



JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON MONDAY 9TH DECEMBER 2024 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor D. Cushing – Chair

Councillors:

Councillors: M. Adams, E. M. Aldworth, A. Angel, C. Bissex-Foster, C. Bishop, M. Chacon-Dawson, R. Chapman, C. Cuss, D. T. Davies, E. Davies, G. Ead, C. Elsbury, G. Enright, K. Etheridge, M. Evans, A. Farina-Childs, C. Forehead, A. Gair, C. Gordon, T. Heron, A. Hussey, D. Ingram-Jones, G. Johnston, J. Jones, A. Leonard, C. Mann, A. McConnell, B. Miles (Vice Chair), B. Owen, M. Powell, H. Pritchard, J. Rao, J. Reed, J. Roberts, R. Saralis, J. Simmonds, C. Thomas, A. Whitcombe, L.G. Whittle, S. Williams, W. Williams, J. Winslade, and K. Woodland.

Cabinet Members:

Cabinet Members in attendance: S. Morgan (Leader of Council), C. Andrews (Education and Communities), S. Cook (Housing), E. Forehead (Social Care), N. George (Corporate Services, Property and Highways), P. Leonard (Planning and Public Protection), C. Morgan (Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces), E. Stenner (Finance and Performance), and J. Pritchard (Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change).

Together with:

Officers: R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), P. Warren (Strategic Lead for School Improvement), J. Southcombe (Finance Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), A. Jones (Committee Services Officer) and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance: Co-opted Members D. Bezzina and K. Cole, C. Parry (Headteacher, Lewis School, Pengam) and L. Doel (National Secretary for NAHT Cymru).

RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live-streamed and recorded and would be made available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#). Members were advised that voting on decisions would be taken via Microsoft Forms.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. Broughton-Pettit, P. Cook, N. Dix, J. Fussell, D. Harse, M. James, L. Jeremiah, S. Kent, T. Parry, L. Phipps, D. Preece, J. A. Pritchard, J. Scriven, S. Skivens, J. Taylor, and C. Wright.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3. JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 24TH SEPTEMBER 2024.

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 24th September 2024 be approved as a correct record, By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 30 for, 0 against, and 8 abstentions), this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Joint Scrutiny Committee held on 24th September 2024 (minute nos. 1 – 6) be approved as a correct record.

4. JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 28TH OCTOBER 2024.

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 28th October 2024 be approved as a correct record, By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 30 for, 0 against, and 8 abstentions), this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Joint Scrutiny Committee held on 28th October 2024 (minute nos. 1 – 3) be approved as a correct record.

REPORT OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following report.

5. NAHT CYMRU REPORT – FALLING SHORT: THE DEEPENING SCHOOL FUNDING CRISIS IN WALES.

The Leader, Councillor S. Morgan, thanked C. Parry (Headteacher, Lewis School, Pengam) and L. Doel (National Secretary for NAHT Cymru) for their attendance at the meeting and introduced the report which updated Scrutiny on the content of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) Cymru recent study entitled 'Falling Short: The Deepening School Funding Crisis in Wales'. The report published in September 2024 recognised the significant funding crisis being felt across the educational landscape in Wales and the potential impact on the quality and accessibility of education.

Members were informed that there is currently significant pressure on public finances across the UK. Central Government, Local Government, Health and other sectors are all facing challenges where the costs of delivering services have accelerated far beyond the level of funding available to the sector. The impact of these challenges upon Caerphilly County Borough Council has seen the Council facing the need to make £65m of savings during the period 2024/25 through to 2026/27 essentially just to stand still. Having identified a range of permanent savings as part of the 2024/25 budget setting process

totalling circa £20m, the remaining balance of £45m must be found over the next two years. This equates to around 10% of the Council's overall net revenue budget. With 78% of the Council's budget spent on Education, Social Services, Waste and Infrastructure, the Council is facing some extremely difficult choices.

Discussion followed regarding the different types of education, vocational and aspirational, and the effects that funding cuts would have on these provisions.

A Member referred to the figures regarding pupil mental health in the report and queried whether these were medically proven. Members were advised that the information was provided by Headteachers' analysis and formed part of the ongoing challenges and concerns faced by Headteachers. Members were also advised that a school-based counselling service is available for pupils and referrals are checked monthly. Discussion followed on the effects on school finances with regards to an increased level of pupils' mental health issues and Members were advised that pupils mental health can be triggered in schools, including bereavement and family issues, and therefore the necessary support staff and interventions need to be available. Members were also advised of additional responsibilities taken on by Headteachers, throughout the school, in order to save costs. Discussion followed in relation to emergency funding available from the Health Service in particular circumstances.

