



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee held on Monday,
16 October 2023 at 5.00 pm.

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

**County Borough Councillors – The following Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee
Councillors were present in the online**

Councillor S Evans (Chair)

Councillor K Webb	Councillor M Ashford
Councillor J Brencher	Councillor J Cook
Councillor J Elliott	Councillor S Emanuel
Councillor S Hickman	Councillor C Lises
Councillor M Maohoub	Councillor C Preedy
Councillor J Smith	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 L Patterson, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
Mr M Thomas, Representing NEU

Officers in attendance:-

Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Ms C Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr D Williams, Head of Attendance and Wellbeing
Ms Hayley Jacobs, Lead for Community Focussed Schools
Mrs S Daniel, Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor R Lewis, Cabinet Member Education, Youth Participation and Welsh Language Services
Councillor J Edwards, Chairperson Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Invitees:-

Ms E Lewis – ALN Coordinator
Ms R Macaully-Lane – ALN Coordinator

Apologies for Absence
Mr M Veale – Co-opted Member

In accordance with the code of conduct, the following declarations were made pertaining to the agenda

Councillor C Preedy, "Personal interest as one of the Special Schools named in Agenda item 7 resides in my ward"

Councillor C Lises, "Personal interest as Hawthorn High School is mentioned in Agenda item 6 and I am a governor of this school"

Councillor S Hickman "personal Interest in agenda item 6 as I am a governor of Porth Community School"

Councillor S Evans "Personal Interest in item 6, my Employer is the University of South Wales"

Ms Rebecca Lydon "Personal interest in item 7, both my sons are autistic"

Councillor Sera Evans "Personal interest in item 7 as my son is statemented"

Mr L Patterson "Personal interest in item 7 as my son is statemented and receives Education in RCT"

25 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 14 September 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

26 CONSULTATION LINKS

Members were advised that the latest open consultations had been circulated, and advised that if Members had any queries to contact the Scrutiny Team

27 Bi-Annual Cabinet Member Engagement

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications presented the report to Members to allow them the opportunity to scrutinise the decisions undertaken by the Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation and Welsh Language Services within the period set out in the report and to ensure the appropriate mechanisms are in place to effectively scrutinise the Executive.

A Member asked what the proposals are to ensure the Authority is encouraging use of the Welsh Language within the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). The Cabinet Member replied that one of the key priorities as a Local authority is achieving the targets in the WESP. He advised Members that the Local Authority has been given targets by Welsh Government to increase the number of Welsh speakers in the Borough and in schools. He advised that the Authority has invested Capital Resources into Welsh Medium schools in the form of improving their buildings and facilities but also building a number of new 21st Century Welsh primary schools. He added that the Authority is also working together with Early Years providers to invest in Early Years facilities to make the Welsh Language more appealing from a younger age with the ambition that those children will then stay in a Welsh Medium setting for their entire education.

A Member asked the Cabinet Member to comment on Capital Investment in the Estyn report and if there is any information on the suggested improved outcomes for pupils. The Cabinet Member commented that the Council is committed to building three new primary schools in the Borough with works on the sites already well under way. He added that the Minister for Education had also attended the sites and was pleased to see the progress being made for our children and young people. He advised the Committee that the key priorities for the Authority are having the best facilities available for learners and as well as building new facilities it was crucial that we continue to refurbish existing schools to increase attainment. He concluded that our children deserve the best facilities for their education.

A Member referred to recommendations in the Estyn report and asked the Cabinet Member what his view was as to how these would be improved in RCT

The Cabinet Member replied that whilst most of the Estyn report gives an accurate reflection of the high standard of Education across the Authority, he acknowledged there is always room for improvement. He acknowledged that partnership working with the Consortium is an area we can improve on and also the areas around self-evaluation will be reviewed to improve effectiveness. He added that in the report there is emphasis on purposeful Leadership and this is reflective of the calibre of our senior officers and the strategic leadership in RCT. The report reflects well our prioritisation of assisting the most vulnerable in the Borough and the comments on our long term succession planning strategy.

A Member asked for clarity on how long the new special school will keep up with demand for places.

The Cabinet Member responded that there are three settings that are close or on capacity which reflects the increased demand for the special services provided by those schools. He added that the new special school site in Clydach is large site and will provide the best facilities for our learners and will assist with meeting capacity requirements. He concluded that they will also continue to look at any opportunities to provide additional capacity of existing sites to keep up with the demand.

