

SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - TUESDAY, 21 JANUARY 2020

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1
HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON
TUESDAY, 21 JANUARY 2020 AT 09:30**

Present

Councillor T Giffard – Chairperson

TH Beedle

JPD Blundell

PA Davies

M Jones

KL Rowlands

B Sedgebeer

RME Stirman

AJ Williams

Apologies for Absence

NA Burnett, SK Dendy, J Gebbie, KJ Watts and A Williams

Officers:

Julie Ellams

Democratic Services Officer - Committees

Rachel Pick

Scrutiny Officer

Andrew Rees

Democratic Services Manager

89. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 4, Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020-21 to 2023-24

Cllr T Beedle declared a personal interest in this item because he is Chair of Bridgend Governors Association.

Cllr JP Blundell declared a personal interest in this item because he is a community governor at Cefn Glas Infants.

Cllr P Davies declared a personal interest in this item because she is a governor at Bryntirion Infants and Juniors.

Rev Canon Edward Evans declared a personal interest in this item because he is a community governor at Bryntirion.

Cllr T Giffard declared a personal interest in this item because he is a governor at Tremains Primary School.

Cllr M Jones declared a personal interest in this item because he is Vice Chair of Bettws Primary.

Cllr K Rowlands declared a personal interest in this item because her son is in an apprenticeship in the BCBC Education Department.

Cllr R Stirman declared a personal interest in this item because she is a non LEA governor at Tynyrheol Primary School and a LA school governor at Bettws Primary School.

Cllr AJ Williams declared a personal interest in this item because she is a parent governor at Coity Primary School.

Cllr P White declared a personal interest because he is a governor of Maesteg Comprehensive School and Nantyllon Primary School.

90. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Members considered the minutes of the meetings of 9th October 2019 and 30 October 2019.

9th October 2019 – Cllr Beedle stated that his concerns regarding the validity of governor training and LEA members failing to attend meetings and their lack of involvement, were not recorded in the minutes. The Chair of Governors had introduced a skills audit and this was also not reflected in the minutes.

30 October 2019 – Cllr Giffard stated that he had declared a personal interest in the “Review of Post 16 Education Provision Across Bridged” item because he was a governor at Tremains Primary School but it had not been recorded in the minutes.

Rev Canon Edward Evans stated that he was unable to attend the 30 October 2019 meeting so had sent in a series of questions to be asked in his absence. There was no reference to his questions in the minutes. The Democratic Services Manager agreed to look into this.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committees dated 9th October 2019 and 30 October 2019 be approved as a true and accurate record subject to the corrections detailed above.

91. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2020-21 TO 2023-24

The Group Manager – Financial Planning and Budget Management presented the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020-21 to 2023-24 which set out the spending priorities of the Council, key investment objectives and budget areas targeted for necessary savings.

The Group Manager- Financial Planning and Budget Management explained that following receipt of the better than anticipated 2020-21 provisional settlement from Welsh Government, school budgets had again been protected from the 1% efficiency target in 2020-21. In addition the draft MTFs included funding for a number of budget pressures for the Education and Family Support Directorate including schools.

A member referred to the 10% cut to the contribution to the Central South Consortium (CSC) and asked how sustainable this was bearing in mind similar cuts had been made for the last three years. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support replied that savings of 17.5% had been made over the last 5 years and this was challenging for CSC. In order to reduce overheads, CSC had moved to new premises and they were focusing on maintaining front line services whilst reducing back room staff. The Headteachers from Cynffig Comprehensive School and Llangewydd Primary School agreed that they had not seen any change to the number of Challenge Advisor visits and the provision of workshops and conferences to date. A member asked if similar cuts were being made to contributions by all authorities. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support explained the Joint Committee would agree the same reduction across the board and indicated that the final reduction was likely to be less than 10%.

A member asked if there had been cuts within the Directorate or if the schools had taken the majority of the cuts. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support replied that there had been significant staff cuts over the last 5 years and that considerable savings had been made from vacancy management.

A member referred to the MTFs Principles and in particular the “One-Council” approach. She believed that departments did not talk to each other and gave the example of home

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to school transport and safe routes to school. Free school transport was provided to children in Coity who lived close to the school but were unable to walk because there was no safe route.

