

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - MONDAY, 12 MARCH 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 MONDAY, 12 MARCH 2018 AT 09:30**

Present

Councillor CA Webster – Chairperson

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

Apologies for Absence

RJ Collins, J Gebbie and A Williams

Registered Representatives

Tim Cahalane	Roman Catholic Church
Rev Canon Edward Evans	Church in Wales
William Bond	
Ciaron Jackson	
K Pascoe	

Officers:

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

Invitees:

Nicola Echanis	Head of Education & Family Support
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Gaynor Thomas	School Programme Manager

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were made:-

Councillor C Webster – Personal interest in agenda Item 5 - parent governor at Heronsbridge School.

Councillor AW Williams – Personal interest in agenda Item 5, - Parent Governor at Coety Primary School

12. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of meetings of Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 dated 10 and 18 January 2018, be approved as true and accurate records, subject to Minute 23 of the Minutes of 10 January 2018, being amended to reflect that Reverend Canon Evans is a school governor of Bryntirion as opposed to Brynteg Comprehensive School.

13. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE (FWP)

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report that detailed the items prioritised by the Corporate O&S Committee including the next delegated item to Subject O&S Committee 1; to also present the Committee with a list of further potential items for comment and prioritisation. To ask the Committee to identify any further items for consideration using the pre-determined criteria form, and finally to consider and approve the feedback from the previous meetings of the Subject O&S Committee 1 and note the list of responses including any still outstanding at Appendix A to the report.

Attached at Appendix B to the report, was the overall FWP for all the Subject O&S Committees which included the topics prioritised by the Corporate O&S Committee for the next round of Scrutiny Committees in Table A, as well as topics that were deemed important for future prioritisation at Table B.

Paragraph 4.7 of the report reminded Members of the Criteria form which Members can use to propose further items for the FWP, which Committee can then consider for prioritisation at a future meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report and the supporting information contained in the Appendices attached to the report be noted.

14. SCHOOL MODERNISATION

The Scrutiny Officer gave an outline of the report in respect of the above, the purpose of which, was to inform Members of the initial outcomes of Band A schemes, including lessons learnt, and the development of the Strategic Outline Programme for Band B of the School Modernisation Programme.

Following this the Chairperson introduced the Invitees to the meeting, following which the Interim Corporate Director – Education and Family Support gave a power point Presentation.

The Chairperson then invited questions to the Invitees from Members.

A Member referred to paragraph 4.4 of the report headed Lessons Learnt, and he welcomed the fact that a key lesson from Band A was that early consultation was required with Highways and Transportation Officers, in order to help inform the choice of sites (for schools), as this was directly connected to the provision of any required Safe Routes to Schools following the relevant school opening and becoming populated with children. He felt that this should form part of the Consultation.

A Member also referred to the Local Development Plan (LDP), which suggested how many cycle shelters should be provided at schools. She felt however, that larger schools have more of these, in order to encourage young people to live a healthier lifestyle.

The Schools Programme Manager confirmed that as part of the next Band of the School Modernisation Programme, the Education Department would link in with the Highways and Transportation section of the Council, in order to not only conduct a review of Safe Routes to Schools, but also to look at certain other wider issues, including car and cycle parking provision. Such provision is linked to the BREEAM assessment, i.e. the environmental and sustainability assessment which the project is measured against. All schemes must achieve a BREEAM excellent rating, which is one of the Welsh Government funding conditions for the programme.

A Member asked what the criteria was in relation to the Council paying for transport costs to/from schools.

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The Head of Education and Early Help confirmed that the Council did pay for transport costs for primary aged pupils if the distance of travel was over 2 miles from pick-up point to the school, and 3 miles in terms of secondary schools.

The Chairperson noted from page 40 of the report, that Band A projects for schemes were at various different stages in terms of their completion dates. She further noted that Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Cwm Garw and Pencoed Primary School were in progress with completion dates of January 2019 and July 2018, respectively. She asked if these schemes were on track to be completed by these dates, to which the Interim Corporate Director – Education and Family Support, replied that they were.

A Member made an observation regarding parents of pupils parking near schools. He asked, in conjunction with the reports proposals, new parking provisions were going to be introduced, or was it more a case of making existing school drop-off points safer.

The Schools Programme Manager replied by advising that, drop-off areas, as well as car parking spaces, were incorporated into the design of any new build schools. The extent of this provision is dependent upon a traffic assessment and the application of the parking guidelines, which determine the amount of vehicles that must be accommodated in the car-park and drop-off areas.

As part of the information in the report on Lessons Learnt, a Member asked how funding was allocated to newly built school for new equipment such as furniture and IT provision.

The Schools Programme Manager advised that for Band B this matter will be determined by WG. Funding the cost of construction will be allocated on a rate per m² and furniture and equipment will be funded on a cost per pupil basis. She confirmed that no funding was available for retrospective payments for furniture and equipment, but as part of the lessons learnt there is a transition fund now in place to support schools during their moves.

