

**SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2 - WEDNESDAY, 5 FEBRUARY 2020**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2  
HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON  
WEDNESDAY, 5 FEBRUARY 2020 AT 09:30**

Present

Councillor CA Green – Chairperson

S Aspey	MC Clarke	SK Dendy	Rev Canon Edward Evans
J Gebbie AA Pucella	A Hussain G Thomas	M Jones	JE Lewis

Apologies for Absence

PA Davies, MJ Kearns, SG Smith, T Thomas and CA Webster

Registered Representatives

Rev Canon Edward Evans                      Church in Wales

Officers:

Meryl Lawrence	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Tracy Watson	Scrutiny Officer

Invitees:

Mark Shephard	Chief Executive
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
Robin Davies	Group Manager - Business Strategy and Performance
Jonathan Parsons	Group Manager Development
Tony Hart	Senior Transport Officer
Councillor Charles Smith	Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration

107. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

108. HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT

The Group Manager Business Strategy and Performance introduced the Home to School report following a recent independent review by Peopletoo, and updated Members on the measures identified and proposals pertaining to the current status in Bridgend borough.

Members noted that no representatives from Social Services had been invited to attend despite the relevance of the subject matter. The Group Manager Business Strategy and Performance advised that officers had yet to assess whether the proposals contained in the review were feasible or indeed accepted, and this needed to be determined.

Members asked how many learners can be transported on one bus. The Group Manager Business Strategy and Performance advised that the review identified the opportunity to commission Social Services' vehicles (mini-bus size) that would otherwise be sitting dormant to transport a learner home. He noted there would be an insignificant

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number of buses available, notwithstanding the benefit to some learners and the financial benefit to the Local Authority (LA).

Members noted a need to introduce walking routes in some wards, e.g. Penyfai, whilst conceding that primary school learners should be required to walk to school. The Group Manager Business Strategy and Performance responded that not all walking routes were identified as available and safe, and only those routes that legislation identified as safe would the LA consider to be available. Those that were unavailable historically would therefore remain so in accordance with legislation. This was reiterated by the Corporate Director – Education and Family Support, who also agreed with Members that the subject formed an important aspect to the curriculum and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Members noted that in relation to Post-16 Education Transport, 1) the proposal to remove all transport provision for schools other than those protected (Welsh Medium and Faith schools) was discriminatory and was anticipated to have a detrimental effect on schools' uptake; Faith schools were not identified in the report and a significant issue was the majority of Roman Catholics in Bridgend borough who lived in Maesteg and how would they be able to access schools such as the Bishop of Llandaff, and 2) the coordination of provision in schools will enable learners to attend a different school. How will transport be arranged and at whose cost? The Group Manager Business Strategy and Performance confirmed that the impact on Post-16 Transport was recognised and that Cabinet would have a full report available to them. It was further confirmed there was no proposal to remove Post-16 Transport from protected schools which, in Bridgend borough, equated to one Welsh Medium and one Faith. Further, the availability of transport can affect the decision to attend a Faith school. The Group Manager Business Strategy and Performance acknowledged this risk but confirmed the proposal was to protect Welsh Medium and Faith schools only and that it was for Cabinet to make the decision. The risk was further acknowledged by the Corporate Director – Education and Family Support. He pointed out that 1) Post-16 Education was non-statutory, 2) Post-16 Travel linked the two, 3) public consultation feedback had been obtained from parents, children and governing bodies, the general finding that transport to school was considered difficult, 4) one Welsh Medium (statutory) and one Faith (non-statutory) was protected but other schools were disadvantaged, and 5) the effect of an increase in cars on the environment and in relation to the Well-being and Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 must be considered.

Members questioned the LA's mileage allowance of 47p per mile (which is above HMRC's rate of 45p per mile) and whether this rate applied to school-only staff, and whether staff were aware that they were taxed on excessive mileage. The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support advised this would be fed back to Finance for clarification.

Members felt that there was no clear indication of how the policy would be implemented at this stage and could only note the report in this Committee. Members therefore asked what was required of them in this Committee in order to ensure they added value. They felt they needed to be fully briefed in order to make the correct recommendations and decisions to go to Cabinet. The Group Manager Business Strategy and Performance confirmed that the report did contain some of the initiatives for financial savings, the biggest saving being around the Learner Travel Policy. The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support said he took Members' comments in the spirit they were intended, i.e. to protect the LA and learners. He asked that Members give due consideration to the proposals at 3.21 and to confirm whether they supported and/or required more information. In addition, he confirmed that the outcomes of the public consultation would be available to Scrutiny on 9 March in readiness for Cabinet to make their decision in April.

Members asked if the Learner Travel Policy applied to 1) learners from both primary and secondary schools and 2) travelling to their own school or their future education. The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support confirmed that a number of events were held and supported by the Youth Council to inform the public consultation. All learners were welcomed but mostly parents attended. Primary and secondary schools were represented, with the latter also linked to the Post-16 consultation. Schools also ran sessions themselves and the outputs were fed back to the LA.

