

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - THURSDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2021

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1
HELD IN REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT
09:30**

Present

Councillor KL Rowlands – Chairperson

TH Beedle	JPD Blundell	J Gebbie	T Giffard
CA Green	DG Howells	M Hughes	T Thomas

Apologies for Absence

RJ Collins, PA Davies, M Jones, B Sedgebeer and CA Webster

Registered Representatives

Lynsey Morris Secondary Schools Sector

Officers:

Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Meryl Lawrence	Senior Democratic Services Officer – Scrutiny
Lucy Beard	Scrutiny Officer
Susan Roberts	Group Manager School Improvement
Tracy Watson	Scrutiny Officer

Invitees:

Hannah Castle	Head Teacher, Cynffig Comprehensive School
Kath John	Head of Brackla Primary School and Chair of Bridgend Primary Federation
Jeremy Phillips	Head of Lichard Primary
Helen Ridout	Head of Ysgol Bryn Castell
Andy Rothwell	Senior Challenge Advisor Central South Consortium
Clara Seery	Central South Consortium
Cllr Charles Smith	Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration
Andrew Williams	Assistant Managing Director Central South Consortium

35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr T Beedle declared a personal interest in item 4 as the Chair of Bridgend Governors Association.

Cllr JP Blundell declared a personal interest in item 4 as a Community Governor at Cefn Glas Infants School.

Cllr J Gebbie declared a personal interest in item 4 as a LA Governor at Mynydd Cynffig Primary School and Pîl Primary School.

Cllr Cheryl Green declared a personal interest in item 4 as a LA Governor at Bryntirion Comprehensive School and Trelales Primary School.

Lyndsey Morris, Registered Representative, Secondary School Sector declared a personal interest in item 4 as a Parent Governor at Maesteg School.

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Cllr Tim Thomas declared a personal interest in item 4 as a LA Governor at Brynmenyn Primary School and Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen.

36. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of a meeting of Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 held on 14 June 2021 be approved as a true and accurate record.

37. HOW CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM SUPPORTS BRIDGEND SCHOOLS

The Managing Director, Central South Consortium (CSC) thanked the committee for the invitation to come and talk about the work they had been doing across Bridgend. Outlining some of the report, she explained that they have been working in the context of a global pandemic and it had been an incredibly difficult year for everybody, particularly Headteachers. There had been significant changes in the areas of accountability and, categorisation continued to be suspended which, had given them the freedom to work differently with schools. The aim was to empower schools to improve outcomes for all learners, by working in partnership with the local authority to provide bespoke support to all the schools within Bridgend. They would continue to support and challenge school leaders so that they could demonstrate progress against the school improvement priorities, however, this would be done in the context of a global pandemic and the uncertainty that it brought. There was significant focus on wellbeing and ensuring that the staff in schools were equipped to be able to manage the challenges that they faced. Their improvement partners would be brokering quality, assuring the support that was going into schools to make sure that it was effective and fit for purpose. Following the presentation of the report, Members of the Committee asked the following.

A Member described the report as very positive but had concerns about the challenges of recruiting Welsh speaking teachers.

The Managing Director, CSC advised that it was a high concern, and they had a regional group that worked together across the five local authorities to discuss those issues. Recruitment was a challenge, with the number of people going into teacher training, then adding the Welsh-medium layer in and it became even more of a challenge. Retention was also a significant issue, but it was something being raised with Welsh Government (WG) at every opportunity. There was a training programme for teachers within the Welsh-medium sector, all of the training was offered through the medium of Welsh and English, however at the moment it was about finding those teachers and getting them into the system. CSC were in discussions with initial teacher training institutions and how they could work at that level, but it was not a quick fix, but definitely on the radar.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration explained one of the things that was important to him was the need for training and resources which was subject based. He had spent the last significant years in his professional life, as an initial teacher trainer and he appreciated the difficulties with getting postgraduates interested in delivering their subject through the medium of Welsh. It was important to talk to teacher training establishments to make sure that there were incentives to teaching their subject through the medium of Welsh. As a Consortium and as an Education Authority and a group of schools, they needed to think about and encourage students to come and do their teaching practice using some Welsh. This was not an issue for just Welsh-medium schools, it was important to encourage all schools to use some Welsh.

A Member noted that in the report that they had replaced the National School Categorisation System (NSCS) with a new model and wondered if there were fixed criteria for determining additional support needs; was the school categorisation still

applied to this criteria and how would the Committee measure the benefits to the schools of applying this extra time.

The Assistant Director for Partnerships and Improvement, CSC explained that the suspension of categorisation was really exciting and a direction of travel they needed to take. With the new structured framework, they could really understand what schools needed and the schools could be honest and clear with them. It would be a high accountability framework but with lower stakes which was really important. When WG produced their initial guidance, the four regions got together and looked at what were the key principles that all the regions in Wales needed to adhere to. The first one being around discussion and that was an important part of this process, the open transparency and partnership working which was the strength of it. To do effective school improvement there had to be an element of challenge and if done appropriately, would lead to improvement. It was a bespoke move from what potentially was core support into enhanced support which was based on individual schools, and there should be no surprise when that move was discussed and happens because all the evidence would have built up over time in conversation with colleagues in schools and local authorities as well.

