

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON TUESDAY, 5 JANUARY 2016 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor EP Foley – Chairperson

PA Davies
PN John

DK Edwards
M Jones

N Farr
G Phillips

CA Green
KJ Watts

Registered Representatives:

Mr K Pascoe

Officers:

Nicola Echanis
Rachel Keepins
Sarah Daniel

Head of Strategy Commissioning and Partnerships
Scrutiny Officer
Democratic Services Officer – Committees

Invitees:

Cllr Huw David

Deputy Leader

Cllr Hailey Townsend

Cabinet Member, Childrens Social Services and Equalities

Hannah Woodhouse

Managing Director, Central South Consortium

Paul Wolstenholme

Bridgend Link Advisor, Central South Consortium

Cllr Chris Elmore

Chair of Joint Committee, Central South Consortium

Mr Ben Blackwell

Headteacher, Pen Y Bont Primary School

Mr David Jenkins

Headteacher, Brynteg

Miss Andrea May

Assistant Headteacher, Brynteg

201. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Officers/ Members for the reasons so stated:

Councillor D B F White – Work Commitments

Councillor R Thomas – Unwell

Mr Tim Calahane – Work Commitments

Mr William Bond – Unwell

Rev Canon Edward Evans – Work Commitments

202. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of Interest were received from:

Mr K Pascoe – Personal Interest in Item 5 and 6 as he is a casual consultant with Central South Consortium

Councillor G Phillips – Personal Interest in Item 6 as his wife works as a supervisor for BCBC School Meals

203. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee dated 4 November 2015 were

approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting, subject to the inclusion of Councillor CA Green's apologies being recorded.

204. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report to the Committee on the Forward Work Programme for the Committee. She presented a list of items that were due to be considered at the Committee's meeting to be held on 21 January 2016 and sought information required for the subsequent scheduled meeting to be held on 9 March 2016. She also advised on further potential items for prioritisation by the Committee

Members asked if the issues that were identified relating to Children and Safeguarding in the Annual Improvement report 2014/15 could be linked into the Committees Forward Work Programme. The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that she would look to see how the issues could be linked in

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Noted the topics due to be considered at the meeting of the Committee for 21 January 2016 and confirmed any specific information to be provided by the invitees listed or the Overview and Scrutiny Unit
2. Determined the invitees to be invited to attend and any specific information it would like the invitees to provide and any research that it would like the Overview and Scrutiny Unit to undertake in relation to its meeting for 9 March 2016

Revisited and considered the list of future potential items for the Committees Forward Work Programme and reprioritised as the Committee felt appropriate.

205. SCHOOL STANDARDS REPORT - FOUNDATION KEY STAGE 2 AND 3 KEY STAGE 4 OUTCOMES FOR 2015

The Scrutiny Officer introduced a report to Committee that provided Members with feedback on the school standards report for foundation Phase, Key Stage 2,3 and 4 outcomes for 2015

Members questioned the fluctuation in the three year trend and noted that there was information for improvement but questioned how this would be implemented. They questioned Officers on how the stats compared to other areas in the Consortium and asked also if the Foundation Phase had been identified as an area for further improvement. The Bridgend Link Advisor Central South Consortium advised that Key Stage 2 was not improving as rapidly as they had hoped but they were continuing to develop and build on the achievements. He added that they were looking at ways to build on strength from infancy. He further added that he did not have the exact figures at the meeting, however he confirmed that Bridgend were better overall than the Consortium and Wales average. He would also clarify the point about the Foundation Phase back to Committee in writing.

A Member added that it would be helpful to see UK wide results as a comparison to see where Bridgend were in the table. The Bridgend Link Advisor stated that it was difficult to provide a comparison of figures as England do not have assessments whereas Wales does. He added that in England students can only sit exams once they have completed their course, in Wales they sit them throughout the academic year. He further added however that a national model, Assessment and Learning in Practice Settings (ALPS),

was used by schools to compare with other parts of the UK. The Committee therefore requested that this information be shared in future reports.

Members questioned the reliability of the Teacher Assessments from the Challenge Advisors and if they were robust and reliable enough. The Bridgend Link Advisor stated that the Consortium were developing a national programme to improve the reliability of the Teacher Assessments and there would be a national report on this where they would look at schools outside of the Consortium to compare the approach and systems used in completing the assessments.

A Member noted that there was no improvement in post 16 stats and what was being prepared to address the issue. The Bridgend Link Advisor, Central South Consortium advised that a lot of work was being undertaken for post 16's and they were working closely with head teachers to discuss how they could work collaboratively delivering sixth form with Bridgend College.

