

**SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - THURSDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2018**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1  
HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB  
ON THURSDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2018 AT 09:30**

Present

Councillor CA Webster – Chairperson

JPD Blundell	NA Burnett	SK Dendy	DK Edwards
M Jones	JC Radcliffe	JH Tildesley MBE	LM Walters
A Williams	AJ Williams		

Apologies for Absence

J Gebbie and K Pascoe

Registered Representatives

Rev Canon Edward Evans	Church in Wales
William Bond	Special School Sector
Ciaron Jackson	Primary School Sector

Officers:

Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Rachel Keepins	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny

Invitees:

Nicola Echanis	Head of Education & Family Support
John Fabes	Specialist Officer Post 16 Education & Training
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Mandy Paish	Senior Challenge Advisor, Central South Consortium
Councillor Charles Smith	Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A number of Members declared a personal interest Agenda Item 4, in that they were School Governors, however, they were advised by Officers that such declarations were not required as they had been appointed onto these by the Local Authority.

The following Councillors declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 4, as they had children who were students in some of the schools mentioned in the report relating to this item:-

Councillor C Webster  
Councillor N Burnett  
Councillor AJ Williams

34. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Corporate Director Operational and Partnership Services submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to present the items prioritised by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee including the next item delegated to this Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee; to present the Committee with a list of further potential items for

comment and prioritisation, and finally to ask the Committee to identify any further items for consideration using the pre-determined criteria form.

Attached at Appendix B to the report, was the overall FWP for the SOSCs which included the topics prioritised by the COSC for the next set of SOSCs in Table A, as well as topics that were deemed important for future prioritisation at Table B.

In terms of items in Table A of Appendix B, it was highlighted that the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee had delegated SOSC 1 with the School Modernisation Band B item for their next meeting, followed by Early Help – Social Care for its meeting on 16 April 2018.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that post April the Committee had been delegated the topic of the budgetary implications in respect of Parc Prison. She added that the further items detailed in Appendix B were items that would be considered at future meetings, the dates of which had not as yet been established.

**RESOLVED:** The Committee approved the feedback and responses from their meeting in December 2017 and noted the items delegated to them for the next sets of meetings.

35. **SCHOOL STANDARDS REPORT FOUNDATION PHASE, KEY STAGES 2,3 AND 4 AND POST - 16 OUTCOMES FOR 2016-2017**

The item commenced with the CSC Senior Challenge Advisor giving a Presentation entitled 'Foundation Phase, Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 and Post-16 Outcomes 2016-2017'.

The Chairperson then invited questions from the floor.

The Chairperson referred to paragraph 4.53 of the report, and noted that the standard of attainment for post-16 pupils at Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen for grades A\* to C had dropped by 20.8% in 2017 when compared to 2016, which she felt was a significant reduction.

The Specialist Officer: Post 16 Education and Training advised that this was largely to do with the fact that staff turnover in key subject areas (ie welsh, mathematics, science and English) had taken place during the above period. These key posts had since been filled and monitoring processes had been put in place in order to ensure improvements are being made this current year in readiness for this year's AS examinations. .

A Member asked what happened to students who failed their A level examinations and if a high percentage of these re-sat the exams. They also queried how many pupils went onto further education.

The Specialist Officer: Post 16 Education and Training confirmed that in terms of the Level 3 threshold, over 90% of students achieved some sort of grade even if it wasn't the highest in terms of attainment. However, he added that poor A level results were not as significant for students as they used to be, as Universities were far more relaxed now than previous in terms of entrance requirements. This fact was borne out in that nearly all students in the County Borough of Bridgend who applied for a place in a university last year had been accepted. He added that some of these pupils were admitted without any A level qualification at all, so there was no detriment for these students in terms of their application to be accepted in higher education environments. Notwithstanding that, teaching staff at all schools were looking to assist in improving grades of qualifications for all pupils.