A Member asked if the Corporate Director, Education and Family Support could give detail on how much information would be available to Councillors in the future for Scrutiny.

The Corporate Director, Education and Family Support advised it was quite challenging and he was sure Scrutiny Members were aware that there was a directive around the use of comparison data at a pupil level without identifying individuals so, they would need to be careful with that. Similarly, the directive from WG was to use it very much for school improvement and to move the system on, rather than for comparison for ranking. One thing the Directors were looking at, was providing the information within the expectations of WG to Scrutiny, and there were plans to revise the reporting mechanism from CSC which aligns more with individual Authority scrutiny functions. They would shortly be moving from a termly to a quarterly reporting function which ties in with their corporate performance assessment process.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration believed this was one of the positives that had come out of Covid, the fact that they had suspended the categorisation and broken the link between data and performance indicators, the whole thing now would be work in progress and figuring out a new way of assessing schools.

A Member referred to paragraph 4.1 of the report and was interested to hear if there were changes in the service they were providing before and after Covid. He sought the views of school representatives present on the effectiveness of the support during Covid and how they saw things going forward. Lastly there were clearly positive aspects, but were there areas that CSC, the Local Authority and schools thought could be improved?

The Managing Director, CSC advised that there had been significant changes before and after Covid, the biggest change during the pandemic was the focus on teaching. Going into lockdown the initial focus was very much about ensuring that teachers had access to the technology and getting kit out into the system. There were things introduced purely because of Covid, one of things being the commission of additional coaching support for Headteachers and senior leaders which was completely independent of the Authority and the Consortia. The only feedback that was received was the number of hours used, and by which Authority, and that was recognising the wellbeing challenges that the system was facing. This gave them the opportunity to work with schools to ask what would make their school better, rather than what will get them to be a green school and the national changes have helped with that. Alongside that,

they have looked at their evaluation processes and have learnt that it is difficult to get evaluations back from people in a virtual world. One of the things they are building into their programme for this year is improvement partners working with Headteachers to see where the impact of the professional learning is, the training they have had, and the impact on learners.

The Managing Director, CSC advised that they also looked regularly at what was working or not, continuously updating their own systems, along with an effectiveness and efficiency report from the consortium that was shared with local authorities which looked at if they were getting the best value out of the resources that they had. She believed that during Covid they got some really good value out of the resource as they were not travelling. The content of all of the training and professional learning had changed and reflected the pandemic and next steps from the pandemic, however what you would hear would be a recovery language in any of the training or documentation. The reasons being young people did have an education during lockdown and if they spoke of lost learning and gaps, they devalued the work that the headteachers / teachers did during the pandemic although they recognised that everyone was coming back into face-to-face learning at a different point and working with schools to move those children on.

The Headteacher, Brackla Primary School advised it was a massive challenge for all of them and they had to adjust quickly, especially with regards to online learning. There had been a large amount of support on offer from CSC but one of the most important things for them as schools was what kind of model they were going to use and how to utilise that very quickly. A very useful document put together had been the Blended Learning Guidance which provided a variety of different approaches and strategies on different rotation models, this was then personalised by the schools depending on their context. There was a large amount of professional learning based on digital learning, the staff had to upskill very quickly to provide blended learning for their children and the best method that suited the school – webinars, workshops. Lots of schools dipped into them and lots of Bridgend schools shared their journey and how they had gone about things, along with pitfalls and successes. There had also been lots of virtual events, curriculum design being one, so even though they were operational they could focus on curriculum design as well as they were looking ahead for 2022.

The Head Teacher, Cynffig Comprehensive School, echoed what had been said with regards to the vast amount of resources that were made available. A priority for them had been engagement which they struggled with initially, during the pandemic, to get the levels of engagement that were required. She had linked in personally with CSC to gain the support needed. As secondary schools they also had to look at examinations, A-levels and GCSEs. They received support in CSC in what was a very difficult and fraught process at times and not necessarily all that well communicated from WG, but actually the support given from CSC was useful. On a personal level she thought that headteachers had felt a big responsibility and having those additional people at CSC that she could speak to, share and could broker information for, had been really useful in a challenging time.

The Headteacher, Ysgol Bryn Castell explained their pupils, their needs and blended learning within a special school environment, looked very different to how they looked in mainstream schools, for obvious reasons. It could be quite challenging to get people with emotional and social difficulties or autism or profound and multiple learning difficulties, to engage in things and their focus had to be on health and wellbeing. In terms of the support from CSC, what they had offered was a very flexible and adaptable approach within special schools. The Managing Director, CSC had met with them, prior to the summer holidays, and they were given autonomy of a group of special schools within the CSC to identify the problems that caused all of them consternation and then

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find a solution-focused approach, normally through some peer based inquiry model but it would be very collaborative, pushing the boundaries in terms of moving forward which she thought was important to recognise as well, in terms of what they had brought to the table.