Members advised that it would be helpful to demonstrate that the support from the Central South Consortium was robust enough as there had been criticism that there was not enough support from them. The Committee suggested it would perhaps be beneficial if there were specific case studies that demonstrated where they had intervened and given support to a school that had now shown signs of improvement.

Members queried whether sickness absence in teachers was a contributing factor to poor school performance as children achieved better results when they had continuity in their teaching arrangements. Members also considered that schools would benefit from specialist HR support and if this was something the Consortium could provide to schools. The Bridgend Link Advisor, Central South Consortium stated that there was a high number of supply teachers working in the schools within the consortium and this was something they were looking to improve on. He advised that he did not have an analysis of staff attendance and the potential impact on student performance. He further advised members that specialist HR advice to schools was important and a shared service with the consortium was being considered as he believed this would provide better outcomes and avoid conflicting HR advice. He added that the consortium were keen to recruit the right staff at Leadership level as they would then be able to support the recruitment of teaching and support staff.

Members asked if information was available for Post 16 education as a comparison as this was the stage that students would be competing nationally for the same universities and employment places. Officers agreed with the statement from members and advised that at a future meeting they would produce figures for the Committee. Members added that it may be more beneficial for a Member and School Engagement Panel to be set up to discuss the findings. The Head of Strategy Commissioning and Partnerships reassured the Committee that Bridgend were doing well and they were working with various organisations across the border to learn lessons of good practice.

A Member queried that in the report it stated that in Autumn 2014 the LA issued "cause for concern" letters to 5 schools and in the Autumn 2015 the LA issued 2 "cause for concern" letters. Members asked if the two schools issued in Autumn 2015 were previously issued the letters in the Autumn 2014. The Deputy Leader stated that these letters were issued for the first time to the schools in 2015 and for different reasons to the letters issued in 2014. They were issued with the cause for concern letters as they were of high risk of dropping down a category when inspected so the Authority took proactive measures in order that the school could take preventative action immediately.

A Member asked when the Local Government and Consortium would use their statutory powers of intervention and questioned where notification of an issue came from;

teachers, parents, trade unions etc. The Bridgend Link Advisor, Central South Consortium advised that warning signs would usually be picked up by the challenge advisor and a categorisation system would be used to determine what level of intervention was needed. He added that Estyn could also intervene if they had cause for concern. The Chair of the Joint Committee – Central South Consortium added that the consortium had also been inspected by Estyn and a list of recommendations for improvement were issued to them

A member stated that it was disappointing that no school in the consortium had been judged excellent and questioned what methods were being put in place to drive the educational standards up. The Bridgend Link Advisor, Central South Consortium advised that schools were being encouraged to work together to learn and share best practice and the consortium would be able to assist with the funding for primary and secondary schools in doing so. He added that there was a focus on driving schools up from good to excellent.

A Member asked for reassurance that BCBC were getting value for money from the Consortium. The Bridgend Link Advisor, Central South Consortium stated that the consortium have to make difficult decisions about where to spend money. He added that the Joint Committee agreed a 5% cut in the budget each year but stated that frontline services in schools would not see a reduction in their services. He advised members that he could provide a written response to the Committee on the key changes to the Consortium including creating bespoke services and the recruitment of quality challenge advisors to achieve a better approach to the recruitment of teachers, particularly senior staff.

Conclusions

The Committee complimented the report and welcomed the changes that had been taken on board as a result of the workshop held with Members on school data.

Given the fact that pupils from Wales would be in competition with pupils from other parts of the UK, both for jobs and university places, the Committee asked whether further comparative information could be provided in relation to performance at Key Stage 4 and Post-16 for the rest of the UK. Although it was reported that this might be difficult because of the differences in education, for example in the curriculum and exam boards, Members were advised that a national model, Assessment and Learning in Practice Settings (ALPS), was used by schools to compare with other parts of the UK. The Committee therefore requested that this information be shared in future reports.

The Committee also requested that whilst there is information relating to the Consortium contained in the report, it would be useful for it to contain case study examples of where the Consortium has assisted in school improvement to evidence its success.

Members raised concerns over the robustness and reliability of Teacher Assessments and welcomed the statement that a National Programme was being introduced to improve the moderation of these assessments and the methods by which the Challenge Advisers consider and challenge them. Members felt that the Committee would benefit from receiving further 'Value Added' data from the Fischer Family Trust for both the annual school report and in relation to any future reports on Free School Meals Attainment.

