



EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY 22ND APRIL 2025 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor D. Cushing - Chair

Councillors:

E.M. Aldworth, C. Bishop, M. Chacon-Dawson, P. Cook, C. Gordon, T. Heron, B. Miles (Vice Chair), T. Parry, J. Roberts, J. Simmonds, S. Skivens, J. Winslade, and K. Woodland.

Cabinet Members:

Councillors C. Andrews (Education and Communities), and E. Forehead (Social Care).

Together with:

Officers: R. Edmunds (Chief Executive), K. Cole (Director of Education), G. Jenkins (Director of Children's Services), J. Williams (Director of Adult Services), A. West (Place Shaping and Sustainable Communities for Learning Service Manager), S. Richards (Director of Customer, Economy and Regeneration Services), P. Warren (Strategic Lead for School Improvement), S. Ellis (Lead for Inclusion and ALN), K. Peters (Corporate Policy Manager), H. Pells (Policy Officer), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), A. Jones (Committee Services Officer) and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance:

Councillors J. Pritchard and J.A. Pritchard.

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live streamed, and a recording would be made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items. [Click Here To View](#).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. Broughton-Pettit, M. Evans, A. Farina-Childs, A. Leonard, and co-opted Members D. Bezzina (Parent Governor Representative), K. Stacey (Parent Governor Representative), P. Ireland (NEU), K. Cole (NEU), and D. Davies (Caerphilly Governors Association).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 20TH FEBRUARY 2025.

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 20th February 2025, be approved as a correct record. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 8 For, 0 Against, and 5 Abstentions), this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 20th February 2025 (minute nos. 1 – 8) be approved as a correct record.

4. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 11TH MARCH 2025.

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 11th March 2025, be approved as a correct record. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 11 For, 0 Against, and 2 Abstentions), this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 11th March 2025 (minute nos. 1 – 9) be approved as a correct record.

5. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CALL-IN PROCEDURE.

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

6. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the report which informed the Committee of the Forward Work Programme planned for the period April 2025 to March 2026.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme, be published on the Councils' website.

7. NOTICE OF MOTION – FAST TRACK GWENT.

Councillor E. Forehead (Cabinet Member for Social Care) introduced the report which asked Members to consider the Notice of Motion as set out in paragraph 5.1 of the report, and to make an appropriate recommendation in accordance with Rule 11(3) of the Constitution.

A Notice of Motion had been received from Councillor E. Forehead and Councillor C. Andrews and was supported by Councillors: A. Hussey, A. McConnell, T. Heron, M. Adams, L. Whittle, J. Simmonds, M. Chacon-Dawson, G. Johnston, K. Woodland, and S. Morgan.

A Member queried the financial implications of the Notice of Motion, if supported. Members were advised that there would be no financial implications for CCBC, as the funding would come from Fast Track Cymru, who receive funding from the Welsh Government. Members were informed that the only implications for CCBC would include staff time and resources.

Following consideration of the Notice of Motion as outlined in paragraph 5.1, it was moved and seconded that the Notice of Motion be supported. By way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Notice of Motion as outlined in paragraph 5.1 of the Officers report, be supported.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following report.

8. MEALS DIRECT.

Councillor E. Forehead (Cabinet Member for Social Care) introduced the report which requested the views of the Scrutiny Committee on the removal of the lower subsidised rate of £4.18 per day currently applied to 79% of recipients of the Meals Direct service, prior to the report being presented to Cabinet on 21st May 2025 for a decision. Members were informed that this was the first stage in making the Meals Direct a sustainable service, as previously agreed by Cabinet.

A Member queried the lack of rate comparisons with other Local Authorities within the report. Members were advised that this had been done for the previous financial year and that the average was around £8 per day. Members heard how information was being collated for the current financial year as rates had risen and this would be shared with Members when finalised. The Member also observed that residents in the Torfaen area were paying £6.50 per day and the rate for residents in Rhondda Cynon Taf as of April 2024 was £5.50. Members were informed that these Authorities operated under one rate whilst Caerphilly had two rates, since the amalgamation of Mid Glamorgan and Gwent Councils and that the proposal was now to have just one rate.