A Member asked if there were suitable contingencies in place at schools if a number of members of staff there left around the same time, in order that pupils were able to maximise their chances of good A level results.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration advised that there was scope for staff to be moved from one school to another in order to supplement the staffing compliment there, should there be a deficiency in teaching staff for whatever reason. He added that it was easier to mitigate anticipated and even long term absence of staff at a school, though there was more of a struggle to put contingencies in place for the more unpredicted cases of short term absence.

The Chairperson noted from the report that Pencoed Comprehensive School reflected very good performance levels for post-16 pupils/education.

The Specialist Officer: Post 16 Education and Training advised that this school did have a good reputation at all age levels, and that this had flourished further since the school had partnered up with Bridgend College, coupled with the fact that the school also had a new Headteacher who had re-galvanised the school and its staff and pupils. This was reflected by the fact that there had been an increase in performance at the school of just under 13% in the last couple of years.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration added that the table of performance shown in paragraph 4.53 of the report was difficult to judge with regards to the true performance of the schools shown therein as it did not show the baselines. For example, the standard of post-16 attainment for Porthcawl Comprehensive School for 2017 for grade A\* - C (when compared to 2016) had reduced by 0.2%. However, this school was still achieving between 80 – 90% in respect of that particular Indicator and this was extremely good in terms of performance. He felt that in future reports, comparators should perhaps be more explicit in order to give a fuller and more accurate picture of the overall situation.

The Chairperson asked if support was being put in place to ensure that the mental and emotional wellbeing of pupils was being considered, in light of the changes anticipated with regard to post-16 education..

The Head of BASH confirmed that this was something that had been taken into account through a series of workshops that had been held at schools, which would continue to be rolled out to all other schools affected by the changes. He added that student support services also assisted in the gauging of the mental health of students of all ages and not just of post-16 age, where part of these services also included looking at pupils possible career choices going forward, including at a fairly early age, where appropriate.

A Member noted from that chart shown as Appendix D that there was significant variation between the school performance at Key Stage 4, when compared over a three year trend, some fairly erratic and even radical from school to school.

The CSC Senior Challenge Advisor confirmed that a dip in terms of performance at schools was both anticipated and realised due to changes that had been introduced to the School Curriculum, which included the manner in which marking was undertaken for certain examinations. It was anticipated however that performance levels would rise when these changes had bedded-in. She further added that the changes put in place also did not allow for a simple method of comparisons to be made in terms of Key Stage 4 results between schools year on year. The changes had also seen a split of the subject areas of English language and English literature which had to be marked separately rather than as one, which had also had a detrimental effect on previous levels of attainment when this was classed as one subject.

The Managing Director of CSC added that to be fair, schools had faced significant changes such as those referred to above, in a short period of time. This had been demanding both on teaching staff and pupils.

The Chairperson felt that it would be beneficial if Members of the Committee could receive further explanation of the changes to the curriculum that were introduced, as well as data which confirmed the up to date Key Stage 4 results in all schools comprising the County Borough.

The Managing Director of CSC advised that he would produce this and make it available to Members accordingly.

The Head of BASH confirmed that aside of the changes effecting English language/literature, the subject of mathematics had also altered to mathematics and numeracy. Though the changes had resulted to some inevitable dips in performance, improvements had also been made at some schools she added.

A Member felt that more strides should be made with regard to teaching pupils with no verbal or hearing abilities, such as them being taught some of the more basic skills in literacy and numeracy with the proposal that this be developed in Special schools.

The CSC Senior Challenge Advisor advised that performance levels and indicators were normally not produced in Special schools, though this was something that could be considered going forward.

The Interim Corporate Director Education and Family Support, pointed out that Headteachers and their staff at schools were fierce advocates for all children to reach their full potential during their years in an education environment. Staff at Heronsbridge School challenged pupils there to attain significant heights in terms of their ability and skill levels. He was also aware that Regional Boards shared information in respect of Special schools, and he reiterated that this was something that could be looked at further in relation to the provision of certain performance data emerging from these schools.

The Head of BASH added that the Council's Pupil Referral Unit had produced some very encouraging data this year when compared to other authorities on an all Wales basis.

