

# Minutes



## Performance Scrutiny Committee - People

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Date: 12<sup>th</sup> July 2022

Time: 10am

Venue: Hybrid Meeting

Present: Councillors W Routley (Chair), J Cleverly, C Townsend, T Watkins, B Davies, p Drewett, D Jenkins, M Pimm, A Screen, P Bright, M Al-Nuaimi.

Cllr D Davies, Sarah Morgan (Head of Education), Karyn Keen (Assistant Head of Education), Sarah Davies (Assistant Head of Education), Katy Rees (Assistant Head of Education)

Samantha Schanzer (Scrutiny Advisor), Felicity Collins (Governance Officer), Louise Thomas (Governance Officer).

Apologies: None

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### 1. Apologies for Absence

None

### 2. Declarations of Interest

None

### 3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting: held 25<sup>th</sup> January 2022

The minutes of the previous meeting held 25<sup>th</sup> January 2022 were **accepted as a true and accurate record.**

### 4. Education Services End of Year Report 2021-22

Councillor Davies gave a brief introduction to the report and asked that the report contextualised by how well schools had performed during the pandemic. Councillor Davies commended the service areas hard work and achievements throughout the report.

#### Questions:

The committee asked why the Service Area Risk indicator regarding Additional Learning Needs (ALN) was amber.

- The Head of Education informed committee that they were waiting from direction from Welsh Government regarding ALN.
- The Head of Education added that there had been input into training and work carried out in cluster groups that aimed at early intervention. The Head of Education informed committee that they were futureproofing.

A committee member expressed that the graphs shown on page 6 of the report could be better presented.

A committee member was pleased of the net underspend and asked how this had been achieved and were there any plans for the underspend.

- The Head of Education explained that the £800,000 underspend was linked to out of county placements in light of the pandemic. The Head of Education added that schools that were closed for a period of time during the pandemic and children with high-end needs did not progress through the system and so were not identified to go into out of county placements, which were very costly for the Council. The Head of Education informed committee that the aim was to secure the best value for money and this was achieved by finding local provision rather than sending children out of county which also proved to be more beneficial for the children involved.
- The Head of Education informed committee that the underspend would be transferred into Newport City Council's general fund to be used where needed.

A committee member asked for an update on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools project.

- The Head of Education informed committee that they were on track with the Bassaleg School project and that it would approximately 18 months until completion.
- The Head of Education added that The Ysgol Gyfun Gwent Iscoed project was also currently meeting all deadlines. #
- The Head of Education noted that the new school at Whiteheads was experiencing delays but this was not a local issue, rather an issue around the transfer of land which meant that anticipated completion date had now moved back to the Autumn term of 2023.

A committee member queried the comment that there was no further action that could be taken with regards to Safe Walking Routes to School

- The Head of Education explained that going forward the Education Service Area would no longer be the primary lead and that City Services would take over the future planning for active travel. The Head of Education informed committee that there was an Active Travel Officer based within City Services and this function would move to a different Scrutiny Committee.

A committee member welcomed the new operating model for the Gwent Music Service and queried how the model would be implemented.

- The Assistant Head of Education explained that funds were being made available by the Local Authorities of Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen to support pupils financially in participating in Gwent Music tuition and activities. The Assistant Head of Education informed committee that funding provided by Welsh Government meant that all learners in Year 3 could have access to a music provision. The Assistant Head of Education added that the Education Service was striving to adapt to the type of provision by working alongside the pupils, identifying types of instruments that would fit the curriculum and also the types of instruments that the pupils were interested in using. The Assistant Head of Education assured committee that the aim was to work with the young people so that all had the same opportunities to participate.

A member asked about staffing levels and the training provided for new staff, particularly in relation to ALN staff.

- The Assistant Head of Education informed committee that 6 new Inclusion Enrichment Team officers had been appointed and these were all highly trained. The Assistant Head of Education added that the Service was deeply committed to professional learning and there were regular supervision sessions and check-ins and that there was a lead officer for each group and they were able to share best practice.

A member queried the how the Pupil Development Grant was spent and sought clarification on the tiered approach.

- The Head of Education explained that all clusters across the city used their PDG to support looked after children. The Head of Education informed committee that behaviour interventions proved to have a moderate impact for low cost and were therefore seen as a worthwhile investment. The Head of Education added that this was a new approach on evidence based research, with the pilot scheme currently being shaped. The Head of Education informed committee that the future recommendation was to implement a three-tiered approach to interventions as this would ensure a whole school approach and aimed to achieve good results at the lower tiers before employing more specialised programmes of intervention.

A committee member asked about the reception of professional learning offered to Chairs and Vice-chairs of Governors in secondary schools.

- The Head of Education explained that while there were regular opportunities for governor professional learning on a range of topics, attendance had been poor. The Head of Education noted that attempts had been made to engage with governors and increase participation but as these were a voluntary role, it was a difficult issue to resolve. The Head of Education assured committee that low attendance would not prevent the learning opportunities from continuing to be offered.

A committee member queried if there was data available on the attainments of FSM learners

- The Head of Education stated that there were a range of internal accountability measures and indicators linked to this and so were able to say what had been achieved. The Head of Education informed committee that internal data could not be shared with committee but they were able to gauge which specific areas represented good value for money and were easily tracked in terms of impact.

