

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 MARCH 2024

Present: Councillor Bridgeman (Chairperson)
Councillors Davies, Hopkins, Melbourne and Moultrie

Bridgid Corr, (Parent Governor Representative), Celeste Lewis
(Parent Governor Representative)

Jesslin Manjesh (Youth Council Representative)

57 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Simmons, Grace Ferguson-Thorne, Patricia Arlotte, Carol Cobert

58 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Hopkins declared a personal interest in Item 4 as he was a Local Authority School Governor at Lakeside Primary School

59 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

60 : PROVISION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS (ALN)

Members were advised that this item would allow them to undertake a pre-decision scrutiny on a report being considered at Cabinet on 21 March 2024, which informs the Cabinet of the responses received following public consultation on proposals to extend and realign additional learning needs provision.

Members were reminded that the School Organisation Programme (SOP) Task and Finish Group considered this item in detail on 12 March 2024 and their comments and observations were set out in paragraphs 16 and 17 of the scrutiny cover report.

The Chairperson welcomed Cllr Sarah Merry (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education); Richard Portas (Programme Director for the School Organisation Programme); Michele Duddridge-Friedl (Operational Manager, School Organisation Programme Strategy); Brett Andrewartha (School Organisation Programme Planning Manager) and Jennie Hughes (Senior Achievement Leader, Inclusion from Education) to the meeting.

Cllr Merry was invited by the Chairperson to make an opening statement. She noted that the Committee was aware of the issues regarding ALN places and the need to meet the increasing demand for specialist resource base places for learners with Emotional Health and Wellbeing Needs and Complex Learning Needs and/Autism. Members were informed that broadly the responses to the consultation had been supportive.

The recommendations in the Cabinet Paper were as follows:

To authorise officers to proceed to publish proposals in accordance with the section 48 of The Schools Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 to:

- establish a new 8 place Specialist Resource Base for emotional health and wellbeing at Baden Powell Primary School from September 2024, within the existing buildings;
- establish an 8 place Specialist Resource Base for emotional health and wellbeing at Fairwater Primary School from September 2024, within the existing buildings. This would replace the existing Wellbeing Class;
- establish a new 16 place Specialist Resource Base for emotional health and wellbeing at Herbert Thompson Primary School from September 2025, within existing buildings or new building;
- establish a 16 place Specialist Resource Base for emotional health and wellbeing at Lakeside Primary School from September 2024, within the existing buildings. This would replace the existing Wellbeing Class;
- establish an 8 place Specialist Resource Base for emotional health and wellbeing at Springwood Primary School from September 2024, within the existing buildings. This would replace the existing Wellbeing Class;
- establish a 20-place Specialist Resource Base for learners with Emotional Health and Wellbeing Needs at Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Plasmawr from September 2024, within the existing buildings;
- establish a 20 place Specialist Resource Base for Autism at Coed Glas Primary School from September 2024, within the existing buildings;
- establish a 20 place Specialist Resource Base for Complex Learning Needs and /or Autism at Greenway Primary School from September 2024, within the existing buildings;
- establish a 20 place Specialist Resource Base for Complex Learning Needs and/or Autism at Severn Primary School from September 2024, within the existing building

The Cabinet report recommended not progressing the proposal to establish an 8 place Specialist Resource Base for emotional health and wellbeing at Ysgol Gymraeg Pwll Coch.

Richard Portas was invited to present the report to the Committee. He advised Members that this was the second paper in the Cabinet cycle, the first paper being on the consultation, the second paper responding to consultation and the third paper to issue a determination following consultation.

He outlined the key comments following the consultation responses. The response from Estyn had been challenged in the Council's response in the Cabinet Paper. Other comments included the impact on schools and how the resources would be managed. There was also a Welsh Medium response around emotional health and wellbeing and capacity in the system.

Members were informed that Pwll Coch Governing Body had reached the decision that they did not want to continue with the emotional health and wellbeing provision already established and the local authority was working with the school to get the transition to another school in due course.

Members were advised that there were site implications also which included taxi drop offs, parking and building related issues. In terms of capital projects the schemes were being funded out of the rolling programme which would be presented to Cabinet in May. It was noted that cost implications had not been presented as the schemes were currently at the middle of the design stage.

Members were invited to ask questions and make comments; the discussion is summarised as follows:

The costs of transport in relation to ALN, which had previously been raised at the February budget meeting and with the increase in teaching places for pupils with SEN and the high number of pupils with SEN, Members asked whether the proportion of SEN pupils in a given cohort was increasing or stable. Officers responded that over the last five years there had been a year on year increase of 0.1% per year. This varied against the different ages. Members were advised that the modelling was based on that percentage going forward and against the changes in pupil population. It was noted that there were high intakes in secondary schools but these would fall by the end of the decade. Intake into primaries was falling but the numbers of learners who required a place was still increasing.