A Member had also compared the proposed rate with the private sector and highlighted that Wiltshire Farm Foods charged £3.99 per frozen meal which was cheaper than the proposed single CCBC rate for frozen and fresh meals. Members were advised that the company's overheads were much lower as they did not heat the meals and typically only did one delivery either weekly or fortnightly.

A Member queried how CCBC charges compared with the rates of other Local Authorities based on collated information from the previous financial year. Members were advised that on average the CCBC higher rate was cheaper than the equivalent of other Local Authorities.

A Member sought to establish the differences between the service provided by CCBC compared with the private sector. Members were advised that consultation with families showed that the social contact was valued as much as the meals themselves. Other services available were not 'like for like' and this was one of the reasons that Cabinet had considered options to sustain the current service model.

A Member noted that not all residents would be able to receive frozen meals, with the safety implications of heating up the meals. The Member also noted that the delivery persons from CCBC are trained professionals, providing an excellent service delivering the food and also recognising if there are any issues with the resident at their property.

A Member suggested having one operative rather than two to deliver meals to reduce service costs. Members were advised that the Director of Adult Services had completed one of the rounds herself and that it was not possible to be facilitated by one person, given the geography and number of deliveries, unless customer numbers were significantly reduced.

Following consideration of the information contained in the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal communication, (and in noting there were 9 For, 1 Against and 4 Abstentions), this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that:

The lower subsidy of £4.18 per day currently applied to Meals Direct is removed as of 1st July 2025, and all recipients of the Meals Direct service to pay the higher rate of £6.89 per day, an increase of £2.38 per day.

9. DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIALIST ADDITIONAL LEARNING PROVISION FOR CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS.

Councillor C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education and Communities) introduced the report which sought endorsement from Scrutiny Members on the recommendation to Cabinet to proceed to consultation on the expansion of specialist resource bases (SRBs) for children with additional learning needs across the County Borough.

A Member queried if there was sufficient support staff for Welsh medium provision at Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni and whether thirty extra pupils at Idris Davies School would have too much of an impact on the classes. Members were assured that staff were in situ at Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni and that discussions prior to the proposals had been with schools with surplus places. Members were advised that the Headteacher and governing body at Idris Davies School were confident that they had the capacity to support CCBC with this development.

A Member sought assurances that the proposed new specialist resource bases (SRBs) met the requirements of children with complex needs and Autistic Spectrum Disorders, particularly in terms of staffing, training and resources. Members were provided with details on the comprehensive learning offer that was available to ensure schools met their statutory obligations around ALN. Members heard how this support, which helped to ensure that schools and staff had the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of children, would continue.

The Member also enquired about the criteria that had been used to select schools for the proposed SRBs, and if geographical equity across the County Borough had been considered. Members were advised that discussions had taken place with the existing cohort of schools that had specialist resource bases and with schools with existing surplus places. This process allowed CCBC to map out provision across the Local Authority area.

The Member also highlighted the increase in demand for specialist provision and requested information on the long-term strategy the Council had, beyond the current proposal to future proof ALN capacity. Members were advised that provision was constantly under review and as part of this ongoing process existing trends such as birth rates were considered as part of the planning process. The Member enquired how the Council would measure the effectiveness of the new SRBs in meeting the needs of children and improving outcomes. Members were advised how this was multifaceted and highlighted the support from the School Improvement Service. Members also heard how children with ALN receiving specialist provision had individual development plans which were reviewed on an annual basis as a minimum requirement.

The Member enquired how the Local Authority would ensure that the transition process to SRBs would be smooth and supportive for children and their families. Members were provided with details on the transition between mainstream and specialist provision which was a person-centred approach and would only happen following discussions together with the support of the pupil and their families. Individual need and what was important to the family were key factors.

A Member queried whether many pupils would be moved to new locations as a result of the proposal, noting the additional travel costs and possible disruption caused for the pupils. Members were advised that there would be 8-10 children maximum at each SRB class and reiterated the consultation with families before any decision was reached. Details were also outlined on the support available for transporting children from their home to the SRB provision.

Following consideration of the information contained in the report, and the significant ongoing financial implications, the Committee offered views and comments, and it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal communication, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED to:

Endorse the recommendation to Cabinet to proceed to formal consultation in partnership with each Governing Body in respect of the development of specialist resources base provision across the Borough as need determines.