The CSC Challenge Advisor confirmed that Challenge Advisors at schools did gauge each individual pupil's performance, as well as the overall performance of the schools.

A Registered Representative urged caution in respect of the examination of data in that each school taught pupils with different levels of ability, needs, aspirations and ultimately performance, and this would inevitably vary from school to school. Therefore data could vary significantly between the different schools within the County Borough. He felt that rather than closely examining some of this data, such analysis should sometimes concentrate more upon any significant dips in cohorts at a school, without any prior warning or reasonable explanation for this taking place.

A Member commented on the internal teacher assessment process such as that at Key Stage 3, in that it was sometimes questionable as it did not always seem to follow that where performance was good at Key Stage 3 pupils would show the same level of performance at Key Stage 4. This she felt, was due to the fact that internal assessment of performance was more lenient than that of external assessment of pupils, which took place when pupils reached Key Stage 4.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Early Help advised that Porthcawl Comprehensive School had very robust systems in place when it came to tracking the progress of learners from one Key Stage to another, and that other schools within the County Borough would do well to adopt the processes and procedures this school followed.

A Member made the point that moderation in schools was always an issue and that inaccuracies in terms of pupils level of ability and application could always be questioned as pupil's progressed year on year as the curricula and levels of educational requirements became more challenging. He added that this was particularly prevalent when pupils were entering secondary from primary education.

The CSC Senior Challenge Advisor confirmed that all schools had Challenge Advisors and they ensured that the ability of pupils in terms of their attainment was challenged from one year to the next, particularly when progressing from primary into secondary schools. Data collated in respect of this was also referred to the Central South Consortium on a school by school basis for analysis as well as to Welsh Government, including samples of moderation.

The Managing Director of Central South Consortium added that all learners needed tracking so as to ensure that they had the individual level of support that they required. It was therefore beneficial he added, for staff in Secondary Schools to work closely with those in Primary Schools in order to gauge the varying ability of different pupils to assist in the transition from one to the other.

The Chairperson emphasised the point she had made previously in proceedings, that there was a significant variation in the level of performance data when comparing schools within the County Borough at Key Stage 4 level for the last 3 year period, and she gave examples of this from the information contained in the tabled Appendix D to the report.

The CSC Senior Challenge Advisor confirmed that at Key Stage 4, recent changes to the courses and exam specifications meant that outcomes from these GCSE's could not be compared on a like to like basis to those of previous years, and this was particularly the case in terms of comparisons of results in the subject areas of mathematics, welsh and English.

Consideration was being given to putting specialised support in place at some schools where performance had dipped over the above period, particularly in the core subjects referred to. Currently, further analysis was being carried out, in order to understand the reasoning behind why some schools outweighed others in terms of performance at Key Stage 4, in particular. When the reasons for this were known, then they would be incorporated within individual School Improvement Programmes with a view to target improvement in underperforming schools.

The Managing Director of Central South Consortium, whilst acknowledging that the changes in the school curricula had resulted in it being very difficult at the present time to accurately compare data on a school to school basis, was sure that with time, this would level itself out.

The CSC Senior Challenge Advisor added that, in general terms, the latest data showed overall the following:-

- Results in mathematics and English had shown an overall improvement;
- Results in Science were variable;
- Little change when comparing A\* - A grades;

- Percentage of pupils of statutory school age eligible for free school meals was slightly above the All Wales average

She further added that data in respect of the above amongst others relating to schools performance had now been verified, and in turn, this would be shared with Scrutiny accordingly.

A Member asked what was the extent of the role of School Challenge Advisors and how were they gauged in terms of their performance.

The CSC Challenge Advisor advised that performance of Officers undertaking this role was monitored by the Central South Consortium and that a large part of the work they carried out was ensuring that standards within the classroom met the needs of all pupils being taught there. Pupil data was also examined and monitored in order to ensure that their levels of performance were individually gauged and set at a standard that was reasonable in terms of the extent of the ability of the pupil in question. This was a key supportive role that if carried out to the required standard, went a considerable way to ensuring that collectively the school improved in terms of its overall performance. It was also about breaking down and disseminating different areas where improvement could be made, i.e. in terms of teaching levels, maximising pupils learning abilities, and ensuring that the subject areas chosen by pupils were compatible with their respective strengths.