Members requested assurances on any recruitment and retention challenges for SEN Teachers teaching via the Welsh language. Officers responded that there was a good field of candidates available. In addition, the Local Authority worked with schools to set up the Specialist Resource Bases. There were existing pools of staff and the provision of ongoing training and support was made available to staff. Members were advised there was a recognition of a difficulty recruiting generally but that was not seen in a specialist area.

Members asked whether Welsh Government funding for transport was sufficient. Officers responded that any money for funding transport was incorporated in the Delegated Schools Budget and that the most efficient and cost effective way of transporting pupils (whether it be ALN, specific needs transport or other means) was key.

Clarity was sought on the ability to deliver these proposals in the current climate, particularly around school deficit budgets Officers responded that the way Specialist Resource Bases were funded was different. Members were advised that SRBs would receive a component of money. Money for SRBs would not be used to subsidise mainstream education or vice versa other than children accessing facilities and food which would be in the mainstream environment.

Members asked what impact there would be on the service of managing the scale of the development proposed and whether there was capacity to manage this in the way envisioned. Officers responded that some of the schemes were bigger than others such as Herbert

Thompson which was a significant scheme. It was suggested that there may be a way of bringing forward an element of the SRB sooner. Members were reassured that the local authority was versed in delivering schemes of that scale and also the smaller schemes.

Members asked about “future proofing” of proposals to ensure that demand meets capacity. Officers responded that there was a significant shortfall of ALN places in Cardiff. The proposal provided a lot of places. The rolling programme was being brought forwards and would be presented to Cabinet in May and it was anticipated that there would be more strategic conversations around what the programme looked like.

Members noted that Estyn had challenged that the report focussed on physical provision and did not highlight the benefits to the learners and the curriculum. Officers were asked how the impact of the extension of provision would be evaluated in relation to the children it was intended to benefit and their needs addressed. Officers responded that more information could be provided in relation to the educational benefits and how the impact of the provision would be monitored. This information could be included in the next Cabinet Paper if approved. In terms of the current Cabinet Paper as it was so extensive it was not felt appropriate to include this information at this stage.

Members asked, given the concerns regarding Education budgets generally, were officers confident that the capital element and revenue costs could be met. Officers responded that in terms of capital this would be funded from the rolling programme. Officers advised that the next Cabinet Paper in May would include details of funding of those provisions. In terms of the revenue difference it was not significant (children were still in the system whether mainstream or SRB) and the average cost of a specialist place in the Council area was much cheaper than an out of county placement, for example.

Officers added that revenue growth had been planned into the future budget. Members were advised that school budgets as a whole were very stressed at the moment. There were no guarantees that it would not have an impact but it had been planned in and there was a clear need for those children to have access to that level of provision.

Members sought information on what was available to schools in relation to capacity building. Officers responded that schools had some expertise in that area. Members were advised that the Inclusion Service and specialist teams worked very closely with schools to set up provision. There were also forums and initiatives in place to exchange best practice.

Members asked for clarity on mitigating risk around to pupils who did not quite meet the threshold for an IDP and how the council was working to ensure that these young people did not fall through the net. Officers responded that there was a commitment on behalf of the local authority to inclusion first. Members were reassured that a child would never be placed in a specialist provision where the parents wanted mainstream provision. Officers recognised that children have a statutory right for an Individual Learning Plan (IDP) and to work with the local authority if they don't have that provision with rights of appeal. It was recognised that the local authority invested

a great deal in monitoring what was happening in its schools and ensuring that children's needs were being met.

Members sought clarification on what support measures were in place with regards the health and wellbeing of staff required to add this new requirement to an already extremely busy workload. Officers responded that funding for specialist resource bases was delegated to schools. In the first instance the governing body and school leadership team had the responsibility to ensure the health and wellbeing of staff. In addition, support was provided by the local authority in terms of co-ordinating a forum and sharing best practice and making sure there were opportunities for staff to meet and work together to access training.

Members asked for clarity on whether the proposals were fully inclusive for all genders. Officers responded that all of the provisions were for boys and girls and open to all pupils who needed the specialist provision.

Members referred to the Estyn responses to the consultation and in particular the statement that they considered that overall the local authority had not considered any issues such as location, transport or the likely impact of the proposals on learners, their parents and the proposed school. Officers were asked if they would like the opportunity to respond. Officers advised Members that they were surprised with Estyn's response to the proposal and in particular the comment that there was no community impact assessment, which in fact there was. In terms of transport there had been serious consideration of each of the items and the SRBs proposed should improve the transport situation across the city and the pupil would be lower.