10. CONNECTING CARE.

Councillor E. Forehead (Cabinet Member for Social Care) introduced the report which advised Members of the need to replace the current Social Services data base – WCCIS. Members were informed that the technical support for the current information case management system used within social services (WCCIS) reaches end of life use in January 2026. The Local Authority has no control over the cessation of this support and is a national (Wales wide) issue. The system will become unsupported and render itself unusable and the data currently contained on WCCIS will need to be migrated across to the new case management system.

A Member queried the length of time that the dual system would be in place during the transition period. Members were advised that the licence would only be renewed for a year (October 2025 to October 2026) and that transition would be completed during that time. Members were also advised that a legacy system would be kept in place for certain records that were required to be kept, including information relating to adoption cases, although it was expected that the new system would be able to accommodate all items going forward.

Members noted the contents of the report, including the risks and mitigations.

11. IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MIDDLE TIER REVIEW.

Councillor C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education and Communities) introduced the report which sought to gain final approval on the future model for school improvement and to update Members on the exit costs and funding to enable the Council to exit the EAS from September 2025. Members were advised that the report builds on the previous report to Scrutiny Committee on 15th October 2024 which was approved.

Members were informed that in July 2023, Welsh Government initiated a review of roles and responsibilities of education partners in Wales and the delivery of school improvement arrangements. This review had subsequently become known as the Middle Tier Review (MTR).

A Member queried if there was currently enough capacity to manage the transition. Members were advised that certain staff members were already working closely with EAS and complimenting its work due to their experience as former headteachers. The work of headteachers as school improvement partners for neighbouring regions was also highlighted. Members were informed that this combined experience in addition to effective governor support ensured there were no concerns around managing the transition. Members also heard that in terms of professional learning the Authority would continue to access the offer from EAS and a national equivalent from the Welsh Government.

The Member also queried whether two years was enough time to put the system in place. It was outlined to Members how the transition for Governor Support Services and School Improvement Partnerships would be completed by September and that the Authority was committed to the existing professional learning offer for a three-year period.

The Member also wished to know the cost of the new system. Members were informed that the Council currently makes a core contribution of around £800,000 and that the proposal offered the opportunity to generate significant savings, as set out in the report. Members also heard how the removal of duplicating roles had the potential to create further savings.

A Member asked about the support available for schools currently accessing Team Around the School (TAS). Members were assured that there would be no change as the Local Authority already hosted the school meetings and would continue to do so.

A Member sought clarification on redundancy costs. Members were provided with details on the cost of leaving EAS which was set out in the legal agreement at the outset of the current arrangement. The Member enquired about the likelihood of a TUPE transfer of staff between EAS and Caerphilly County Borough Council. Members were provided with details on the scope for TUPE which was currently 0.6FTE and also advised that there may be potential for two further EAS employees to transfer following the conclusion of the EAS change management processes. This would, however, be by mutual agreement rather than part of a formal TUPE transfer process. Members were also advised that costs contained within the report had been provided by the company, and also highlighted the potential for future savings and an improved service despite exit costs.

The Chair requested a full breakdown of costs once the exit strategy was finalised. Members were assured that this would happen and outlined how the current information was based on full-time equivalent roles.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 12 For, 1 Against, and 0 Abstentions), this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED to:

Endorse the following Cabinet Recommendations on a proposed new model for school improvement:

- Delegate responsibility to the relevant officers and the Cabinet Member for Education to serve notice to withdraw from EAS in August 2025 with the notice period being two years
- Migrate Governor Support Services from the EAS back in house and deliver directly
- Migrate the School Improvement Partner functions back in house taking back control of the key component of improving schools

- Continue to access a professional learning offer from the partnership of the four Las, albeit with a smaller ask.
- Complement the new EAS professional learning offer with the emerging national professional learning offer from Welsh Government.
- Work with Headteachers to identify further opportunities to support school to school improvement within Caerphilly and to support any other partners who require assistance.

The Chair thanked all for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 6.35 pm.

Approved as a correct record, subject to any amendments agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd June 2025.

CHAIR