A Member considered that with regard to the provision of new schools under the School Modernisation Programme, that the local Ward Member should be part of the Project Team that is set-up in the lead-up to the build of the school, as they knew the area and could have an input in issues such as parking at schools and Safe Routes to Schools. This would contribute towards issues of safety for children who become admitted to the school, which amongst others, was a matter of priority.

A Member pointed out to Invitees, that Ysgol y Ferch O'r Sger had portable buildings that now required refurbishment and/or replacing.

A Member similarly advised that she was concerned over the lack of investment being made to schools located in or on the periphery to Bridgend County Borough's town centres, as a lot of these schools were old buildings. For example, Penybont Primary School did not have sufficiently good facilities in order to adequately provide education for Foundation Phase children. She therefore asked, how much consideration was being given to changes in demographics regarding schools and their attendance levels. She added that 100's of new houses were being built in the County Borough including near town based schools, and she asked if this was being considered as there may be an influx of pupils into these schools which were not up to the required standard.

The Head of Education and Early Help advised that Band B Schools were not just about constructing new builds or refurbishing of existing schools, it was also about looking at feasibility studies of other land upon which schools could be constructed/developed. Funding was allocated to schools in order to ensure that sufficient schools places were provided for primary age pupils. Existing schools that were becoming older and in a

state of disrepair could be improved by way of alternative avenues of funding, and if this was required, then firstly a condition survey of the school buildings would be arranged through the Corporate Landlord.

A Member felt that capacity issues and future needs for school places needed to be looked at closely, to cater for any demographic changes, and that school boundary issues similarly required closer examination.

The Head of Education and Early Help advised Members that any necessary projections for schools were based on the projected capacity of any new build, and the boundary of the catchment area for the school. This would in turn, assist in calculating the Pupil Admission Number for the school including accounting for any new housing development that would be included in the catchment area as far as numbers of units (ie houses) were known.

A Member made the point that the timing of this report was good as it had a direct correlation to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) that had just been approved by Council. She added that as a local authority we had a statutory requirement to provide school places. She was aware that £1.1m a year was being repaid each year in terms of supportive borrowing for schools, and she asked if this had been accounted for in the MTFS. She noted for example, from paragraph 7.5 of the report, that the Bridgend Special School scheme being progressed via the Mutual Investment Model, could benefit from a 75% Welsh Government intervention rate. However, this would require revenue match funding from the Authority of approximately £750k per annum over a 25 year period. This, she noted though, was not currently built into the MTFS.

The Interim Corporate Director – Education and Family Support, stated that there was a total of £1.1m required for schools in the form of supportive borrowing, and this was not being funded through the current MTFS. However, as the Council had a statutory duty to sufficiently fund schools, this funding needed to be provided from elsewhere.

A Member asked how well in the past S106 funding through legal agreements had been secured from housing developers, in situations where a new school was required to accommodate pupils within the catchment area, and was there any lessons to be learnt if recovery of this funding had not always been completely successful in the past.

The Schools Programme Manager advised that when securing S106 monies for schools, the S106 Officer from the Council's Planning Department linked in with the Education Department and alerts officers to housing planning applications which are then assessed to determine whether a contribution should be made for education places. The process regarding the calculation of such funding was based on the size and number of houses proposed for the development, and this process was monitored periodically. She added that the local authority had been quite successful in securing S106 funding from developers for new schools and examples of these are Coety and Maes-yr-Haul Primary Schools which serve the housing developments at Parc Derwen and Broadlands respectively. What the Authority needed to be cautious over, that any such S106 Agreement accounted for the total number of houses that were constructed to serve a new school, and that the development was not added to in terms of its size, subsequent to any S106 agreement being secured.

The Cabinet Member – Communities added, that with every S106 Agreement, there would be a 'trigger point' at which time site developers would be required to deposit monies payable to the Council (as part of the school development), as opposed to this being paid in full when the housing development was completed.

The Chairperson asked Invitees if it was difficult recruiting teachers to support pupils with ALN.

The Interim Corporate Director – Education and Family Support, advised that it was difficult to recruit teachers for ALN needs, more for Post-16 age pupils. He also added that there were also challenges geographically in this area with teachers expertise in ALN often being employed from outside the County Borough rather than from within it. If recruitment and/or retention was proving difficult for the Authority in terms of employing teaching staff in specialist areas, then schools often shared such resources with neighbouring schools, dependent upon flexibility, capacity and resources.

