeting subject to the following amendment:-

That the Head of Service Transformation, Admissions and Governance should read Head of Service, Transformation, Admissions & Governance.

19 CONSULTATION LINKS

Members were advised that the latest open consultations being run by Welsh Government, were circulated on the 1st September, and at this time, there are no new relevant Welsh Government consultations to bring to Members attention.

20 PROPOSALS TO DEVELOP A NEW SPECIAL SCHOOL IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

The Senior Democratic & Scrutiny Officer reminded Members that the purpose was for the Committee to formally respond to the Council's consultation which proposed to develop a 3-19 new special school in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT). The Service Director of 21st Century Schools and Transformation provided Members with information regarding the proposals to develop a new special school in RCT and took Members through the report.

A Member asked about the parental responses to the consultation, how engaged they were and what the process was for consulting with parents of children with existing needs.

The Service Director of 21st Century Schools and Transformation acknowledged there had been individual meetings with each of the special schools, as part of the school organisation code process, including governors, pupils, school council, and parents. In addition, an open evening was held at Clydach Vale, which was poorly attended. The

consultation document had also been sent to schools within RCT for comment.

The 21st Century Schools Business and School Organisation Manager confirmed that all parents with children at special schools were sent the link to the consultation documents and to date, there were 44 responses, with less than half being negative. It was noted that it hadn't been considered to be a controversial consultation, and the feedback had been positive on the whole. Meetings with existing staff members and the governing bodies at all the schools had seen relatively low attendance.

A Member asked for a summary of response from Menter Iaith, Mudiad Meithrin and the Welsh Language Commissioner.

The 21st Century Schools Business and School Organisation Manager confirmed that to date, no responses had been received. The only statutory consultee response received to date was from Estyn.

The Member asked how many pupils transitioned from a special school to mainstream learning support class and vice versa.

The Head of Learner Support Service explained that in the last five years she had known only one child who had gone from a special school to mainstream. In terms of LSC through to special schools, lots of parents would give the child the opportunity in the safe environment of a primary school, but the step into secondary was just too big.

The Member also asked for clarification about the differences in data.

The 21st Century Schools Business and School Organisation Manager explained that within the Code, the minimum needed to be used was the last 5 years data in terms of attendance, although she acknowledged the other report used 10 years. The Director of Education and Inclusion Services added that the data within the special school report demonstrated significant growth, in terms of demand.

The Member noted the significant out of county provision and the cost attached to that and sought assurance that this provision may alleviate some of that cost, with the new expanded provision.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that with regard to out of county provision the Council was good at keeping children within county and within existing provisions. There were exceptions e.g., when children and young people required a residential placement, or when the local authority was directed by Tribunal to place learners in provisions out of county. There had been a reduction in out of county costs, but it was difficult to give any reassurance in relation to future placements given the increase in complexity of need and demand for special school placements, but the proposal should significantly enhance capacity.

A Member referred to Page 49 and asked what options had been explored in terms of post 16 provision.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that some really good work had been done in developing post 16 specialist provision on college campuses, which had worked really effectively but there were restrictions on some school sites, with regard to expanding post 16 provision.

A Member referred to the maintenance costs associated with the existing special schools, and asked if those maintenance costs would be alleviated by the proposal.

The Service Director of 21st Century Schools and Transformation acknowledged that the maintenance costs would still be there, but through the Council's Capital Programme, would look to support the schools to reduce the backlog of repairs and maintenance, although it was a challenge. Existing Capital had also been invested in special schools, over the last 3 years to improve them.

A Member noted the Council's commitment to becoming carbon neutral and asked for clarification around the impact of transportation.

The Service Director of 21st Century Schools and Transformation acknowledged that there would not be much of a reduction in cost, so it was more about keep children within catchments, as some of the distances would not be as great as they were now, which would be a benefit. It was acknowledged that there would not be any savings, but it was not expected that transport costs would increase significantly.

A Member asked if the Council had considered contracting environmentally friendly vehicles e.g., electric.

The Service Director of 21st Century Schools and Transformation confirmed that a lot of the taxis and school transport, encouraged by the integrated school transport team, was reverting to electric vehicles, so this was an encouraging outlook.

A Member asked if out of county provision would be visited to look at examples.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services acknowledged that they had already been to see one provision, as well as meeting with specialist design teams, with workshops held about what a new school could potentially look like, highlighting that the design team worked across the UK, so they could draw on best practice, with further visits to be held where deemed appropriate.

The Member also sought clarification around speech and language

support available in non-specialist units in schools.

The Head of Learner Support Service acknowledged that there were a couple of strategies and approaches available including outreach teams in the schools, as well as dedicated outreach teachers, whilst working in partnership with Health. In addition, there was a pilot project on early language, which was in the second year. This ensures schools are equipped to meet the needs of children who present as non-verbal on entry.

