



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee held on
Wednesday, 19 July 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 Ashford Councillor S Emanuel
Councillor S Hickman 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 C Lises

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

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 C Edwards, Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr T Britton, Head of Achievement RCT – primary sector
Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Mr R Evans, Director of Human Resources
Mrs T Watson, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

6 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence were received from County Borough Councillors Smith and Wood and Co-opted Member Mr Booth.

7 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

8 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 27th April and 20th June 2023 as an accurate reflection of the meetings.

9 CONSULTATION LINKS

Members were reminded that following circulation of the open consultations being run by Welsh Government (WG) recently, there was one consultation, which they may be interested in completing.

10 DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2023-24

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications presented his report which sought Members' comments and approval on the Committee's draft Work Programme for the 2023-24 Municipal Year. Members were provided with the background at Section 4.1 to 4.3 and advised that a revised programme was considered by Cabinet, which the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would consider in September which would feed back into this Committee. The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications then continued through Section 5 of the report, Scrutiny areas for consideration, and highlighted to Members that in considering any areas they may wish to amend or add to, it was important to identify where maximum value could be achieved, acknowledging that this was a particularly busy committee with a wide-ranging remit, so it was important to provide that focus and identify matters that could add value and form policy development.

The Chair thanked the Service Director Democratic Services and Communications for presenting the report.

Following discussion between Members and Officers the following amendments / additions to the FWP, were agreed:

- Move the report on Estyn Recommendations from unallocated to the Autumn term;
- Move the School Attendance data report forward, from the Spring term to the Autumn term;
- Move the report on Post 16 Curriculum offer from unallocated to the Spring term.
- Add an item on Travel Plans, to the unallocated.

Following consideration, it was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Agree the issues for inclusion on the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme for the 2023/24 Municipal Year (as set out in **Appendix A**) with appropriate amendments as necessary;
2. Request that the Service Director Democratic Services & Communications notifies the appropriate Cabinet Member and responsible Officer, of the matters identified for pre-scrutiny in advance of Cabinet consideration;
3. Agree that the Work Programme be reviewed at regular intervals to

ensure the items identified for inclusion are relevant and that any additional referrals are incorporated; and

4. Consider, where appropriate, any items which could be presented to the Committee as Information Reports, to allow Members the flexibility to consider any urgent item or the opportunity for some unallocated items already identified by the Committee to be brought forward for Members consideration.
5. Consider and determine any other matter that Members may wish to scrutinise over this period.

11

REPORT ON A TASK AND FINISH GROUP IN RELATION TO THE REPORT ON SCHOOL MODERNISATION - UPDATE ON BAND B SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR LEARNING PROGRAMME

The Service Director, Democratic Services and Communication provided Members with information regarding the report on a Task and Finish Group in relation to the report on School Modernisation – update on Band B Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme. The Service Director, Democratic Services and Communication took Members through the background at Section 3, noting in particular, that Members had received Estyn’s Report on Education Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, at their meeting on the 20th June 2023, and highlighted the response from Estyn, at 3.4 of the report, before taking Members through the proposed way forward and next steps.

The Chair thanked the Service Director, Democratic Services and Communications for presenting the report.

A Member was fully supportive of the T&F Group but saw this as a two-track process, so the need for some kind of written report or analysis to compliment any visits.

The Service Director, Democratic Services and Communications explained that through scrutiny resources, it was hoped to capture and provide the feedback provided through the forums and then at key junctures, throughout that process, and feedback those findings to the Committee. He hoped from a scrutiny perspective it would be how the Committee could provide meaningful recommendations, so should Council ever consider taking forward strategic re-organisation proposals, that those were the issues they could be mindful of, and then it would be on the part of Cabinet, advised by the Director, in terms of which recommendations, all or part, that they adopted.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained she was mindful of the fact that the Band B Programme was currently in implementation, so if the Committee was seeking an evaluation of the impact of this investment, then they should perhaps be looking at Band A schools as this programme had been finalised for a number of years. A robust assessment and evaluation of the issues, challenges, and benefits of the Band B programme at this point in time would be more challenging as these developments were ongoing.

A Member, having read the report, and noting Section 3.4 of the report, asked for clarification of the value of the T&F group, given that Band B schools were in the implementation stage now.

The Service Director, Democratic Services and Communications acknowledged there was always a challenge with scrutiny work programming that sometimes the ability for Members to have that broader understanding of some of the issues, was restricted by a Committee environment. The T&F group added value in terms of Members delving deeper, and so it was about approaching this with the view of seeking to develop very specific recommendations, to inform future proposals, would in effect be the purpose of the task and finish group.

The Chair suggested, it was almost starting with the end e.g., what does the group want to achieve, what are the learnings, etc., so it was absolutely clear, before embarking on that piece of work, whilst acknowledging the positive feedback from Estyn.