A Member referred to page 44 of the report, and noted that there was some uncertainty of there being insufficient school places in some areas where new developments were being constructed, due to the the number of units increasing as the development progressed. An example of this, was in the south of Bridgend, with there being a risk of insufficient pupil places to serve the Pencoed and Parc Afon Ewenni areas, if all planned housing identified within the Local Development Plan (LDP) was fully progressed. Examples of this she added was not just affecting primary school places, but secondary school places also. She also raised concerns with regard to the large new housing development being constructed between Pencoed and Llantrisant (Llanilid), and the effect this may have on pressure for school places at Pencoed Comprehensive School, as this development would cover a large area and families with children would be looking to educate their children in nearby 'feeder' schools such as this. She urged Officers in BCBC to engage at an early stage with Officers in RCT and the Vale of Glamorgan regarding the new development to ensure sufficient school places are available to serve the development.

A Member referred to paragraph 4.15 of the report, where reference was made to Bryntirion School, and that consideration was given to creating all-through primary provision for the Bryntirion area. However, it was subsequently noted, that Cefn Glas Infants, Bryntirion Infants and Llangewydd Junior Schools were all currently operating successfully. He further noted however, that Bryntirion Comprehensive was presently oversubscribed, and this was a problem given that it was a feeder school for pupils of Penyfai Primary School.

The Interim Corporate Director – Education and Family Support advised that that Penyfai Primary was not a natural feeder school for Bryntirion Comprehensive, as this school was also a feeder school for Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwyn (at Ynysawdre). He added that every effort was made with parents for the admission of pupils to their preferred school, but this was not always possible as every school by law had a Pupil Admission Number based on the size of the school which must not be routinely exceeded to.

If admission was refused at a particular school for reasons of capacity, then a school nearby where there was surplus places was offered to parents for their child (ren) to be educated, as an alternative. If an admission application to a particular preferred school was turned down by the local authority, then they could appeal this decision to an Independent Schools Admissions Appeals Panel. He added that schools should not be overcrowded at the expense of there being surplus pupils at a school in the neighbouring area.

A Member felt that there should be regular reviews of defined catchment areas for schools within the County Borough, and that this should link in with proposals for the LDP.

A Member noted that Brynteg Comprehensive School currently had surplus places, and that it would be prudent to make this school more up to capacity, particularly as Bryntirion Comprehensive was oversubscribed.

As this concluded the debate on this item, the Chairperson thanked the Invitees for their attendance and responding to Members questions.

Committee Recommendations:

Members recommended that Officers adopt a whole Council approach to the School Modernisation Programme whereby it is ensured that officers from all Directorates including Highways, Transport, Finance and Social Services are consulted throughout the whole of the planning and development stages, are also given the opportunity to provide their input and are present at the relevant Scrutiny Committee to give their representations.

Members recommended earlier consultation and engagement with Highways and Planning officers to ensure that the Safe Routes to School provision is applied when plans are being developed for each new school. Members further recommended that plans for new schools include adequate facilities for pupils and staff to store and secure their bicycles to encourage them to cycle safely to school.

The Committee recommended that for the development of any new schools where a private road would be a designated drop off zone, legally compliant parking spaces are incorporated into the plans to ensure the safety of children, staff and parents using the same road to cross and park.

Members recommended that Officers take into account the demographic changes when considering the placement of new schools and not just consider the new housing developments but also the changes in current housing where increasingly younger families are moving into homes in and around the Town centres. Many young families currently have to travel out of town by car for school provision as there is not sufficient provision in the immediate area.

Members recommended that evidence be provided as to how risks relating to a change in political power in Welsh Government have been taken into consideration and mitigated against as this could potentially affect the 25 year financial plan.

Members recommended that Officers engage with Rhondda Cynon Taff Council and the Vale of Glamorgan during the early stages of the planned new housing development near Llanilid to discuss secondary education provision including how the new development could potentially affect the population of Pencoed Comprehensive School.

Members recommended that as part of Band B of the School Modernisation Programme a solution for the shortfall of pupil places in Bryntirion Comprehensive School is considered as a priority as the school was currently already oversubscribed with children from out of the catchment area opting to be educated there.

Members recommended that Cabinet and Officers ensure that evidence be provided as to how safety solutions and preventative measures are being addressed in all schools in the Borough, particularly in relation to the newer schools and those that have recently been completed. Members gave the example of schools with mezzanine type floors, which, whilst they complied with safety regulations, were still a cause for concern as children were able to climb onto the safety barriers or throw objects over the top which could cause serious injury to themselves and other pupils.

Further Information

How many pupils that live in walking distance to Brynteg School have opted to go to Bryntirion School?

What criteria is applied when refusing planning applications in relation to new housing developments and provision of school places.
Clarification on whether the non MIM spend of approximately £1.1m has been included within the MTFS agreed at last Council meeting.

Further Points

Members recommended that Scrutiny explore the possibility of having an item on the Local Development Plan and the section 106 contributions and how these contributions can be expended.

15. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 13:00