A Member queried whether a Parent Partnership was in place for ALN pupils, and the costs to the Authority, and also sought to clarify how many schools in the County Borough had the capacity for shared Headteachers and the number already doing so. Members were advised that SNAP Cymru is available to support parents across the 5 Local Authorities in the region, with positive feedback received from parents. Members were informed that approximately a third of all schools are collaborating with shared strong leadership and expertise, which was also acknowledged in the recent Estyn report. It was also noted that NAHT do not support Headteachers operating over multiple school sites.

A Member queried how financial pressures on schools were affected by ALN. Members were advised that significant challenges are caused by ALN, and issues can develop throughout the pupils' time at the school, which may not have been budgeted for, together with the effects on teaching staff.

A Member sought clarification on the Education department and NAHT working together for the best interest of the pupils when dealing with challenging budget pressures, and whether Members could be assured that this working relationship would continue going forward. Members were advised that meetings had taken place across the country, together with the Budget Forum meetings, and would continue with additional support from the Local Authority and Team around the school. Members were also advised of additional sessions that had taken place with Headteachers, together with Mobilising Team Caerphilly, virtual meetings planned going forward, annual surveys for Headteachers to provide feedback and self-evaluation. Members were also informed of NAHT concerns regarding WG funding to LAs, and future campaigns for pay rises.

A Member clarified that the Trade Union could not advise a Headteacher on balancing the budget but would provide support in ensuring a safe school environment.

Discussion followed regarding the format of collaborations and expected outcomes, and the sharing of best practice between management across directorates. Members were also referred to EOTAS pupils and the improvement of provisions to these learners going forward. Reference was also made to the provision of Welsh education facilities for ALN pupils and Members were advised that there are Welsh speaking staff and officers dealing with ALN, together with the link advisory teacher, there is a team of staff who deal with ALN issues. Members were also referred to the ALN provision at Cwm Rhymini and Cwm Gwyddon Schools.

A Member noted that the report was concerning with regards to funding however the Council was working closely with schools and queried whether there were alternative cuts that could be made instead of the teaching staff, such as maintenance and non-essential staff. Members were advised that some schools had received fundraising from parents for classroom equipment due to budget cuts and noted the impact on the mental health of staff and pupils.

A Member queried the level of support in place for the mental health and well-being of teaching and non-teaching staff. Members were advised that all staff are supported throughout schools as their mental health can also affect the pupils' mental health and well-being and referred to 'education support' which provides a contact helpline 24 hours a day, together with staff support groups set up within schools. Members were also advised of the educational psychology service, provided by the local authority and individual coaching programmes available for headteachers.

A Member noted concerns on the use of supply cover supervisors, to reduce costs, instead of qualified teachers and queried the impact on the pupils' education. Members were advised that this was an aim going forward, together with qualified teachers being able to teach in their chosen subject area. It was also noted that some FE teachers are not currently being paid at the correct rate for their level of qualification.

A Member referred to volunteering within schools, assisting with reading etc, and queried whether more volunteering could be encouraged within schools. Members were advised that whilst volunteers were a valuable asset to the schools they attended, specialist qualified teachers were still needed to maintain the required level of education in the schools.

A Member queried how many schools in Caerphilly are currently in a deficit budget and the total figure for these schools and projected for the next 2 years going forward. Members were advised that collectively school balances were in a surplus position of £5.3m at the end of financial year 2023/24. Members were advised that this collective surplus position included 21 schools (out of 86) that were in a deficit position at the end of financial year 2023/24. Members were advised that the most recent financial projections indicate a collective deficit balances position for our schools of £1.6m by the end of the current financial year, this position will be updated as we move through the year. Members were advised that projected school balances figures over the next 3 years are discussed at the School Budget Forum.

A Member requested assurance that no costs for educational resources and basic equipment within schools would be passed on to pupils. Members were advised that this was not currently done within Caerphilly schools, although it was in some schools across Wales, however this was not supported by NAHT.

A Member noted their concerns for a Headteacher in their ward and was advised to make them aware of the relevant support available to them and to the school.

A Member requested that an all-party delegation from CCBC should request to meet with Education Ministers in Welsh Government to discuss issues concerning funding, well-being, additional support, coaching and deficit budgets. Discussion followed as to whether this matter should be discussed by the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee and the different methods by which this request could be made to the WG. Members were advised that a letter to the relevant Minister would suffice in the first instance, to be approved and signed by the Chair. The Member was also invited to contact the Leader, Councillor S. Morgan, together with the leader of the Plaid Cymru group, to arrange a visit to the Senedd to request a meeting with the Education Minister. A Member also suggested attendance by the NAHT representatives. Following further discussion, it was

confirmed that the Leader would refer details of this meeting and the report to the WLGA.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report and asked questions and provided comments that they considered appropriate to representatives of the NAHT Cymru and Council Officers.

The meeting closed at 6.42 p.m.

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd January 2025.

CHAIR