A Member asked where we will see the future investments in Education for RCT. The Cabinet Member replied that in recent years we have been one of the leading local authorities in Wales in drawing down funding from Welsh Government to invest in 21st Century Schools. Close working relationships with Welsh Government officials has allowed us to deliver our priorities as a Cabinet. He acknowledged that whilst the economic pressures and budget constraints have provided a challenge the Authority has continued to prioritise and protect the delivery of the education services as much as possible. Education remains a key priority as well as ensuring our education facilities are also able to provide facilities to our communities outside of the curriculum and school day.

A Member asked how the Council engages with young people in the Borough to ensure they are aware of any proposals and are able to have their voices heard before any potential decisions are taken that will affect their future. The Cabinet Member replied that the views of young people are key and he, along with senior officers regularly engage with the County Youth Forum, the Youth Service and School Councils to seek their views and feedback on matters that affect our

Children and Young People. He continued that one example was the naming of new schools whereby pupils were integral to the decision making process which is in place to ensure they feel part of the process.

A Member asked if future opportunity will be provided to the Committee to scrutinise further decisions of the Cabinet Member, namely the proposal to close Rhigos School which is still in the consultation phase and a decision not yet finalised.

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications advised that there will be opportunity for Members to further scrutinise the matter either through a Cabinet Member and Engagement session or through pre-scrutiny before a final decision is taken forward.

The Chair asked if the Cabinet Member can make a statement on the Authority's journey to ensure there are enough opportunities for our students and young people with special educational needs to ensure access to the best support to meet their needs through the Welsh language. The Cabinet Member advised that one of the Authority's key priorities is developing their Additional Learning Needs facilities across the County Borough in line with legislation to ensure the very best facilities for our learners. He added that there had been over £1.2 million investment into ALN and Learning support classes in the last year. He added that while making the investment the Authority are keen to have the minimum amount of disruption to children's education. The Cabinet Member also advised that they are continuing to develop their ALN classes in Welsh medium settings, in line with their aspirations as set out in the WESP and this is currently being consulted on.

Following discussion, the Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for attending the meeting and answering Members questions and looked forward to inviting him back again in the future

RESOLVED to:

1. Scrutinise the Cabinet Member for Education, Youth Participation & Welsh Language in respect of matters considered and agreed by Cabinet, and any key decisions taken, during the period 11 May – 16 October 2023.
2. Identify any areas arising from those matters determined within this period which Committee wish to further scrutinise, as part of revisions to the committees published work programme, in relation to Education and Inclusion

28 Member Nomination - Child Poverty

Following the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 27 September, Members were asked to nominate two Members of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee to be invited to attend the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to contribute to discussions on the Child Poverty Notice of Motion

RESOLVED to nominate Councillor S Emanuel and Councillor C Preedy to be invited to attend the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to contribute to the Child Poverty Notice of Motion discussion.

29 Child Poverty and Community Schools Update

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service presented the report to Members on the Community Focused School approach in RCT. The report provides a further update on the agenda following the report provided to Members in December 2022. The report discusses the approach to family engagement and utilisation of Welsh Government and Cabinet funding in this area as well as some of the Capital Grant that has been provided to RCT by Welsh Government. The Officer continued that the report also covers elements of the work undertaken to mitigate the impacts of poverty on learners and their families so that, where possible, barriers are removed to education.

Following conclusion of the presentation of the report, the Chairperson invited questions from Members

A Member referred to the Community Engagement and asked if the activities and services being offered outside of the school hours were easily accessible children living in poverty, i.e don't need to book online, pay for the activities and transport to / from the activities.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing replied that the YEPS service do work closely with schools to make sure, where possible that transport is put on for pupils to enable them to attend the activities and be transported home safely. He did acknowledge however, that following analysis of the data that this is an area that needs further work and development to see if barriers such as the high cost of transport can be overcome.

A Member commented that some parents evenings cannot be attended by those living in poverty as their children get bussed to school but the parents do not have the transport to be able to get back to the school for evening appointments. The Member stated that what has previously worked well is taking the meetings out into the Community where they are easily accessible to all parents. The Chair agreed and stated that with a figure of less than 50% of schools offering out of school activities, more needs to be done to combat Child Poverty and the barriers these families face. The Chair also referred to the decrease in the number of schools (61.5% to 59.3%) who have a designated member of staff with responsibility for developing and improving multi-agency working and stated that further exploration for this decrease was needed.

