

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - MONDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2023

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 HELD HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB ON MONDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2023 AT 11:00

Present

Councillor A Williams – Chairperson

RJ Collins
M Jones
E D Winstanley

M J Evans
J Llewellyn-Hopkins

H Griffiths
T Thomas

D M Hughes
AJ Williams

Apologies for Absence

I M Spiller

Officers:

Stephen Griffiths
Rachel Keepins

Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Democratic Services Manager

Invitees:

Councillor Jon-Paul Blundell

Cabinet Member for Education

Robin Davies
Lindsay Harvey
Chris Jones
Louise Kerton
Jonathan Lewis
Anthony Morrison
Robbie Owen

Group Manager - Business Strategy and Performance
Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Headteacher, Llangynwyd Primary School
Team Manager, Catering Services
Headteacher, Coety Primary School
Headteacher, Trelales Primary School
Headteacher, Penybont Primary School

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Melanie Evans – Personal – School Governor – Croesty Primary School and Pencoed Comprehensive School.

Councillor Amanda Williams – Personal – Chair of Governors, Coety Primary School.

Councillor Tim Thomas – Personal – School Governor, Coleg Cymunedol y Dderwen. Children attending Llangynwyd Primary School and Ysgol Bro Ogwr.

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - MONDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2023

Councillor Richard Collins – Personal – School Governor – Plasnewydd Primary School and St.Mary's and St. Patrick's Catholic Primary School.

33. Approval of Minutes

Decision Made	That the minutes of the 01/12/2022 were approved as a true and accurate record.
Date Decision Made	4 December 2023

34. Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM) and Operational Issues within the Catering Service

Decision Made	<p>Following detailed consideration of the report and discussions with the Cabinet members and Senior Officers, the Committee made the following observations and recommendations:</p> <p>Funding and Time for Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Committee expressed strong concerns around the financial situation for Universal Free School Meal Provision (UPFSM) given the fact that whilst Welsh Government has provided Capital investment for new kitchen equipment, facilities and upgrades, there are the ongoing Revenue cost implications that the Local Authority and Schools will struggle to meet. These include the cost of subsidising school meals, food inflation rates, costs to meet new requirements for food waste as well as significant costs required for additional staff to deliver UPFSM, both in schools and in the Catering Service. The Committee therefore agreed to write to the Minister for Education and Welsh Language to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Express these concerns and highlight the continuing struggle of Local Authorities and Schools to respond to new legislation and requirements without suitable funding being provided to support it; and○ To call on WG to commit to fully funding the revenue and capital costs of implementing this national policy commitment.• Furthermore, the Committee asked that the implications of UPFSM on time for learning be looked at as a matter of urgency given that Headteachers are already highlighting this as a concern which will only be exacerbated with the further rollout of UPFSM to Nursery years and Years 5 – 6. The Committee were of the view that this could have a significant negative affect on primary school pupil's education.
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SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - MONDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2023

	<p>Meal Portion Sizes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Members expressed concern over school meal portion sizes provided for primary school pupils in that these are the same for those in nursery provision to those in year 6. It was agreed that portion sizes for this age range would likely differ significantly and either cause an issue of food waste from younger children due to the portion size being too big (as well as unnecessary associated costs), or the potential opposite in portion sizes not being big enough for the older children and them remaining hungry. The Committee were advised that Welsh Government were reviewing healthy eating in schools, however, it was unknown whether the review would include consideration of portion sizes, which was set, under the direction of WG, by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). It was therefore agreed that the Committee would write to both the Welsh Government and the WLGA and request that portion sizes be incorporated into the review and that this be based on clear evidence gathered from schools and pupils, the latter to ensure the voice of the child is heard. <p>Free School Meals (eFSM) and Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Concerns were raised over the potential impact of UPFSM on those who could potentially be entitled to eFSM. Headteachers at the meeting reported that there had been a drop in eFSM recently which could possibly be attributed to the introduction of UPFSM. Whilst pupils would still receive a meal in both cases, pupils could be put at a disadvantage by losing out on the extra support they would be entitled to under eFSM. This includes a School Essentials Grant each year to help towards the cost of things like uniform and school supplies. It also had an impact on the amount of funding schools received to support eFSM pupils. The Committee therefore recommend that Primary schools and the Local Authority ensure parents are appropriately informed of the difference between the two and that the benefits of eFSM over UPFSM be advertised as widely as possible to encourage take-up and ensure no child is invertedly disadvantaged. <p>Menu Choices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Whilst appreciating that there is a priority to rollout UPFSM, the Committee expressed strong concerns around the value for money provided with free school meals, given the menu stipulated for all schools and how suited it was to their pupils. Information viewed in school visits and gathered from Headteachers suggest that at times, the menu choices result in a lot of food wastage and also, more worryingly, instances where children are not being appropriately fed as they do not
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SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - MONDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2023

