



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 22 January 2024 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 online:-

Councillor S Evans (Chair)
Councillor S Emanuel Councillor M Ashford
Councillor J Brencher Councillor J Cook
Councillor J Elliott Councillor S Hickman
Councillor C Lises Councillor M Maohoub
Councillor J Smith Councillor K Webb

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr P Booth, Voting Diocesan Authorities Representative
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 Transformation And Data Systems
Ms C Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion
Mr T Britton, Head of Achievement RCT – primary sector
Ms S Corcoran, Head of Achievement and Wellbeing for secondary and through schools in RCT
Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Ms L Howell, 21st Century School Organisation and Business Manager
Mr D Williams, Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service
Ms S Daniel, Principal Democratic Services Officer

Invitees:-

Ms C Seery, Managing Director, CSC
Ms L Blatchford, Deputy Managing Director, CSC
Ms K Williams, Principal Improvement Partner for RCT Secondary and Special Schools, CSC
Mr S Williams, Principal Improvement Partner for RCT Primary and All-Age Schools, CSC

41 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence were received from County Borough Councillor D Wood and Co-opted Member, Mr L Patterson.

42 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

In accordance with the code of conduct, the following declarations were made:

Mr Veale - Personal interest Agenda item 5 & 6 “ I am a Governor at Hawthorn High School”

County Borough Councillor S Evans - Personal Interest item 5,6 & 7
“My son’s School is mentioned in the report”
“I am Vice Chair of Governors of a school mentioned in the reports”
“I work for the University of South Wales”
“I am Vice Chair of Governors of a School mentioned in the report”

County Borough councillor M Ashford - Personal Interest in agenda item 5
“ I am a Governor of Pontyclun Primary School

County Borough Councillor J Brencher - Personal Interest in agenda item 5 & 6 “ I formerly taught at Hawthorn High School”

County Borough Councillor C Lises - Personal Interest in agenda item 5 & 6 “I am a Governor at Hawthorn High School”

County Borough Councillor Jayne Smith - Personal interest in item 7 “ I am a Governor at Llyn Y Forwen

County Borough Councillor S Hickman - Personal interest in item 5 “ My daughter attends Ynyshir Primary School”

43 MINUTES

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

44 CONSULTATION LINKS

The principal Scrutiny Officer advised Members of the published consultations and reminded Members that if they had any queries they can contact the Scrutiny Team.

45 WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION - STRUCTURE OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

The Principal Scrutiny Officer presented the report to Members for them to formally respond to the Welsh Government’s [consultation](#) which sets out the proposals on the principle of modifying the school year, options for implementing changes to the school year including being made in the 2025 to 2026 school year and suggested term dates for 2025 to 2026 school year.

Following presentation of the report, the Chairperson invited Members comments and observations on the proposals.

Concerns were raised that an extension to school holidays during the autumn/ winter terms could extend child poverty due to families needing to heat their homes during the day in the colder months if the children are home and provide an additional hot meal during the day. If a change to the term time is taken forward, an extra week in May is preferred by Members.

Members preferred to retain the current arrangements regarding notification of GCSE results to ensure continuity with English counterparts to avoid confusion and possible advantages of Welsh students receiving results first.

Some Members considered that keeping the 6 weeks holiday during the summer months was better for children's wellbeing due to the longer days and warmer weather. Members were not against reducing this to 5 weeks with the additional week preferred by Members added during the May / June holiday

Members were in support of separating the Easter holidays from the Bank Holidays to even out the Spring / Summer Terms. A Member also commented that the length of the autumn term is long and staff and learner wellbeing should be considered here.

Members commented that more even term times could support Children with ALN who can suffer with longer term times as they generally prefer structure and routine.

A Member made the observation that the current holiday structure is an attraction to many people looking to go into the profession so changing this could affect people wanting to go into the teaching profession.

Members stated that any changes to the current structure should have a consideration not only on the learners but the wellbeing of staff as changing the structure could have a negative effect on them.

Members were concerned that changing the current structure could also make it difficult for childcare for parents, particularly for those who commute for work or teach in England where the term times will remain unchanged.

In considering Children's Health and Wellbeing, Members commented that rather than change the term times, a review of start times for schools should be undertaken to avoid the need for learners to be starting their commute on public transport at 7am

Following consideration of the information it was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Provide feedback on the proposals as outlined in paragraph 4, and decide whether they wish to make any further comments or

suggestions as appropriate following consideration of the information before them.