Members asked for clarification on the difference between an available walking route and a safe route, as well as the potential impact that the assessment of walking routes in Bridgend borough would have on school provision. The Group Manager Business Strategy and Performance confirmed that an available route also meant a safe route. Furthermore, the LA's assessment of available and unavailable walking routes was in accordance with Welsh Government legislation.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support drew attention to the three options under the Learner Travel Policy and confirmed that the third option ('retaining sixth forms in all schools, but with further development to improve this option's delivery') did not indicate the status quo but would, in fact, require schools to coordinate their hours to aid blended learning.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support confirmed that the Learner Travel Report would be returned to Scrutiny on 9 March, and put forward the possibility of a Joint Committee on this date.

Members asked about the availability of utilising other LA vehicles on site in addition to Social Services' vehicles as a way of minimising demand. The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support confirmed this had been explored, notwithstanding that cars were designed for adult passengers and not adapted for learning/additional needs. The Group Manager Business Strategy and Performance confirmed that the LA did have fleet cars for undertaking longer journeys but this was withdrawn around five years ago.

Members asked how the use of vehicles for Home to School transportation met with Local Development Planning. The Group Manager Planning and Development Services confirmed that the Policy would need to be in accordance with the current general transport/clean air agenda and a greater emphasis on public transport and walking.

Members were concerned about the added cost of introducing new software when the Local Authority was striving to reduce costs, and asked whether a report on technology would be available in the future. The Chair pointed to p. 17, Table 2 'Identified potential financial savings and investment requirements', and noted that investing in the software would prove financially beneficial in the long term. The Group Manager Business Strategy and Performance confirmed an investment had been made in the use of technology but it was difficult to measure the financial saving. He advised that if the LA wished to invest back into the system then the procured process would need to be undertaken and that this was worth considering again through Scrutiny. The Chair advised that a report be produced on the technology.

Members asked if Learner Transport was means tested, i.e. based upon an assessment of parents' ability to pay for the service. The example was given that parents may have two children attending the Sixth Form, which would prove costly. The Group Manager Business Strategy and Performance confirmed there was currently a paying scheme within the LA set at the subsidised rate of £2 per day and reviewed annually. There were options around the implementation of available spaces on buses but the legal implications of this would need to be considered, as well as the impact on low-income

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families. The Group Manager Business Strategy and Performance confirmed they were aware of the views of operators and that feedback would be provided to Scrutiny.

Members asked for clarity as to whether Post-16 Transport was going to exist given that the report talked about removing the provision. Members argued the need for a 'middle group', i.e. subject to a nominal means-tested payment. The Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration stated that the provision should not be seen as a 'yes' or 'no' option.

### **Recommendations:**

Members felt that if the current mileage rate is currently at 47p per mile then consideration should be given to lowering the rate to the HMRC level of 45p. Members further asked for clarification whether this figure was for the whole council, or just school staff.

Members felt that it was not possible to make recommendations until they had sight of the results of the public consultation, as there may be issues raised that were not addressed by the review. However, Members wished to make the following comments for consideration and request for further information:

Members sought clarification that only those taking their own children to school would receive a cash lump sum and sought assurance how this would be monitored? As a result of this, Members recognised this could potentially increase car usage on the roads and asked if any environmental research had been carried out?

Members believed that further work needs to be done to maximise the use of Social Services' transport vehicles.

Members sought further clarification in respect of the Authority's Fleet Car Policy.

Members felt that the Authority should encourage healthy routes to school, where available, through greater communication with parents and children.

Members felt that the potential for public transport would need to be explored and asked that the scheduled report include cost comparisons, so parents can make an informed choice.

Members asked that the scheduled report include feedback from operators about potential changes to contracts, e.g. removal of pupil escorts.

Members recognised that given the choice between no offer of transport or paid offer of transport, some may prefer the latter. Members asked that the scheduled report include feedback on how parents feel about contributing, as a third option.

Members expressed concern of the potential for judicial review in respect of Post-16 Education and asked that the scheduled report include risk tables.

In relation to Post-16 transport, Members raised concern that protected status would be given to Welsh Medium and Faith Schools, thereby discriminating English Medium Schools, particularly affecting those within the Garw and Ogmore Valleys.

Members further raised concern that this in turn could have a potential negative impact on Sixth-Form attendance.

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Members would welcome a briefing on the benefits of a tracking system for pupils on school transport, including costings and the benefits for monitoring lone workers.

The Committee requested that a Combined Meeting of SOSC1 and SOSC2 be held on 9 March to consider the report upon Learner Travel and Post-16 Education, post consultation and pre-Cabinet Decision in April.

### **109. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - FEEDBACK FROM MEETINGS**

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report to Members which provided feedback from the previous meeting of SOSC2 in relation to the item on Prevention and Wellbeing, including Day Time Opportunities for discussion and approval.

Members accepted the feedback and assigned all to green status. They confirmed they did not wish to add any further comments.

### **110. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report to members of the items prioritised by the COSC, which included the next item delegated to the Committee.

Members agreed with the two items in respect of Transformation Grant and Remodelling Children's Residential Services Project.

Members requested that, due to the cross-cutting impact of Learner Travel on Social Services and the Committee, a Combined Meeting of SOSC1 and SOSC 2 would be held to receive the reports on 9 March.

### **111. URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 11.30.