The member said that there was no joined up thinking and that her suggestion to extend on land adjoining an oversubscribed school, rather than build a new school, was rejected because of the cost of building a retaining wall. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support replied that there had been many conversations regarding the challenges around safe walking routes. They had to follow WG guidance and some cases were easier to resolve than others. The School Modernisation Programme dealt with new schools and extensions and often there were competing priorities. Members recommended that there should be a one Council approach with officers from Education, Planning and Finance working in a holistic manner to provide footways and crossing points thereby reducing the reliance on and cost of school transport.

A member asked what impact there had been on sickness levels in light of the staff cuts and if the authority was using agency staff. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support replied that sickness levels had not improved with a small number of staff being off for a significant length of time. He also reported that work related stress had grown from last year. There was a very supportive occupational health scheme and they worked closely with HR to support staff back into work. They avoided using agency staff wherever possible. The Headteachers from Cynffig Comprehensive School and Llangewydd Primary School agreed that most days there would be a supply teacher on site and even though they tried to put mechanisms in place it was difficult to avoid. They had not seen an increase in work related stress but did see staff susceptible to small illnesses.

A member asked if devolved budgeting worked and could the authority be confident that schools were getting the right level of funding. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support explained that there were 59 schools with a common goal and planning was challenging. The biggest pressure was teachers' pay and pension increases for the period April to August 2020 which had been fully funded and the future impacts of teachers' pay awards which would come into effect from September 2020. There was also a significant number of special school pupils identified as requiring 1:1 additional support. The Group Manager- Financial Planning and Budget Management explained that the pay and pension increase should be fully funded for 20/21 and that £185,000 had been identified as a budget pressure for 1:1 support for special school pupils.

The Headteachers from Cynffig Comprehensive School and Llangewydd Primary School were disappointed that even though there had been a significant improvement in the settlement, there was no additional funding allocated to schools. Teachers pay and pensions pressures had been met which kept them at status quo. There was no more in real terms and they had to continue to be extremely creative to deal with new pressures. The Committee welcomed the better budget settlement but considered that the Council was at standstill and it would be harder to make savings going forward as many schools had experienced an increase in the behavioural demands of pupils, which schools had to fund themselves and which would get more difficult to fund.

A member asked for further information regarding the budget for behaviour support. Bad behaviour could lead to permanent exclusions and this could have an impact on staff and their wellbeing. The previous staff survey had not been sent to school based staff and teachers and if staff were unhappy then that could lead to sickness and absence. Members noted that a deficit budget added to the problem. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support explained that half of the schools had deficit budgets and a few had considerable deficit budgets. If the deficit was more than 5% a deficit recovery plan was put in place. Pressures had been identified with behaviour support and

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schools were doing a remarkable job of maintaining the attendance of very challenging pupils. He also recognised the statutory duty of protecting staff. The Committee expressed concern that the increase in behavioural demands of pupils could have an impact on the wellbeing of staff, which in turn could lead to an increase in sickness and place pressure on school budgets. Members recommended that a request be made to the Corporate Director Education and Family Support for school staff to be included in the staff survey seeking their views on management, workplace well-being, communications within the Council, opportunities for learning and development.

A member asked what the uptake was for the Corporate Landlord SLA and if it was working. The Headteacher of Cynffig Comprehensive School explained that they had opted for tier 1. She was not sure how effective it was and there seemed to be different opinions between primary and secondary schools and tier 1 and tier 2. Another member stated that from her experience the system was working well with issues categorised and most resolved the same day. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support explained that this fell within the Communities Directorate. Members recommended that an item be placed on the Forward Work Programme on the take up by schools of the Corporate Landlord service.

A member raised the issue of pupil behaviour and exclusions and the impact on staff. Members asked who picked up the bill for transporting a child to a different school following exclusion. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support replied that the wellbeing of staff was paramount. He confirmed that there would be no additional cost to the school and that exclusion would be a last resort. All schools worked extremely hard to maintain attendance. Sometimes a fresh start at a different school could work and the LA would cover the cost. The challenge was greater when a child was excluded on 2 occasions due to the cost of home tuition or an out of county placement.

A member asked how visible the School Liaison Officers were in the schools and what level of support was provided by the police. The Headteacher from Cynffig Comprehensive School explained that they had a school police liaison officer who attended for various reasons such as knife crime and substance misuse. His availability had reduced because of cuts but he still carried out work with the children. PCSOs worked well with the schools however the level of support they provided appeared to be inconsistent across the schools. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support explained that partnership working was key and they did a lot of work with a number of agencies such as Early Help, MASH, PCSO's and CAMHS. Members recommended that a request be made to the Police to establish the differing levels of support the Police and PCSOs provided to support schools across the County Borough.