There were also plans to put in place more generic marking of examinations papers, which would lead to more consistency in terms of the outcomes of results and limit bureaucracy. This was also planned to be shared across the Central South Consortia region and not just Bridgend County Borough.

The Managing Director CSC added that teacher training was becoming increasingly crucial in order to maximise outcomes for pupils. Such training would be developed through the likes of Hub Programmes, Pathfinder, Peer Inquiry's, School Improvement Groups, Governing bodies, Performance Management sessions through evidence based work, for example teaching per se, and specialist support areas in core subjects.

The Interim Corporate Director Education and Family Support, supplemented this by adding that schools performance was carefully monitored by Estyn through school inspections and there was a correlation and alignment between the Central South Consortium Business Plan and the various local authority Education Directorate Plans. It was also incumbent upon schools to have Strategic Outline Plans where the Headteacher/staff had to focus on 5 key areas and certain other information which was analysed by both the Central South Consortium and the local authority. He further added that BCBC held the Central South Consortium to account in terms of its performance much in the way that Members hold Officers to account within the Authority.

A Member pointed out that effective guidance and leadership to schools was also required from the School's governing body. It was therefore important that any vacancies on school governing bodies were kept to a minimum and were filled by suitably qualified and/or professional people, with it being an added bonus if they had previous experience in an educational background.

The Interim Corporate Director Education and Family Support advised that his Department undertook a continuous rolling programme with regard to the advertising of vacancies on school governing bodies. The Department looked to fill these wherever possible, though it was not always easy for this to be achieved at all schools either due to a lack of interest, or the fact that potential candidates were not always deemed suitable carry out what was required in this role.

A Member enquired how schools were coping in terms of performance and attainment in light of decreasing budgets..

The Managing Director CSC explained that it was about putting into place a methodology of how to successfully do more at schools with less. He added that the Central South Consortium committed as much as 95% of its budget to schools located within the Consortia in order that they could undertake school improvement. This funding assisted in key areas where there were changes required to the school, including for any new up and coming initiatives/school improvements, and in order to meet the new curriculum in Wales.

The Interim Corporate Director Education and Family Support stated that in addition to the above, leadership programmes and the like were also continuing to be developed in order to improve further the interface between schools and Welsh Government. He added that he had recently attended a training session with all Headteachers that had covered the following subject areas:-

1. New statutory requirements in respect of Religious Education;
2. Changes in the laws of Data Protection;
3. Responsibilities regarding managing buildings;
4. School complaints;
5. Safeguarding the protection of children;
6. Managing (with the Police) criminal gang activity;

He informed Members the above was in addition to the day to day duties of staff at schools.

The Head of BASH advised that Headteachers also monitored the performance of teaching staff by sitting in on lessons from time to time in order to gauge the quality of teaching to learners.

The Chairperson asked the Invitees if they felt that the role of Challenge Advisors produced value for money, to which the Head of BASH replied that in his opinion they did.

A Member asked if schools had any say as to when inspections by Estyn were carried at schools, i.e. if the Headteacher had any scope in changing the planned date of these.

The Managing Director CSC replied that the school could not bring forward or put back the date of any inspection proposed by Estyn.

A Member noted from Appendix B to the report that schools in Bridgend did not do as well as their counterparts from other authorities in terms of attainment in core subjects. He further noted that the Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council schools had better results overall than Bridgend schools, notwithstanding the fact that they spent less per pupil than Bridgend did.

The Head of BASH confirmed that this was due to the fact that there were more deprived areas in the area of Bridgend County Borough when compared to the Vale, and such social economical differences between could result in this.

A Member asked if Bridgend schools performed better overall than other neighbouring areas covered by the Consortia in non-core subjects.