A Member sought clarification around the workforce, and asked if it already existed in RCT, acknowledging the need for highly skilled and trained teachers and support staff.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that any new setting was an incredible draw for people in terms of recruitment and didn't anticipate that would be a significant problem, in attracting to the sector. However, it was acknowledged that a new setting could have a knock-on effect on staffing in existing provisions, which needed to be mitigated against. It was hoped that this proposal would attract staff from beyond existing specialist settings as well.

A Member expressed concern with regard to the equality impact screening and requested that a full impact equality assessment is carried out.

A Member referred to the capacity calculations, and felt it needed to be clear, in terms of predictions, for the number of special school places to be clarified in the future and whether the new set-up would cover that.

The Service Director of 21st Century Schools and Transformation explained it was difficult because Welsh Government don't specify capacity calculations for a special school, instead there are building bulletin guidelines, , and recognised it was a moving feast with children with varying needs.

A Member was fully supportive of gender-neutral toilets noting that their primary consideration was design and safety, and the preferable model was with everything contained within a single unit.

A Member fully concurred with the Member, and agreed this was the model that should be aimed for.

A Member asked if consideration had been given to a specialist Welsh Medium support e.g., Welsh speaking staff or a stream.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that as far as possible in existing special school provision, where staff spoke Welsh, and children stemmed from Welsh speaking homes, every endeavour was made to provide those language experiences. Appointing bilingual

speakers into any setting, was a benefit, because the WESP was about developing Welsh speaking skills in all settings. It would need to be needs led, as well. So, if significant numbers of children coming into a provision were from Welsh Medium school settings, then this would need to be looked at creatively, to ensure those needs were met. The Director of Education and Inclusion Services acknowledged that this was going to be a designated English Medium setting, but that wasn't to say that the setting could provide Welsh language opportunities within the confines of that provision. We need to be flexible and ensure we do everything we can, to support children with the development of Welsh language skills.

The Head of Learner Support Service advised that one of the WESP actions currently being undertaken was an audit of the bilingual skills of all staff, across every specialist provision, and central specialist services, so it was something actively looked at being developed.

A Member asked if there was a commitment to recruit Welsh speakers actively. It was acknowledged that CfW was a bilingual delivery, but there also needed to be thought given to developing understanding around Welsh d heritage and history and how that could be actively promoted in the new school.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services acknowledged that in the main, the report was about a proposal to consult on a new school. The detail in terms of the curriculum offer, had perhaps not been a the focus for this report, but agreed with everything the Member said, as it was important to develop cultural identity. It was noted that this is an important part of the new CfW, and this would be covered off as part of the curriculum in the new setting. Also, the development of Welsh language skills across a special school, was actively reinforced across all schools, with a number of special schools working with CSC to gain some awards. In terms of Welsh language skills, most job descriptions had desirable Welsh language skills referenced, but if there was a situation where the need was significant, there would be nothing from preventing a headteacher reflecting Welsh language skills were essential when recruiting. for a particular cohort.

Members were very much in support of the proposal and thanked and commended Officers for their time in preparing the proposal. Members then formulated their response to the consultation document.

Following consideration, it was **RESOLVED**:

1. To respond as consultees upon the proposals detailed in Appendix 1.
2. To provide further comments, observations/recommendations in respect of these proposals prior to Cabinet consideration.
3. To request the Service Director for Democratic Services & Communications to provide Cabinet with the feedback of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee.

CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSALS TO REALIGN ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS MAINSTREAM LEARNING SUPPORT CLASS PROVISION WITHIN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

The Senior Democratic & Scrutiny Officer reminded Members that the purpose was for the Committee to pre-scrutinise the outcome of the recent consultation in respect of the proposal to realign the mainstream Learning Support Class (LSC) provision within Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT). The Head of Learner Support Service then provided Members with an overview of the decision made by the Council in May 2023 (Appendix A) to give approval to begin formal consultation on the 5 proposals to realign the LSC provision within the County. The Head of Learner support then took Members through the 5 proposals, before continuing through the background at section 4 of the report, and the outcome of the consultations, with respect to the proposals, at section 5, noting the good response. Members were then taken through the remainder of the report.

A Member referring to page 138, table 1, sought clarification, as the majority of the responses disagreed with the proposal, and asked if the reason for this was largely due to the move in location. The Member asked for reassurance that these concerns were mitigated. The Member also sought reassurance that sufficient support was in place for pupils and parents during the transition, including transport.

The Head of Learner Support Service confirmed this was the reason, and explained that some pre-emptive steps had been taken, with 3 pupils who were due to move at the start of the term, remaining until a decision was made. In addition, by moving the start date, it would only be 5 pupils and staff, who would transfer with them, with lots of the opportunities for visits. In terms of transport, it was unlikely to be any different, with a lot of the children already transported into schools. The LSC had really well-established protocols for liaising with parents.

A member noted the School Council's response highlighting their sadness at the proposed move and recognised this as a testament to the school's integration and inclusion of the Learning Support Class, which was to be celebrated.

A Member sought reassurance, that the move in location would not mean a difference in the quality of facilities or experiences received noting from the responses received in the consultation the praise provided for Abercynon Primary School.

