



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

17th JULY 2023

PRE-SCRUTINY – ESTYN’S REPORT ON EDUCATION SERVICES IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATION

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the feedback and comments of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee following its pre scrutiny of Estyn’s report on Education Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, at its meeting on the 20th June 2023.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the comments and observations of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee; and
- 2.2 Subject to any further comment by Cabinet Members, endorse Estyn’s report on Education Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, as attached to the report as **Appendix B**.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The need for Members to be aware of the comments and observations of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee prior to their consideration of Estyn’s report on Education Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Estyn’s inspection of local authorities is informed by the [Guidance handbook for the inspection of LGES 2022 \(gov.wales\)](#). The handbook sets out the way in which Estyn conducts inspections of local government education services (LGES), which has changed significantly since our last core inspection in 2012.
- 4.2 During the 2022 - 2023 Municipal Year Estyn undertook an inspection of the Education Services within Rhondda Cynon Taf, which concluded in January 2023.

- 4.3 The Cabinet report appended at **Appendix A** provides details of the inspection process which highlights the information gathering process undertaken in advance of the inspection, the citizen survey undertaken and advises upon the main forms of evidence captured as part of the inspection. This evidence included detail of the work undertaken by the Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Committee.
- 4.4 The outcome of the inspection is detailed within the Estyn Inspection report appended as **Appendix B** to this document. It was Estyn's expectation that the inspection report was scrutinised in full by the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee, so that the necessary support and challenge can be provided about the Directorate's plans for improvement.

5. PRE-SCRUTINY OF ESTYN'S REPORT ON EDUCATION SERVICES IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

- 5.1 The Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee met on the [20th June 2023](#), to consider pre scrutiny of Estyn's report on Education Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.
- 5.2 Members acknowledged this was a very robust report, and offered the Committees congratulations, noting there were several areas of good practice identified and the Directorate needed to be commended, for that and also the fact that Estyn had requested the 2 case studies, which was something to be proud of. The recommendations Estyn had posed, were fair and very much actionable.
- 5.3 Members questioned the variability of the 'quality of support and the information provided by the CSC', acknowledging that this was in relation to some reporting, particularly around SIPL reports. Members recognised that it was important the service worked closely with CSC around expectations, to ensure that the information that was recorded, was very much based on first hand evidence, with an evaluative nature to the observations/findings. This was considered to be essential in order to enable the local authority to make informed judgements about schools and to respond in a timely manner in respect of schools causing concern. Members were advised that the service had also tightened its own internal processes for identifying emerging concerns in schools, with heads of service and CSC colleagues meeting regularly to share that intelligence. Members were advised that CSC had been working on their quality assurance processes, as there should be no surprises when Estyn inspected a school. It was important that information and intelligence provided by CSC was accurate.
- 5.4 Members felt it was important that Estyn recognised 'the impact of poverty' in relation to the inspection report but acknowledged that Estyn had received a presentation at the start of the inspection, to provide an understanding of the context and they were empathetic of those challenges, whilst also scrutinising the data in a very robust way.
- 5.5 Members felt that in relation to 'the rate of permanent exclusions was broadly in line with the national average' there should be more data to ensure scrutiny, in the future of how the service had improved, in line with the R3 recommendation. Members recognised that attendance and exclusion reports had been presented to the Committee and was included in the work programme for next year, so this would

give Members an additional opportunity to review the data, whilst acknowledging it was a strong focus for the service and a fair recommendation.

- 5.6 Members acknowledged the recommendation at R1, and felt it was important to firmly embed a more self-reflective, listening, and co-ordinated work ethos across the Directorate, whilst acknowledging that part of the issue was around the need to streamline the documentation, with plans already in place to make it more succinct and ensure it was very evaluative. Members acknowledged that Estyn felt there was a clear thread from the Corporate to the Directorate 3-year strategic document, down to the annual Directorate delivery plan but they wanted to see greater alignment from the Directorate Plan down to Service Plans. Estyn were also keen that the service incorporated new performance measures or perhaps greater clarity around success criteria, which had now been assigned to all the actions in the current Directorate Delivery Plan for 2023-24. Members recognised that In terms of stakeholder feedback, it could be evidenced that the service had consulted with wide ranging partners. However, with learner voice, this area had already been identified as an area that required strengthening, so there was an engagement plan in the process of being developed. Members acknowledged the work in progress around bullying, in terms of the pupil voice.
- 5.7 Members felt that steps needed to be taken to improve the process and the portal system, in relation to the ALN referrals process. Members acknowledged this was in the Delivery Plan, and the service was well aware of the issue and acknowledged that some schools were frustrated with the clunkiness of the system so the uploading of digital information needed to be streamlined. This work had already been progressed, and new processes would be shared with schools in September. A lot of training was provided, and focus groups had taken place with schools and, feedback was being taken onboard.
- 5.8 Members questioned the work done with other local authorities, in respect of Welsh language immersion opportunities, acknowledging that some strides had been made, with the right staff now appointed and in place. Lots of networking had been done with external agencies as well as other local authorities and the first 3 learners started access to Welsh language immersion provision. It was hoped that the numbers requesting Welsh language immersion would continue to grow. Members noted that although this was a key recommendation, it has been seen in a positive light and work was well underway to progress developments.
- 5.9 Members noted the comment in the Inspection report in respect of ALN complex needs class comment, acknowledging that there was very clear criteria for all provisions, but the difficulty was sometimes children had multiple needs, and it was a question of deciding which was the primary need and about the best placement for the learner. Members recognised that it wasn't a precise science and all placements required informed and careful decision making.
- 5.10 Members questioned why there was no mention of Step 4 in the Inspection report but acknowledged that this had been picked up as part of the meetings with Estyn and discussions around that agenda.
- 5.11 Members requested a further report in 6 months' time on how the Estyn recommendations had led to improvements and developments, across the county borough

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not needed because the contents of the report are for information purposes only.

7. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT

- 7.1 The report contained within **Appendix B** has been presented to Scrutiny for pre scrutiny prior to consideration by Cabinet.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 8.1 Any financial implications are outlined within **Appendix A** of the report.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 9.1 Any legal implications are outlined within **Appendix A** of the report.

10. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 10.1 Links to the Council's Corporate Plan/ other Corporate Priorities are outlined within **Appendix A** of the report.

11. CONCLUSION

- 11.1 It is recognised that scrutiny is a vital component of good governance and improves Councils' decision making, service provision and cost effectiveness.
- 11.2 The undertaking of pre-scrutiny by the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee in this area will strength accountability and assist Cabinet Members in taking any future decisions on these matters.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

17th JULY 2023

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND
COMMUNICATION**

Item: **PRE-SCRUTINY – ESTYN'S REPORT ON EDUCATION SERVICES IN RHONDDA
CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Background Papers

None.