A Member stated that they had been told at a previous meeting, that no evaluation internally had been done of the processing and development of the Band A schools. This was an opportunity to do that, as part of the T&F group, so that moving forward if such schemes were done again, lessons were learnt, making the best use of the resources, and saving money.

A Member sought clarification around the mention of 3 – 19 schools and assumed that all through schools were included in this, not just a particular category of school.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services, picking up on the point on the outcomes of Band A, explained that the outcomes of schools, were included as part of the CSC, Exclusions and Attendance reports presented to the Committee annually. Additionally, CSC provided a summary of Estyn's inspection outcomes, so there was some evidence of the performance of the schools that had benefited from Band A investment. An evaluation of Band A was a complex area, and it was important, in exploring this, to get the focus right.

Following consideration, it was **RESOLVED** to

1. Acknowledge the content of the report & consider the suggested proposed way forward and next steps; and
2. Request that the Service Director Democratic Services & Communication make the necessary arrangements.

(Note: The lost motion not to pursue a task and finish group in view of the fact that Estyn had no recommendations or concerns, that they agreed that the school organisation proposals considered the needs of the community, promoted equality and provision for pupils, and as Band B schools were in the implementation phase, and in view of the Committee's busy work programme was proposed by Councillor S Emanuel).

12 EDUCATION WORKFORCE DATA

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services provided Members with information regarding the update on education workforce data across the 115 schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf, and specific data relating to the Welsh medium workforce, noting this was a joint report with colleagues from HR, which drew on 3 key data sources. The Director of Education and Inclusion Services took Members through the background at Section 4, before taking Members through

Section 5, in relation to the iTrent data, and provided an overview of teaching data (all sectors) as detailed in Appendix 1; teaching staff (Welsh medium) data in Appendix 2; and support staff data as highlighted in Appendix 3, before taking Members through the PLASC data, at Section 6. The Director of Education and Inclusion Services continued to take Members through Welsh Language Data at Section 7 before summarising the conclusions at Section 14, of the report.

The Chair thanked the Director of Education and Inclusion Services for presenting the report.

A Member sought clarification about retention in core subjects e.g., Physics.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services acknowledged that recruiting teachers for core subject areas was a challenge in both English and Welsh medium sectors, but particularly so in the Welsh medium sector. It was challenging to grow the numbers of teachers available, and she was uncertain how successful Universities were in meeting Welsh Government's ambitious targets for initial teacher education. The service was very cognisant that there was movement in the system, and the challenge was retaining staff.

A Member asked what was being done to encourage non-speaking Welsh school staff to take up opportunities to learn Welsh.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that as part of the recruitment campaign, HR had been going out to record people, in order to share their different experiences, and put those success stories on the Council website, to demonstrate how people can transition into different roles and sectors. As part of outcome 7 of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, which focuses on sufficiency of staff in the Welsh medium sector, we can see that there hasn't been enough growth in this area. There is more to do, to encourage access to the training that is available. There is a marketing sub-group, which promotes the message, alongside the re-vamping of the website to attract potential staff. There are also staff in the English Medium sector, that lack the confidence to teach in Welsh, but with the right support could potentially move to the Welsh medium. There is lots of work to be done and it was going to be challenging to secure this growth in staffing, but there was a commitment to try and improve this aspect.

A Member asked how many times did children have a class where the teacher was not a specialist.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that the data, wasn't collated but the Welsh Medium sector in particular have to be really creative about upskilling staff, who may not be subject specialists to teach a broader range of subjects, as it was important for someone to be in front of children teaching them with the right skills and knowledge. It was about ensuring access to the right professional learning, and tapping into the support from CSC, but also promoting different routes into teaching e.g., graduates working in teaching support posts accessing further training to become teachers. There was a lot of creativity in the system to tackle this, but no quick solution to this national challenge.

The Member then asked if this had an impact on Education outcomes.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services acknowledged that all school leaders wanted children to have access to highly specialist staff, and one of the Directorate's strategic priorities, was around ensuring that all children were being taught a transformational curriculum, that improved outcomes. In CSC, all the professional learning that is offered focuses on upskilling the workforce, so that they are well placed to deliver an exciting curriculum. It was hoped that not having access to subject specialists had diminished significantly since the pandemic, but staff absence and recruitment challenges still occur. The data showed that mental health was an issue, but HR, did a lot to support the wellbeing of the workforce through occupational health support, with professionals that not only raised awareness, but tried to support people to get back into work.

The Director, Human Resources, also provided the Member with information regarding support for staff, explaining the dedicated support for school staff, which took place after 3pm, so as not to impact on the school day, as well as the introduction of CARI with regards to mental health.