The Service Director of 21st Century Schools and Transformation advised that Perthcelyn was one of the newer schools and the facilities were equal to Abercynon.

The Head of Learner Support Service confirmed that all the LSCs ran on the same basis, so there was the same expectations for the delivery of the curriculum, the teachers all had the same support and training, although the way it was going to be delivered was different to capitalise on the opportunities within that school.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services acknowledged that change was difficult, with the impetus around some of the changes was to minimise

future transitions by developing all through provisions. If this went ahead, there would be a person-centred approach adopted, in order to mitigate any stress and anxiety for the learners. The Director of Education and Inclusion Services acknowledged that Abercynon and Perthcelyn were both lovely schools and had every confidence that the level of provision would be the same.

A Member queried the consultation process outlined in the report and sought clarification on the information regarding notification of governing bodies to provide responses as part of the consultation. The Member expressed concern that those comments had not been identified within the report. The Member, who is a Member of a governing body affected, noted they could not recall being sent the consultation. The Member also noted on page 145, in respect of proposal 5, Comments/Issues raised 'however responders felt further LSCs are needed' noting the answer talked about 'further reviews will be undertaken' as needed, which they felt was not representative of the original question and response received during the consultation. The Member also noted the comments by Estyn on page 146, where a number of matters had been listed, that they didn't feel had been properly addressed within the consultation document. Whilst the majority of the things were 'should', 3 of them were 'must'.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services advised that to her knowledge the links were sent to all schools/consultees identified, but if it was felt they weren't received, this could be looked into. In terms of the points raised by Estyn, looking at the feedback provided, some of the points raised were quite valid and those had been taken onboard. Despite all the experiences of undertaking statutory consultations it was recognised that a bit more detail in some of the key areas, should have been included, although hopefully the responses had assisted. In terms of the feedback around learning support provision at primary, there was a statutory duty on LAs to keep all ALN provision under review and that was something that was constantly looked at and if there was a need in RCT that was un-met, then that would be looked at.

The Head of Learner Support Service reiterated that as part of the consultation a link to the consultation was sent to each school and the school then shared this with all of the governing bodies and staff, so if that was not happening, this needed to be followed up. In terms of provision, in the current review there was ample primary provision, in terms of meeting the needs of learners with ASD in the locality, but it was the secondary provision that needed to expand. This linked back to the previous conversation, where children's needs could be more easily met in primary school within the mainstream, but that move to secondary school put more demand on the areas that children with ASD found difficult, so there was more of a demand for places.

The Member clarified their question was regarding proposal 5 and felt this was positive but queried in relation to Learning Support at primary level. The response they received at the time was that provision was not required in this area. The Member noted that the information provided in the report did not accurately reflect this.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that the comments could be noted and would be reflected in the information shared.

A Member referred to paragraph 13.2 of the report, which outlined the Council's aim to work toward a fully operative bilingual ALN provision. The Member was pleased to see that 2 classes were proposed for Welsh Medium, which was certainly very positive, however felt that they were nowhere near fully bilingual as highlighted by response in the Welsh Language services comments. The Member felt the proposal went somewhat but didn't fulfil the requirements upon the Council or the Council's own Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. The Member also sought assurance if Welsh language provision was the preference, regardless of location in county borough, that transport would be provided to ensure access. The Member also noted the impact of travelling long distances to receive Welsh language provision would have on the carbon footprint and raised the ideal scenario of ensuring provision across the borough in the future should be a key priority for the Council.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services confirmed that transport would be provided. It was recognised there would be 3 new provisions, if the proposal went ahead, and it was going back to the statutory responsibility to keep provision under review, so clearly if these classes became full, then that would be looked at and responded to.

The Member asked if the numbers of pupils that had attended Welsh medium provision and then transferred to LS provision previously through the Medium of Welsh and then had to transfer to English Medium, were included in this report.

The Head of Learner Support Service said she was sure she'd seen those numbers in respect of the WESP, so would look into this.

Members recognised that a lot of work had been undertaken and were supportive of the proposals. Members were mindful of the challenges that change would present for individuals affected by the proposal and were clear that this should be considered when detailed implementation plans are made should the proposals be adopted by Cabinet. Overall, the Committee noted its support in favour of the proposals.

Following consideration, it was **RESOLVED**:

1. To undertake pre scrutiny of the report (attached at Appendix A & 1), thus providing Scrutiny with an opportunity to comment upon this matter prior to consideration by the Cabinet.
2. To request the Service Director for Democratic Services & Communications to feedback the comments, observations and/or recommendations of members to Cabinet Committee.

22 CHAIR'S REVIEW AND CLOSE

The Chair acknowledged there had been excellent engagement from Members and thanked them for coming prepared with their questions. The Chair also thanked Officers for answer questions and the preparatory work and wished them well with their reports to Cabinet.

23 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

This meeting closed at 6.56 pm

**Cllr S Evans
Chair**

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg / This document is also available in Welsh