A member referred to home to school transport and in particular, the proposed cuts for post 16 pupils. He believed it discriminated against pupils who lived a distance from comprehensive schools through no fault of their own eg pupils who lived in the valleys who attended CCYD. He also asked what was happening to Post 16 education in Bridgend. Some of the options would require pupils to travel more and how did that sit with home to school transport. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support replied that post 16 education was non statutory and there was no requirement to provide transport so it would not be discriminatory from a legal point of view. The budget was in deficit so they had to take action to arrest the decline. They were meeting with different providers and considering various options such as travel passes but this was a real challenge. They were in the process of preparing a paper to be submitted to Cabinet in April. They were aware that this could impact on several hundred pupils. The Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help said that he sympathised but this was the tenth year of austerity and there was no end in sight. It was difficult to see how many families

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in deprived areas would be able to afford transport. They were looking at a number of scenarios and the solution might not be a blanket approach but a case by case solution.

A member raised concerns that staff at the Youth Offending Service were working with pupils and this information was not being passed on to the school. There did not appear to be a one council approach. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support explained that there should be a team meeting with a representative from the Youth Offending Service, in attendance and he agreed to look into it.

A member referred to the rise in the number of pupils entitled to free school meals and asked if this had an impact on school budgets. The Corporate Director Education and Family Support replied that the increase in the number of pupils eligible for free school meals and the cost of additional learning needs were a budget pressure. Another Member added that in his ward, there were a number of pupils entitled to free school meals and this ward would also suffer if post 16 opportunities were also removed. He also queried the way any credit was written off at the end of the day rather than accumulating and allowing the pupil to spend more another day. The Corporate Director Education and family Support explained that Cabinet had been asked to look at a number of options including free Breakfast Clubs for secondary schools, to look at the price of school meals and pilot schemes for the summer holidays and Christmas holidays. WAG were looking at year 7 Breakfast Clubs for pupils transitioning. Consideration was also being given to using the Pupil Development Grant to purchase food for a small breakfast club. The Cabinet Member Social Services and Early Help said that he had attended a Young Carers open morning at CCYD and talked about the difficulties of children going to school feeling hungry. He was pleased to be involved in WG and BCBC initiatives and recognised that school staff were observant and took steps to help pupils in need. Members recommended that it be established whether a Pupil Development Grant could be used for the provision of food.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Following the Committee's consideration of the draft budget proposals for the Education & Family Support Directorate, Members determined to make the following comments and recommendations:

- The Committee welcomed the better budget settlement but considered that school budgets were at standstill and it would be harder to make savings going forward as many schools had experienced an increase in the behavioural demands of pupils, which schools had to fund themselves and which would get more difficult to fund. The Committee expressed concern that the increase in behavioural demands of pupils could have an impact on the wellbeing of staff, which in turn could lead to an increase in sickness and place pressure on school budgets.
- That an item be placed on the Forward Work Programme on the take up by schools of the Corporate Landlord service.
- That in relation to EFS1 and EFS41 Home to School Transport, Post 16 Education and the School Modernisation Programme with the development of new schools and its impact on existing catchment areas and Section 106 Agreements there needs to be a one Council approach with officers from Education, Planning and Finance working in a holistic manner to provide footways and crossing points thereby negating the reliance on and the cost of school transport. That safe routes to school be part of the review of Post 16 education.

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- That a request be made to the Corporate Director Education and family Support for school staff to be included in the staff survey seeking their views on management, workplace well-being, communications within the Council, opportunities for learning and development.
- A request be made to the Police to establish the differing levels of support the Police, PCSOs and School Liaison Officers provide to support schools across the County Borough

That in relation to EFS5, the increase in number of pupils eligible for free school meals, that it be established whether the Pupil Development Grant can be used for the provision of food for breakfast clubs.

92. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Democratic Services Manager presented the Forward Work Programme. He explained that SOSOC1 would receive the Education Outcomes report on 5 February 2020 and Learner Travel on 9 March 2020. Members asked if students and the Youth Mayor or colleagues, could be invited and if the meeting could be webcast. A member suggested that the meeting should be held in one of the comprehensive schools and the start time changed to 3 pm to accommodate the pupils. Another member stated that he would have child care issues at this time and this could also be a problem for other members of the committee. The Democratic Services Manager explained that if it was held in a school, the meeting could not be webcast and he agreed to look into this option.

93. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 11:26