2. Authorise the Service Director Democratic Services and Communications to submit the feedback provided by Members to Welsh Government on behalf of the Committee.

46 THE WORK OF THE CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM IN THE REGION AND RHONDDA CYNON TAF LOCAL AUTHORITY 2022 - 2023

The Chairperson welcomed the officers from the Consortium and thanked them for attending. Upon reviewing the report, the Chair asked the Officers if they had an additional presentation or any further information they would like Members to receive before they went into questions comments.

Upon considering the information before them, the Committee agreed to defer this item and requested that it be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee. Members felt the report contained lots of data which was difficult to determine what was specific to RCT. They asked that the Officers return to a future meeting with a report which details the following:

- Progress of Schools in Special Measures
- Partnership Working
- Information in relation to School Governors and training
- Broader CSC information removed and replaced with RCT relevant data and specifics
- Reduce volume of report and streamline. Members supported the use of a Powerpoint presentation.
- Extend invitation to attend meeting to Headteacher from the School Improvement Group

The Managing Director CSC thanked Members for their observations and for the clear steer for a future report. They assured they would bring this information to a future meeting streamlined and supported by a Powerpoint presentation.

Following conclusion of discussions it was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Defer the item and receive at a future meeting of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee supported by a presentation of RCT relevant data.

47 ESTYN RECOMMENDATIONS

The Director Education and Inclusion provided an update on the progress made against the recommendations for improvement identified following Estyn's inspection of the education services in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council in January 2023. The Director continued that the

Estyn report provides a comprehensive overview of inspection findings, including the Directorate's strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations.

A Member asked what the target completion date is and will the Committee be updated on its progress.

The Director Education and Inclusion replied that there are detailed plans that sit under recommendations with five strategic priorities that form the basis of the framework of an annual delivery plan. The Director continued that they will develop a brand new delivery plan in April, with lots of actions that will be monitored on a quarterly basis. The Director reassured that every action has an accountable officer and specific timetable that is reviewed and monitored. The Director continued that they are on target to address the issues and acknowledged there is significant work needed to address attendance and exclusion issues. The Director confirmed that the delivery plan can be shared with Members of the Committee in due course.

A Member asked if the reoccurring issues such as attendance are partly aligned to the high number of children living in poverty. The Director Education and Inclusion advised that attendance has a significant improvement journey as there are many different complexities that exist in this area and has been ongoing since before the pandemic. The Director continued that Welsh Government have a task group who challenge these issues on a national basis whilst the Authority are working in partnership with schools to resolve.

Members acknowledged that the number of recommendations have halved which is already significant progress, and the list of recommendations are already built in to the Education Scrutiny Work Programme so will continue to be monitored by Members including the work of the Consortium and how they are supporting us in addressing the recommendations. The Member suggested a broad report back to Committee in a years' time from officers on the delivery plans to demonstrate progress.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Consider the information provided.
2. Consider whether any further information is required on any aspect of the report or the work of the Education and Inclusion Services Directorate.

48 WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN (WESP) - ANNUAL PLAN UPDATE

The Director Education and Inclusion provided an update on the implementation and the progress of the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2022–2032

Members were advised that The Council's Annual Review Report for year one of the WESP was submitted to Welsh Government for consideration on 31st July 2023. Feedback from Welsh Government on the report was received on 14th November 2023 and the feedback received was largely positive. The Officer continued that there has been further notable progress made in a number of areas since the report was prepared and submitted to Welsh Government in July 2023, and these were listed in the report.

Members considered that due to the volume of reports received that it had been difficult to give the report the Scrutiny that it needed. They also considered that the report was too lengthy and a huge amount of data and many embedded links and documents making reading the report difficult. The Committee requested that the item be deferred and brought back to Committee at a future date with a summary of the information required for Members to effectively scrutinise the report.

The Director Education and Inclusion thanked Members for their observations and proposed that each Member of the Senior Leadership Team provides a summary of each of the outcomes which can be embedded to a report for Members and possibly extend the invite to partners to attend the meeting also.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Defer the item to the next meeting with a report containing a summary of each outcome from each Member of the Senior Leadership Team

NB: In line with the Council's Overview & Scrutiny procedural rules, this original item of business will now be considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

49 CHAIR'S REVIEW AND CLOSE

The Chair thanked Members & Officers for attending and their contributions and felt it had been a really useful discussion and, she looked forward to having some of the detailed reports back. The Chair reminded Members that the next meeting would be on 13th March 2024.

50 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

This meeting closed at 6.20 pm

**Cllr S Evans
Chair**