

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (LIFELONG LEARNING)

MINUTES of a meeting held at the Y.M.C.A. Hub, Barry on 6th November, 2006.

Present: Councillor C.P. Franks (Chairman); Councillor S.C. Egan (Vice-Chairman); Councillors Mrs. M.E.J. Birch, Ms. R.M. Birch, Mrs. C.V.L. Clay, J. Clifford, E. Hacker, Mrs. V.M. Hartrey, C.L. Osborne, A.G. Powell, Mrs. S.I. Sharpe, Mrs. M.R. Wilkinson and E.T. Williams.

Non-Voting Observers: Mr. G. Beaudette and Mr. T. Cox.

479 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE -

These were received from Councillors F.T. Johnson, Mrs. M. Kelly Owen, B.I. Shaw and W.C. Vaughan, and Mr. G. Roberts (non-voting observer).

480 MINUTES -

RECOMMENDED - T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 9th October, 2006 be signed as an accurate record.

481 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST -

The following Councillors declared the nature of their interest, being governors of schools within the Vale of Glamorgan, it being noted that the Standards Committee on 9th September and 21st October, 2004 and 13th January, 2005 had granted them a general dispensation to vote upon any matters to be considered by the Scrutiny Committee (Lifelong Learning) in relation to matters of a general educational matter in terms of policy, plans, policy frameworks and budgets etc.

Councillors C.P. Franks, S.C. Egan, Mrs. M.E.J. Birch, Ms. R.M. Birch, Mrs. C.V.L. Clay, J. Clifford, E. Hacker, Mrs. V.M. Hartrey, C.L. Osborne, A.G. Powell, Mrs. M.R. Wilkinson and E.T. Williams.

482 A REVIEW TO EVALUATE THE LEVELS OF NURSERY PROVISION IN THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN (CHAIRMAN) -

In attendance for this item:

Mrs. S. Howell, Headteacher, High Street Primary School, Barry
Mr. A. Smith, Headteacher, St. Illtyd's Primary School, Llantwit Major.

Committee considered a desktop review which established the situation in terms of nursery provision within the Vale, and which examined levels of

provision in both nurseries provided by the Vale of Glamorgan Council and those which were privately operated with a view to establishing whether the statutory duty to ensure that sufficient free nursery places existed for every child aged over 3 was being fulfilled.

The review formed part of the Committee's work programme, and focussed upon establishing a clear picture of the current situation in terms of nursery provision within the Vale of Glamorgan. It examined the levels of provision in the nurseries provided by the Council and in those which were privately operated. The review also considered issues around how geographical location impacted upon parents ability to access nursery provision and how it affected demand for services.

The desktop review reflected initial scope objectives to establish what there was available within the Vale in terms of nursery provision, and also tried to identify any issues with current provision arrangements. It involved liaising with Council Officers from the School Improvement Service, Strategic Planning Section, the Children's Information Service and the Early Years Partnership as well as external providers of nursery provision of both Council operated and private providers.

The review found that the Council provided enough places to satisfy the Welsh Assembly Government policy of a part time funded place for every child from the term after their third birthday. These places were primarily provided by Vale run nurseries, or those schools with a nursery unit attached; in some instances, places were allocated through private providers, but only when there was short fall in Council provision within a 2 mile radius of a parent's home address. The review found that Welsh medium provision was available in most nursery settings as part of the curriculum and in some, Welsh was used more extensively, shown by the figures provided by Ysgol Meithrin.

The review found that in terms of cost, the Vale paid roughly in line with what a private operator would charge, being £6.97 per child per session (a session being 2 ½ hours) regardless of the nursery they attended. One of the issues that came out of the review was that some nurseries were operating below full capacity, partly due to factors beyond the Council's control, such as birth rates, and that the focus of services tended to be in the more urban areas with some outreach work, as that was where the need was greatest.

The review also found that the policy and situation of nursery provision in the Vale was not dissimilar to that of other local authorities. For example, both Carmarthenshire and Rhondda Cynon Taff used primarily Council provision with private providers used to fill any extra provision required.

The five recommendations from the report had arisen from issues when speaking with officers and providers.

Mrs. Howell was asked to give her comments on the contents of the review document and described High Street Primary as having a proven ability of dealing with pupils with special needs, and the school provided

- excellent “wrap around” education
- a breakfast club and after-school club

which enabled parents to return to work or full time education. Mrs. Howells asserted that the offer of more full-time nursery places would make a huge long-term difference to the pupils and that the school had the capacity to provide it.

Mr. Smith stated that the position at St. Illtyd’s Primary School was different to that at High Street Primary. St. Illtyd’s was full to capacity with four year olds and had no available space for three year olds.