A Member picking up on the high percentage of leavers after one year of service, asked if there was a regular monitoring service of newly qualified teachers and sought clarification around the percentage.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services agreed that the support provided was critical. When CSC brings their annual report to the committee, it explains all the mechanisms available to support newly qualified teachers. It was acknowledged that retention of staff was key, alongside understanding the current pressures facing the workforce in the post pandemic phase, with pupils' re-engagement in education and behaviour. As a newly qualified teacher, it was noted that it was important that the support was there, so that newly qualified teachers don't find the challenges overwhelming. Schools were pretty strong on the whole in terms of retaining staff.

The Head of Achievement RCT – primary sector, pointed Members towards the CSC website, and highlighted that under 'NQT induction,' this showed all the support provided. CSC had a team of people that worked closely with NQT's, to ensure they achieved the standards.

The Chair, on behalf of a Member sought clarification around temporary staff, transitioning to permanent.

The Director, Human Resources explained that a lot of staff were initially taken on, on temporary contracts, often due to funding arrangements. The Director, Human Resources explained he would need to drill down a bit more in terms of those that moved from temporary to permanent, although this was often normal, in terms of progression.

The Member also asked if there was a supply pool in RCT, and if teachers used the Teacher Booker system.

The Director, Human Resources explained that there hadn't been an RCT dedicated supply pool for a number of years, although there were small pockets of internal supply staff managed by each individual school, but these tended to be allocated to specific schools. In terms of the Teacher Booker system, the current understanding was that it was not currently fully functional but that there was work ongoing between the WLGA and WG, to rectify this, so it could be

used at a point in time.

A Member asked what was being done to retain teachers or move them to other schools, where schools were downsizing, as a result of the financial crises.

The Director, Human Resources acknowledged that where any redundancy occurred, they would look to redeploy those teachers to other schools, or use a bump redundancy arrangement, which had been successful over the years. This would be done for support staff as well, as part of the Council's management of change process. It was noted however, that schools had to agree to take staff on, because governing bodies were autonomous, so there was no guarantee that all staff could be re-deployed.

A Member sought clarification, around the return on investment in respect of social media campaigns, noting they had not seen teaching posts advertised yet.

The Director, Human Resources explained he didn't have the costs to hand, but referred to the recent social media campaigns, in relation to social care and cleaning staff, which had been very successful, so anecdotal evidence would say it had been very successful.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that the promotional and marketing activity was in development now with the targeted social media campaign planned for the future.

The Member sought clarification around the geographical spread of teachers and support staff e.g., how many lived in county and out of county, etc.

The Director, Human Resources explained that this information could be collated, and shared with Members.

The Member, referring to the Educator Wales, and initial teacher training asked if the WG targets were realistic, and what was being done in order to achieve them.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that WG were thinking of creative solutions to tackle this and there are workforce plans in place. Recruitment is challenging, and something that is flagged up as a challenge and concern, in the All-Wales meetings.

Following consideration, it was **RESOLVED** to

1. Note that Members had reviewed and scrutinised the content of the report; and
2. Considered whether they wished to scrutinise any parts in greater depth and require further reports in future.

13 SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

The Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance provided Members with a summary of the annual school admissions process, which provided an update on developments within school admissions in the admissions year 2022/2023 and application dates for the forthcoming 2023/2024 admissions year. The Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance then

took Members through Section 4, which provided a summary of the normal/annual routine admissions, applications for the academic year 2022/23, appeals processes, late applications, parental responsibility, all through schools, the timetable for 2023/2024, waiting lists and admissions at other times. Section 5 then clarified in more detail the Welsh Medium transfers, with a breakdown provided. Section 6 then outlined the admissions for learners with special education needs, and the Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance concluded with Section 7, which detailed the Fair Access Panel.

The Chair thanked the Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance for presenting the report.

A Member sought clarification in relation to transfers from Year 6 to Year 7.

The Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance noted there was parental choice, noting there was no such thing as feeder primaries, just associated schools, so this meant adhering to the statutory admissions code. This meant a child from Year 6 in an All-through school could apply to Year 7, in another school.

A Member referring to in-year transfers, sought clarification if these were internal transfers in RCT only, or included pupils coming into the county borough. The Member also noted in the case of secondary schools, the number of in-year transfers seemed high, and asked if it was known why.

The Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance explained in relation to in-year transfers, that 51.81% were due to house moves, although there were other issues, but unfortunately, there was no legal right to ask for the reasons why. With regards to secondary schools, there was an in-year transfer officer, and when parents moved between schools, the officer met with parents, to try and understand the reasons, before the transfer took place.

A Member sought clarification around why people were opting to send their children to a church school, for example, rather than their associated school.

The Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance explained that faith schools were their own admissions authority, and it was entirely parental choice, with parents often applying to 2 schools, 1 RCT school and 1 faith school.