Members sought clarification on the point that Foundation Phase was identified by Officers at the meeting as an area for further improvement but not identified as such in the report.

Additional Information

Members asked for further comparative information for the other Local Authorities in the Central South Consortium in relation to their schools that are under Estyn monitoring, in order to establish how Bridgend compares.

Members asked whether there had been any analysis done in relation to staff attendance and the impact on pupil performance, similar to that associated with pupil attendance and performance.

The Committee supported the exploration and possible development of a shared HR Service within the Consortium in order to standardise provision both within the LA, for Primary and Secondary and also across the Local Authorities within the Consortium.

206. FREE SCHOOL MEALS (FSM) ATTAINMENT REPORT

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the report to members which provided them information on the work that was being undertaken and the support that was being provided to target and raise educational performance for children from socially deprived backgrounds.

A member asked what impact the new cashless catering system that had recently been implemented in some schools in the Borough had on families eligible for free school meals. The Head of Strategy and Commissioning Partnerships advised that not all schools had implemented the cashless catering system and some schools outsource their catering so the system was not a possibility for them. She advised that where it had been implemented it had removed the stigma attached to having free school meals. She added that she could bring a more detailed report to the Committee on this. A Member added that the implementation of cashless catering at a school in Maesteg had been very successful with pupils and parents being pleased with its benefits. The Deputy Leader added that BCBC are encouraging more schools to implement the system as it was better all round for pupils and parents and also dramatically reduced the administration around collecting and banking dinner money fees from pupils. The Head teacher at PenyBont School added that he had not introduced the cashless catering system as the school would be uncomfortable that only one days grace would be given to a pupil if there was no credit in their account. Members asked if further information could be brought to a future Committee on how the system dealt with arrears on an account.

A Member questioned if free school meals for all pupils was a possibility. The Deputy Leader advised that cost was a massive issue and the Authority needed to reduce budgets too much which would not able them to offer free school meals to all.

The Chairman Children Young people and Overview Scrutiny Committee asked if the Authority could assist primary schools in deprived areas in looking at schemes such as Cloud Nine which helps children get access to PCs at a heavily subsidised rate, as not all pupils had access to a computer at home. The Head of Strategy and Commissioning Partnerships agreed and stated that poverty excluded the equality of access which made it difficult for a lot of pupils as IT was well embedded in all schools in the Borough. She added that research had found that the issue however was more about access to the internet rather than the access to equipment. A member recommended that the Authority could use section 106 opportunities to implement broadband for their local community. Members also stated that Town and Community Councils may be able to assist to provide free WIFI access to its residents and could even approach key employers in the Borough to do the same.

Members questioned how many primary and secondary schools in Bridgend provided a free breakfast club for pupils and asked also if free breakfast clubs were available post 16 as this would be a stressful time for pupils who had exams to sit. The Head of Strategy and Commissioning Partnerships stated that she did not have figures to offer at the meeting but could provide the information to the Committee at a later date

The Committee thanked Head teachers Mr Ben Blackwell and Mr David Jenkins and Assistant Head teacher Andrea May for their attendance and input into the Committee discussions and added that their contributions were a valuable insight.

Conclusions

Members raised concerns over reports of pupils not having sufficient access to a computer at home. The Committee recommended that the Local Authority assist Primary Schools in looking at schemes such as Cloud Nine, which had recently helped a local school procure computers for youngsters at a heavily subsidised price.

The Committee further recommended the Local Authority utilise Planning 106 opportunities to acquire Community Broadband which would assist pupils who do not have internet access at home. Members recommended that this could be expanded with Town and Community Councils also approached over provision of free wifi access as well as key employers in the community, Valleys to Coast, BT and BAVO.

The Committee welcomed the input from the Head teachers Mr Ben Blackall and Mr David Jenkins and Assistant Head teacher Miss Andrea May on both items and concluded that such representatives be invited to attend the Scrutiny Committee on a more regular basis to provide valuable insight and assist with discussions.

Additional Information

Members requested further information on how arrears were dealt with for Cashless catering and whether schools were experiencing more issues with arrears through the new system.

The Committee requested information on how many secondary schools within the County Borough have breakfast clubs.

207. MEMBER AND SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT PANEL ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15

The Scrutiny Officer informed the Committee of the work of the Member and School Engagement Panel during 2014-15.

Following discussions over the key findings of the Member and School Engagement Panel, the Committee determined to send the report containing these findings to the Corporate Director – Education and Transformation and to the Managing Director – Central South Consortium requesting their response, for consideration at a future Committee meeting.

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report

208. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 5.01 pm