## **SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - THURSDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2018**

The Managing Director CSC confirmed that although there was no data in the report to reflect the comparison here between authorities, schools in the Bridgend County Borough performed better in such non-core subjects than they did in the likes of English and mathematics. However steps were being taken to try and improve performance in the core subjects and this was planned to be closely monitored in the future.

The Chairperson noted that throughout the report reference was made to 'Areas of Improvement' but there was no detail as to how these would be achieved either as a Local Authority or in each school.

The CSC Challenge Advisor confirmed that the above would be challenged through School Improvement Programmes as well as School Challenge Advisors.

In respect of any data relating to schools that Members may wish to examine outside the meeting, the Interim Corporate Director Education and Family Support confirmed that there was a wealth of this that could be found on the "My Local School" website, particularly in respect of schools budget allocation and performance etc.

As this concluded debate on the report, the Chairperson thanked the Invitees for attending and responding to questions following which they retired from the meeting.

### Conclusions:

The Committee felt that whilst the report included a vast amount of data there was a lack of analysis in relation to individual schools within the county borough and therefore Members felt it difficult to get a grasp of the current situation with schools in Bridgend i.e. which ones were of concern and required significant support etc.

The Committee also queried the fact that the report did not provide detail of how exactly the Consortium had firstly had an impact on school performance last year – much work was described but the direct impact and outcomes of this on individual schools was not apparent. Secondly whilst areas of improvement were identified throughout the report, it did not provide ideas or examples of how these improvements would be put in place. Members understood that improvements would be somewhat different in each school however, for areas such as improving attainment of boys across the County Borough, the Committee felt there should be some overall plan for this directed by the Consortium.

With this in mind the Committee requested that they receive a further report at a meeting in the near future, (to be agreed by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny), incorporating the following:

- School Categorisation information;
- In relation to Post-16 data at 4.53 of the report, the Committee requested that they receive the baseline for each school to give a better indication of how each school has improved;
- Information on Bridgend's ranking for Key Stage 4 based on the latest results;
- Information on what targets were set at each stage in order to determine whether the performance was expected and possibly a cohort issue or whether any actuals differed significantly from the targets set;
- Information that the Consortium has gathered through drilling down into each schools' performance to determine what challenges schools face;
- Further detail of the performance of those with ALN attending the PRU or Heronsbridge School as Members felt this was not incorporated into the report to a great degree;



## **SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - THURSDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2018**

- Information on the work that the Consortium is doing to identify the variation for each secondary school at Key Stage 4, and what is being done about it;
- More information in relation to each schools performance – not necessarily more data but detail of the where, what and how in relation to good and poor performance for each school so that the Committee has an overall understanding of the current situation and priority schools in Bridgend;
- What extent are schools responding to the changes recently introduced such as the removal of Btec etc, to ensure they are still meeting the needs of the pupils;
- What work is being done to mitigate against future dips in performance resulting from any changes to curriculum or changes to performance measures;
- Evidence of how the Consortium has made a direct impact on schools and school performance, what outcomes can they be measured on in relation to Bridgend to assure Members of value for money;
- What is being done to mitigate against the impact of changes in teachers to ensure that this does not have a resulting impact on the performance of pupils;
- Performance in relation to vocational qualifications and non-core subjects – where are there causes for concern and where there is excellent work taking place etc.

### **Further comments**

The Committee agreed to keep an eye on the performance of English Literature as a result of it being removed from the Level 2+ performance measure.

The Committee requested that they invite representatives from other schools to give a broader viewpoint including that of the Consortium support – the Scrutiny Officer agreed to look into this on behalf of the Committee.

The Committee also requested that representatives of the school budget forum be invited to attend future meetings on school performance to seek their views on the consortium and the value for money aspect and the potential impact of the budget reduction to future Consortium funding for 2018-19.

Members requested that the Chair draft a letter to Estyn on behalf of the Committee regarding the recent experiences of some schools having inspections during periods of refurbishment, renovation or a move. Such instances have not only caused extra stress on staff but could potentially affect the school's inspection results even though they were outside of the school's control and could have been avoided had the inspection taken the situation into account and been better timed.

### 36. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 12:45