It was apparent that children who attended the nursery school made better progress, and were more prepared for school, than those who did not attend.

Mr. Smith stated that the Council should try to ensure that every three year old was offered a chance to attend a school nursery.

Individual members of the Committee were offered an opportunity to comment of the contents of the review document, and the following points emerged:

- the information provided in the report was very useful
- the importance that all three and four year olds be provided with a nursery place in a Council run school was emphasised
- if all children started from the same base-level, the above comment would be supported. However, this was not the case and the Council’s aim should be to raise all children’s attainments to a minimum level
- whilst the review’s suggestion that those able to pay for additional placements was supported, concern was expressed that those most in need were usually the least able to afford the costs
- more research on the effects of full-time nursery provision on children most in need was necessary
- consultation on the contents of the report should have been undertaken with social services
- there was no reference to nurseries, including Welsh medium under threat of closure
- no Welsh medium school had been contacted as part of the review process.

Following discussions on the content of the review document and consideration of the issues raised at the meeting, it was

RECOMMENDED -

(1) T H A T the recommendations contained in the review document be agreed in principle, and subject to consideration of a further report (see below), namely:

- information be provided on the Council's website to raise awareness of the free provision which is available to ensure maximum take up of the resources
- review the making of the policy for allocating nursery places to see if it is feasible to make it more flexible so that if there is a genuine case for a child to attend an alternative provider it be seriously considered (this was also in line with the Welsh Assembly Government's directive of increasing parental choice)
- that Scrutiny Committee receive a further report to consider whether it is feasible to review Council policy to enable the nursery providers to offer full-time places and enable parents to pay the difference (if they have the capacity to do so) to satisfy the Welsh Assembly Government's initiative of increasing parental choice
- introduce a child care database that is readily available, that joins up both authority operated facilities and privately run playgroups to enable parents to make an informed choice about the appropriate form of child care
- undertake a feasibility study for introducing transport provision to enable children who live in the rural Vale to have access to services based in other parts of the Vale.

(2) T H A T Committee receive a further report on early years provision in areas of deprivation, and early years provision in the context of Welsh medium nursery education.

(3) T H A T a copy of the report and recommendations of this Committee be referred to Scrutiny Committee (Community Wellbeing and Safety).

483 REVENUE AND CAPITAL MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL, 2006 TO 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2006 (DLD) -

The projected outturn for 2006/07 revenue budget was shown in comparison with the annual budget. The current forecast was for a balanced budget.

The delegated budget relating to schools was expected to balance as any under/overspends was carried forward by schools.

It was currently projected that education service expenditure indicated that expenditure would be in line with the budget. However, the access and inclusion budget would need to absorb unforeseen costs of £135,000 in respect of an out of county placement. It was presently anticipated that additional recoupment income would cover this.

Although the Library Service was projected to outturn on target, there was a potential underspend due to the delay in opening the new library. This would be closely monitored and reported to future meetings.

The current adverse variance on lifelong learning of £67,000 on the profiled budget was expected to increase to £120,000 by year-end. The deficit was due to income generation problems in the training section and job shop extra and running costs of the Heritage Skills Centre. A report to Cabinet would detail the actions to be taken to reduce the projected overspend and ensure that a balanced budget was achieved in future years. The report would also recommend that the anticipated overspend for the current year be funded from within the Directorate.

Committee were also advised of the financial progress on the capital programme as at 30th September, 2006.

It was reported that Cabinet had been requested to increase the Big Lottery Fund PE and Sports Grant budget for 2006/07. One of the schemes to be funded from this grant was a new sports hall at Cadoxton Primary School. Additional grant funding of £27,000 had been approved for the scheme. Works were due for completion in October, 2006.

It was anticipated that the Rhws Primary additional accommodation scheme would not be completed on target. This scheme would include the construction of a new four classroom block to replace the existing demountable accommodation which was in poor condition. Due to the constraints of the site, there were many difficult planning issues. It was hoped that these planning issues would be resolved and it was intended to submit a full planning application within the next month. It was anticipated that subject to planning approval being obtained, work could start on site in early 2007/08. It was estimated that £50,000 would be spent this year and it had been requested that £915,000 be carried forward to future years.

Arising from consideration of the report, it was

RECOMMENDED -

- (1) T H A T the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T a detailed report be brought before a future meeting of the Committee detailing how many schools delegated budgets are in credit/debit.
- (3) T H A T the report to be presented to Cabinet regarding the actions to be taken to address the income generation problems in the training section and job shop extra be also brought before this Committee.