In response to a Member query around Multi-agency and third party attendance support and attendance at schools, the Head of Attendance and Wellbeing advised that there is a lot of work being undertaken in this area, recognising that there is still a long way to go. He added that they are in strategic conversations with Public Health Wales around providing co-location opportunities in schools i.e. through Health visitors and mental health support alongside central education services, although these talks are only in the early stages.

A Member asked if the Big Bocs Bwyd link with food banks to ensure wraparound service is there. As families are referred to the Food bank. The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing replied that the Big Bocs Bwyd is usually operated by the Family Engagement Officers who have very close links with the food banks and they are best placed to understand the needs of the family. He added that through this initiative, families can access resources in addition to food such as school uniform through a recycling scheme and period products

which were funded by the local authority.

A Member referred to the Welsh Government model for Community focussed schools, specifically article 31 of UN convention which gives children the right to Play, Education, Health, Housing and food. The Member expressed concern that with the rollout of Universal Free School Meals not expected until September 2024, is there anything that could be done in the meantime to ensure no child in RCT is going hungry, as a Local Member, she was concerned and has had reports that this is the case, particularly where there were families who had no recourse to public funds.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing advised that a meeting was convened with Children's Services last month to discuss the issue with Colleges and Universities in the RCT areas as many of the families who have no recourse to public funds are students with families who choose to come to the UK with the student. The Director Education and Inclusion added that the issue was also raised in the last Overview and Scrutiny Committee and she reassured Members that if Schools were concerned that children were going hungry the school would immediately refer the matter to the Safeguarding teams. She concluded that the Authority are also ahead of schedule in progressing the implementation of the Universal Free School Meals for Primary School children

A Member requested further analysis of the survey outlined in 15.2 of the report due to the low response and possibly the same respondents feeding back a second time. The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing replied that the survey is a considerable ask of Headteachers as each question presented has a supplementary box which is analysed for support needs and the survey as taking around 20 minutes to complete, therefore an 83% response rate is extremely high. The second survey received a 51% response which is again a fairly high response rate for a survey.

A Member referred to the use of Community facilities and stated that the authority should be consulting with the Community that live in the surrounding area to the facilities when considering opening or extending the hours of availability of the facilities as those that will be impacted as a result. The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing confirmed that any such proposals would be subject to community engagement and they would have opportunity to provide feedback to any proposals through the usual planning processes.

A Member commented that it would have been good to see a robust set of outcomes as to what success looks like and how this will be measured in combatting Child Poverty and together with Community Focussed Schools. The Member added that it would be great to take a Strategic approach with detailed action plans and then review the outputs to assess their impact. The Chair agreed that she would also like to see an accompanying action plan with KPIs included with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee informing some of this work through the Child Poverty Strategy. The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing stated that the Strategy included in the Appendix is intended as the strategic document and there is a framework/toolkit document which sits beneath this and is used for operational approaches which includes KPIs following community mapping.

The Director Education and Inclusion advised that they are trying to achieve a streamlining of strategic plans to integrate them all into our Annual Delivery Plan. She reassured Members that the Annual delivery plan does have a

success criteria with more measures this academic year and Child Poverty underpins what we do as a Council and is being raised corporately and cross Directorate to ensure the work we do is evaluated and has the desired impacts.

The Chair commented that she was pleased to read that Governor training had been offered around the Community Focussed agenda and it was important that this continues to be rolled out to all schools. She added that she would like to see this item return with detail on the take up of initiatives such as Big Bocs Bwyd and how can the delivery of these services be improved to reach out to families who need it most. The report should also include data around the survey responses. She extended the invite at a future meeting to the Family Engagement officers and stated it would be great to hear their voices at Committee.

The Director Education and Inclusion suggested bringing the item back to Committee once the Corporate has been out for consultation and steps can be taken forward as to how the Directorate will take forward their Delivery Plan for the academic year and a self-evaluation can be provided to Members at this point. The Service Director Democratic Services and Communication agreed and stated that as part of the Notice of Motion put forward in Council, Overview and Scrutiny Committee will first be provided the opportunity to shape specific plans in respect of Child Poverty.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** to

1. Note the positive impact of the work undertaken around the Community Focused School and Child Poverty agenda as well as next steps.
2. To bring the item back to the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee at an appropriate time to compliment the discussions that will take place at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

30

AN UPDATE ON YEAR 2 OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS AND EDUCATION TRIBUNAL ACT 2018 IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Head of Inclusion Services presented the report to Members to provide an update on the implementation of the ALNET (Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal) Wales Act (2018) and its associated ALN Code for Wales (2021) in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) during the academic year 2022/23.