The Corporate Director, Education and Family Support echoed what the Headteachers had said. He believed it was important that the Committee heard from them in the first instance, as they were the major recipient of the support from CSC. He also wished to play tribute to the enormous amount of work that Headteachers had done over the last 18 months. It was a team effort, and he was indebted to Headteachers for working with them with patience, and the support from CSC very much tailored to the needs of individual schools was generally very positive. It was recognised that during the period they had received comments back from Estyn that had mirrored the positive feedback that Headteachers showed in the meeting, acknowledging the strong and sympathetic support that they received from the Consortium, and he believed it was testimony to the external relationship they had with colleagues in CSC. He was really pleased with the service the Local Authority received from CSC.

A Member referred to the budget and noted every year they had cut funding to CSC. His concern was CSC still able to offer the same level of service schools wanted and needed going forward.

The Managing Director, CSC explained that budget was always a challenge. There had been some cuts to the budget over recent years although alongside that, changes to grant funding meant they were able to balance that out. They had been fortunate to be able to look at the grant terms and conditions and also some of the work people had been doing to fit with those grant terms and conditions. In reality they could actually offer more services than they had done previously, part of that being the removal of categorisation. As an organisation over the past two years their model had become more effective but at the same time, they had to be really conscious that if they overstretched, the only people who would suffer, would be the schools. To reassure though they could still offer the same service and they were not expecting any budget cuts in the immediate future, however she appreciated that they were living in an uncertain funding world.

A Member advised that he had been a Chair of Governors and also Chair of Bridgend Governors Association and felt that the relationship with CSC was good. He advised that there was lots of communications coming through from CSC and along with regular emails they were also on Twitter and Facebook and their webpage also connected to the WG Education Pages. The Member referred to the Governor Steering Group and also the uptake on training on how to be an effective governor and stressed it was important to be upskilled and updated on legislation, especially looking ahead at the new curriculum and how it was going to be delivered.

The Principal Improvement Partner, CSC advised that he would obtain and circulate some information from the Governor Steering Group, and also that there were governor training sessions starting in October. There had been some insight and research which they would share in some of their findings but one of the stark things that occurred during the pandemic had been the significant increase in the uptake of training from Bridgend Governors. They had seen 161% increase in Governors accessing training and thought that probably reflected some of what they had spoken about previously around a different delivery model and Governors finding it easier to access the training, and he looked forward to the session in October where they could explore that more.

The Member acknowledged the amount of information he received from CSC via emails and felt it would be useful to disseminate to Governors across the county borough, from

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Governor Support. The Member noted that parent governor elections had been put on hold and they had some vacancies for some time which they could not fill as they could not have the elections. The Member questioned whether the Corporate Director, Education and Family Support and Governor Support could do something about arranging parent elections so that they could have a full complement on going forward for the next year.

The Group Manager School Support advised that in relation to parent-governor vacancies, the local authority recognised the challenge and had been in conversation with the Group Manager Business Support about it. One of the things that was posing the challenge was that the elections still had to be done manually. The suggestion made, was that existing parent-governors continue in their role and perhaps even extend their role where possible to reduce the number of vacancies until those new elections could be arranged. They realised that there would still be some vacancies and they would try to manage to fill those vacancies as soon as possible.

The Corporate Director, Education and Family Support agreed that streamlining communications was a really good idea and would pick that up with CSC following the meeting, perhaps using the Monday mailshot to get out to schools and governors. With regard to parent elections, he was aware that it had been a challenge for many schools over the last 18 months. They were resurrecting the Director's newsletter, which would highlight some of the changes they were going to make that would make it easier for schools. He advised that if he and the Member could have a separate discussion, he would ensure that the newsletter met the expectations.

The Member advised from personal experience in his school, they have had two parent governors right throughout the pandemic. The important factor was that every October they had annual general meetings where they needed to firm their committee structures. The Member concluded that the sooner the issue was resolved the better.

The Chair thanked the Officers for the positive and reassuring presentation and thanked all invitees for their attendance and contribution.

RESOLVED: That having regard to consideration of the content of the report and the responses to the questions asked, the Committee endorsed the report.

38. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

There were no further items identified for consideration on the Forward Work Programme having regard to the selection criteria in paragraph 4.3, and this could be revisited at the next meeting.

There were no requests to include specific information in the item for the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee approved the Forward Work Programme in Appendix A, noted that the Forward Work Programme and any updates from the Committee would be reported to the next meeting of COSC and noted the Recommendation Monitoring Action Sheet in Appendix B.

39. URGENT ITEMS

None