like the choices available. Acknowledging that the menus have to take account of Healthy Eating in Schools regulations, Nutritional Food Standards and are devised using the Saffron system for nutritional analysis, the Committee support the view expressed by some Headteachers that the menu choices need tweaking to address these concerns and take more account of pupil's views in the choices available to them. Members **recommend** that this be looked at as soon as possible to reduce wastage, ensure pupils are being fed appropriately, and in order that that the new UPFSM provision is effective and achieves its overall aim.

Staffing and Contracts

- Concerns were expressed over the high number of vacancies reported relating to UPFSM provision and how the Authority would fill these. The Committee **recommend** that the Directorate look at what other Local Authorities may be doing to recruit to this service area to see if there are some innovative methods and ways of advertising that could be utilised in Bridgend, including any incentives that could be considered.
- The Committee also **recommend** that the Local Authority explore, along with Headteachers and the Catering Service, how schools in close proximity to one another could potentially work together to assist with the provision of UPFSM, particularly with meeting staffing requirements given the high number of vacancies reported. Members proposed that schools could consider how staff could be shared across schools, particularly where there are low hour contracts, thereby providing more working hours, with the aim of attracting people into these positions.
- It was further **recommended** that information be sought from HR as to whether staff contracts could be combined and strengthened for those staff who may hold multiple smaller roles in schools, such as support, catering, lunchtime cover etc, and thereby multiple contracts.

Additional Information and Requests

- The Committee requested further information as to whether notification from parents at the beginning of the week whether children would be taking up their free school meal each day of that week would assist schools with planning and reducing waste. Members recall that this used to be the standard method for most schools and wondered whether reverting back to this would provide benefits, even in so much as planning for staff cover as well as dining hall space and the number of meal sittings required.
- The Committee requested clarification on the current projected overspend for Catering Services for

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - MONDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2023

2023-24 as well as a breakdown of this overspend.

- The Committee welcomed the offer from Mr Chris Jones of Llangynwyd Primary School to receive a copy of the information gathered via a short survey sent to fellow colleagues in primary schools across the County Borough.
- Members requested clarification on whether there would be any potential legal or financial penalties levied on Local Authorities if they were unable to deliver UPFSM in full for whatever reasons, whether this be lack of staffing or kitchen facilities for example, given the fact that this is now a statutory service.
- The Committee requested that either an information report or a briefing session be arranged as soon as possible on the subject of Secondary School meal provision, given reports by one school that they have not got the capacity to feed all the pupils that request it and are therefore being sent into the local town to buy lunch instead. To further explore this issue Members have requested more visits to schools, focusing on secondary school meal provision in this instance, and the capacity of the catering service to meet this need.

Forward Work Programme Requests

- The Committee asked for clarification as to when the WG review of healthy eating in schools would be completed and out for consultation, in order that they could add it to their forward work programme and provide their own response.
- The Committee also agreed to revisit and review the item of UPFSM on their FWP once it was fully rolled out to all ages, however they also requested that a potential interim update be provided in May/June 2024 to determine the position of the rollout and the financial situation.
- As part of any future consideration by the Committee on UPFSM, Members requested that evidence and views be invited from pupils in order to inform the Committee's deliberations.
- As a result of discussions around delays with school extensions due to specific surveys being required, the Committee requested that when considering School Modernisation on its FWP, they be provided with an update on the Corporate Landlord report in order to consider the current situation with the whole school estate.

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - MONDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2023

Date Decision Made	4 December 2023
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35. Forward Work Programme Update

Decision Made	<p>The Committee approved the Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the Committee attached at Appendix A.</p> <p>The Chair advised the Committee that Estyn were developing a new framework for their school inspections and an all member briefing on this would be held in the New Year. Estyn had also highlighted the need for Scrutiny to undertake more performance monitoring of schools with consideration Estyn Inspection Reports. The Chair confirmed that work was being undertaken to explore how to take this forward, to be considered by the Committee under future a FWP item.</p> <p>Members requested that Catering Services facilities be listed for consideration under the subject of 'Upgrading older school facilities...' under 'Potential Items to be Scheduled' in the Committee's FWP.</p>
Date Decision Made	4 December 2023

36. Urgent Items

Decision Made	None
Date Decision Made	4 December 2023

The meeting closed at 13:58.