The Chair welcomed ALN Coordinators to the meeting and thanked them for being in attendance to hear their contributions to the discussions.

Following conclusion of the presentation the Chairperson invited questions from the Committee

A Member asked if officers felt there are any gaps in RCT where they felt there should be provision but there isn't. The Head of Inclusion replied that learning support class realignments are regularly undertaken and we always strive to have an even distribution of learning support classes across the Local authority area. We are constantly looking at improving environments that suits the 21st Century curriculum. She added that she did not feel there were any gaps currently, but acknowledged there is always a need to keep provision under

review.

A Member asked if the portal that school staff use for submissions has improved. The Head of Inclusion Services confirmed that they had taken feedback from ALNcos and undertaken many changes to improve and streamline the situation. She added that the reasons for rejections were also investigated and used to improve the submission process. The Officer concluded that the Specialist Placement Request form had also been reviewed so that ALNcos do not have to submit as many forms as they did previously. She acknowledged that whilst it is another new process, the process had been simplified.

The ALNco advised that the portal had given them some challenges and whilst there were still some small challenges the Local Authority has done a lot of work to improve it. She added that a working group reviewed and assessed what improvements could be made and those have since been implemented.

The Chair asked the ALNcos if they felt they have sufficient time and resource to ensure they can carry out their duties.

The ALNco replied that she felt she was in a fortunate position to have strong leadership from her headteacher and she had a passion for inclusion and takes the time to ensure her team could be upskilled. She believed her school is firmly invested in needs of students and has a strong focus on ALN support and they are supported with assistants and administrative support too. Another ALNco confirmed that she was in a similar position and had been given a non-teaching role this year so she could put all her focus in to ALN. In addition she has a deputy ALNco who is working on a half timetable. She concluded that trying to teach as well as undertake a ALNco role is challenging.

The Chair advised that the Committee would like to see this item continue to feature on their Work Programme and they would like to see the findings, data and outcomes of the Quality Assurance and Person Centred Practice

The Head of Inclusion confirmed that the Quality Assurance will continue over three years, however feedback will be continual throughout the process. She advised the Committee that they released their ALNco cluster leads for 12 days last year with the support of grant funding and they work closely with the Additional Learning Provision coordinators on a tiered Quality Assurance process. She confirmed that the outcomes of the process will be used to feedback to ALNco forums. She continued that they are working with the Central South Consortium to develop professional learning for their head teachers, ALNcos and Improvement Partners and they will develop training sessions on inclusive practice, effective self-evaluation of ALN and how the outcomes of self-evaluation can be used to feed into school development plans.

The Chair asked about the transition experience for learners as they enter the post 16 phase – Do they continue in school or college or seek alternative provisions.

The ALNco provided the following written response due to connection issues:

- We work closely with the college and have had a lot of success with several students who have gone on to study practical courses such as catering.

- We have our own robust transition for those students who continue into our own 6th Form. Sometimes this works better for our students as they are already familiar with staff and the site.
- We have had great success in the past with students who have gone on to Cardiff University following the discovery project.

The Chair asked for more detail of an audit of the Welsh Medium ALN workforce within Access and Inclusion and specialist settings in RCT and the development of a joint professional development opportunity for head teachers, ALNcos and Central South Consortium Improvement Partners to ensure a shared understanding of effective self- evaluation of ALN.

The Head of Inclusion advised that the ALN code states there is a requirement to develop a bilingual system with Welsh Government acknowledging there is some way to travel with this. She advised that many issues they face are faced by many local authorities on a national basis. Nationally she acknowledged there is a lack of welsh medium resources and workforce. More locally, we are confident we have welsh speaking specialists in all services, however, we do need to have more resilience and part of our WESP action plan is to ensure there are welsh essential posts in place across service areas

The Chair summarised that Committee would like to see this return to the Committee in the future with data around the quality assurance process, including outcomes and impact for our learners. The Chair thanked all officers for attending for the item and extended the Committees thanks to the ALNcos for also attending the meeting and giving their contributions to Members.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Scrutinise and comment on the information contained within this report
2. Receive the item again in the future at an appropriate time, to include data from the Quality Assurance process, including outcomes and impact on learners.

31 CHAIR'S REVIEW AND CLOSE

32 URGENT BUSINESS

None

**Cllr S Evans
Chair**

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