The Member noted that it was difficult trying to plan strategically, when there was significant changes in numbers, and asked if there was any work that could be done.

The Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance explained that one thing that had been done was to email all primary schools with their pupil number projections, in order to identify which secondary schools, the potential children they've got, so they could work closely with associated primary schools. The other thing that was done with secondary schools, when the admission process shuts in October, was to cross reference with faith schools, where there were duplicate applications. If there were particular schools where there was a high percentage of children who had applied to faith schools, a conversation was had with the primary headteacher, to find out why, but ultimately it came down to parental choice.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that in terms of transition, most schools would support transition to multiple schools. In terms of associated schools, they were duty bound to have sufficient spaces in particular areas to meet the local need, but this could be challenging if a shift or trend was seen, e.g., a brand-new school inevitably attracts high applications. Conversations take place, from a school improvement perspective, when trends relating to school admissions start to shift but legislation does support parents to choose.

A Member referring to the table at 4.2, around the Year 7 Sept 2022, 2nd, and 3rd preference, and asked if this was around capacity. The Member sought clarification around the appeals process, noting there were 23 appeals, of which 20 were successful.

The Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance explained that the appeals panel, was in 2 parts, with the local authority and the Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance having to work on facts and figures, and on a calculation basis, if a school was full, whereas the panel would take account of individual circumstances, with quite a significant number of diverse reasons why parents and children had specially requested a school, that the admissions authority couldn't take into account. When parents put their case forward, the Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance had to be black and white, and say the school was full, whereas the appellants could put a case forward, that the panel could take account of, therefore the panel had the authority to overrule a local authority decision, with whatever the decision the panel makes, being legal binding, for the local authority and the school.

A Member, referring to admissions to Welsh Medium primary schools, noted that as demand was increasing, what arrangements were in place, for over-subscription and had entry ever been refused, because there were no spaces.

The Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance explained, people could only appeal for reception upwards, and to date, they had never had to refuse any child a place in a Welsh Medium school, although alternative provision had been offered for nursery schools, where they were full.

A Member asked if there were figures for in-year transfer from English Medium to Welsh Medium, and suggested that after the immersion work was completed, this was something that could be reported on.

The Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance explained that in regard to the immersion work, when the meetings were held with the new Band B schools, moving forward, the immersion teacher attended, to explain to the parents what the options were for Welsh Medium and the English Medium sector, so that was beginning to be promoted.

A Member, referring to 4.2, age ineligible to apply, Pre-Nursery Jan 2023 column 406, and asked what was done in order to make sure parents knew when to apply.

The Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance, explained that this referred to where parents had applied, and their child was too young, so the advertising and promotion had been increased, including attending the Teddy Bears picnic, with potentially 3k parents in attendance and was very

successful as well as explaining to health visitors when the dates were. Where parents had applied too quickly, they were moved forward to the eligible date.

The Member referred to 4.5, parental responsibility, and asked about the number of cases.

The Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance, acknowledged there were incidences, but that they tried to keep out of these cases as much as possible which is why the child benefit situation was introduced, with the parent with parental responsibility for child benefit, the overruling one.

A Member referred to page 69 and asked if was possible to have a breakdown of in-year transfers by ALN.

The Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance, confirmed she could provide the breakdown in regard to ALN, in terms of the PLASC return.

The Member referred to section 7, in relation to the Fair Access Panel (FAP), noting there were 55 referrals, and asked of the 12 that were parental IYT requests, were these placed in line with their preference.

The Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance explained in regard to FAP, these were hard to place children, with various emotional problems, who could be quite challenging, so it was about supporting parents and children, when they were moving schools, so they were given as much support and encouragement to be placed in the optimum school for those children.

The Chair felt that it would be good to hear from the officer directly, when exclusions were looked at next time, with some anonymised case studies, to bring that work to life.

The Chair concluded by acknowledging that there was a lot of work that goes on, and not just administrative, but mediation work, communication with parents, etc., and there was a need to acknowledge that, and asked the Head of Service Transformance, Admissions and Governance to pass that recognition on to her team, from the Committee.

Following consideration, it was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Acknowledge the contents of the report and consider whether they wish to scrutinise any parts in greater depth.

14 CHAIR'S REVIEW AND CLOSE

The Chair thanked Officers for their detailed reports and diligence in answer questions and thanked Members for their engagement and contributions, before reminding Members that the next meeting of the Committee was on Thursday 28th September 2023, and reminded Members to contact the Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer regarding the 'Food and Fun' School Holiday Enrichment Programme, which would take place on Wednesday 9th August 2023, if they wished to attend.

15 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

This meeting closed at 7.02 pm

**Cllr S Evans
Chair**

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