The committee were pleased to see the appointment of additional Education Welfare Officers (EWO) and queried their impact on reducing absenteeism and what media techniques were used to highlight issues.

- The Assistant Head of Education stated that the additional EWOs meant that schools had more support in this area. The Head of Education informed committee that they could provide more bespoke support with an individual family which took time and often involved signposting to other areas of support. The Head of Education assured committee that they were beginning to see the impact of this and schools were making good progress in beginning to reduce levels of persistent absenteeism.
- The Head of Education informed committee that an attendance campaign was designed which aimed to reassure parents that schools were a safe environment for pupils to attend following the pandemic. The Head of Education noted that secondary schools still had a number of challenges and following guidance from Welsh Government, a campaign would start during the Summer break informing parents that schools would be able to issue a fixed penalty notice for pupil non-attendance.

A committee Member requested an update on the appointment of an Educational Psychologist.

- The Head of Education explained that there was a national shortage of EPs as there were not enough University courses across Wales to meet workforce demands and whilst they had made one appointment, the other was still vacant. The Head of Education noted that they would like to employ a Welsh speaking EP, but we would continue to advertise and locum EPs would be sourced where possible.

A committee member requested why progress on the Accessibility Strategy was a red measure

- The Head of Education explained that progress was slower than anticipated and this was linked to school accessibility issue such as some work being unable to proceed until the schools were closed for holidays. The Head of Education noted that some works were awaiting return of tenders and we worked closely with Norse.
- In response to a question regarding Tredegar Park Primary schools expansion, the Head of Education explained there was continuous investigation into the feasibility but there were ongoing flood prevention issues.
- Councillor Watkins as a Governor declared an interest in this topic.
- In response to a question, the Head of Education explained that whilst there was not continuous Welsh language provision at the Bridge Training Centre, there had been at a specific time when it was required for a pupil.

A committee member queried the risks related to Managed Moves.

- The Head of Education explained that the risks surrounded the distances between schools and noted that a pupil at risk of exclusion could go to a different school in the first instance to see if a fresh start would help. The Head of Education informed committee that as Newport only had 1 Secondary school with Welsh medium learning provision, any move would be outside of the authority if this was a requirement and could be far from ideal for the pupil. The Head of Education noted that parents would also be consulted and some were happy for their child to remain within Newport but the Head of Education stated that they would prefer all systems to be equitable.

Committee members raised various queries regarding school budgets and the Head of Education provided the following responses

- There were currently no schools were classed as being in deficit this financial year. Welsh Government had provided a large amount of grant funding and many schools had a positive balance. There was a system in place for tracking which schools were heading towards a deficit at the end of the year and this, together with ensuring schools had appropriate spending plans in place would avoid this.
- With support from the Local Authority, Caerleon Secondary school had recovered from deficit. This was not due to grant funding but rather from implementing a restructure together with working with officers to manage its budget and this had led to the school being in a healthy financial position.
- No nursery schools were in danger of deficit and any issues with outstanding repairs could be fed back to the Norse Board.
- A 5% surplus would be seen as a healthy surplus to have and there would be no penalties imposed on Local Authorities for having large surpluses this year due to the large grants received due to the Covid crisis.

A committee member queried why the performance measure for the percentage of pupils not in education, employment or training (NEET) only focussed on 16-18 year olds.

- The Head of Education confirmed that all other accountability measures had been suspended by Welsh Government presently whilst the new curriculum was being introduced.
- The committee member asked that in future where this was the case, that an explanation be added for clarity.

A committee member asked why the figure had stagnated at 2.6% and was currently in red.

- The Head of Education noted that in 2020/21 Newport was ranked the 6<sup>th</sup> in Wales for this particular indicator. The Head of Education informed committee that they had aspirations to help all 16-18 year olds and so had set a lower target which they had unfortunately not been able to meet. The Head of Education noted that they had been talking to this group of young people and asked them what was needed. The Head of Education informed committee that they had identified a lack of knowledge around training opportunities and as a result, Moving On Days were implemented where training providers could meet with young people and explore opportunities available. The Head of Education informed committee that evening sessions had been introduced so parents could attend and these had received positive feedback. The Head of Education expressed that they hoped these measures would help improve figures for this performance indicator going forward.

The committee thanked the officers and Cabinet Member for their presentation and attendance.

## **5. Conclusions of Committee Reports**

- The committee felt that the report was comprehensive and informative.
- The committee noted that the graph and table on page 6 of the report could be adjusted for clarity.
- The committee suggested that information regarding imperfect “complete” actions could be adjusted to reflect the situation more accurately.
- The committee suggested an explanation be provided within the report where performance measures were missing in future.
- The committee asked that the partnership work with Newport Norse be investigated and an update be provided regarding Norse’s support of repairs and upgrades.
- The committee suggested that actions related to Estyn recommendations be summarised together for clarity.

## **6. Scrutiny Adviser Reports (Pages 55 - 60)**

The committee were informed that the next meeting would be on the 26<sup>th</sup> July 2022 at 10am.

### **7. Date of Next Meeting:**

**26<sup>th</sup> July 2022 at 10am.**