Members also commented that Estyn had stated that the paper had not gone into too much detail given the amount of pages and there was also mention that there was not much about the benefits or effects given that some of them were self-evident. Officers responded that they were quite lengthy documents as there had been a long list of information they had been required to provide information on. The authority also had a list of information from liaising with Estyn to provide in consultation and this was consistent with previous ALN proposal consultations which had not drawn the same levels of criticism. The comment was made that if document was a too long it sometimes excluded some people. There were also some misconceptions in terms of the terminology. It was suggested that it would be beneficial for officers to talk to the Estyn team who produced the responses to ascertain their concerns. Officers advised Members that they had supplied the same level of information as previously and if there were any new requirements they would go back and seek clarification from Estyn on what was required.

Members noted the response from RhAG (Appendix 8 to the papers) which referred to parity of provision; capacity building; communication with parents; costs; the need to spur demand in Welsh; WESP; potential need to travel further than the WM School; risk of moving children to a English medium setting; and lack of training in Welsh in the ALN field. Also, the requirement of Welsh medium places to be more geographically spread across the city. Members asked that the understandable concerns be logged and as a strategy to keep in mind.

Members asked if there was sufficient capacity and levels of work from Coed Glas, Severn and Greenway Primaries – given their responses to the consultation.

Officers responded that there was spare capacity at the schools mentioned but what was necessary was to come to an agreement with each school on the most appropriate arrangements. It was envisioned that there would be capital work for some of these schemes to make them viable.

Taxi pick up and drop off considerations were discussed. Members were assured that officers considered planning SPG and guidance and rules around parking for any schools. A discussion always took place with planners around parking for ALN. It was part of the design process that was being worked through.

RESOLVED: That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations captured during the way forward.

61 : SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2025/2026

Members were advised that this item would allow them to undertake a pre-decision scrutiny on a report being considered at Cabinet on 21 March 2024, which informed the Cabinet of responses received following public consultation on the Council's School Admission Arrangements for 2025/26.

Members were reminded that the SOP Task and Finish Group considered this item in detail on 12 March 2024 and their comments and observations were set out in paragraph 10 and 11 of the scrutiny cover report.

The Cabinet Member made an opening statement followed by an introduction to the report by Richard Portas.

Cllr Merry made an opening statement in which she stated that the Council had to review its Admissions Policy annually. During this process views were sought from headteachers, governing bodies, church representatives and neighbouring education authorities. There was also close liaison with the Admissions Forum. The policy which had been out to consultation included references to published admission numbers and the criteria considered when schools oversubscribed.

Members were advised that some of the changes this year included replacing a section in admissions on children with SEN, ALN and IDP, clarification on changing school during the academic year and clarification of documents in relation to a child's change of address.

Members were informed that the changes were relatively minor. One of the consultation responses received included a request to examine changes to catchment areas in a specific area. The response being that this would be looked at in due course.

Members were invited to ask questions and make comments; the discussion is summarised as follows:

The Chairperson asked questions around school choices and children going through a transition process, which could give a strong impression that this school was the one the pupil will be attending at Year 7. Officers responded that there was information on the Council's website every year regarding the allocation of school

places, a school admissions booklet and a high-profile social media campaign and other campaigns to advise parents on the process for asking for places. Parents were advised to apply for more than one school as they were not guaranteed to get a place. The reason being that numbers at schools fluctuated. Cardiff Council was committed to that in language preferred English and Welsh as well. All schools were encouraged to operate transition activities to prepare children for the journey into high school. Ultimately that life milestone was going to happen as a child was going to transfer from year 6 primary to year 7 secondary. Activities involved preparing for a larger school, transition, different behaviours, different forms of support, different facilities which were all relevant to all high school transitions. There was no guarantee that children transitioned with others to the same high school.

Members sought further clarity around any requests for out of chronological age requests from parents. Officers responded that the Council or the School could apply an offset but if the parents wished to apply for a place outside of the chronological age group of their child they would apply to the Council or could offer an alternative year group. Consultation between the school and the local authority would take place in such a case, along with the engagement of the Education Psychologists.

Members asked for clarification on the criteria for “compelling medical grounds”, especially the use of a GP’s letter. Officers responded that parents could ask a GP to send a letter containing details of ‘compelling medical grounds’ and make a statement on their behalf. The letter would need to state what the needs were and describe how a specific school could meet those needs. However, if an applicant was to submit a letter that said very similar things as from a GP but did not meet the criteria an Appeal Panel could decide on whether the child should be admitted or not.

Members asked whether any suggested amendments made during consultation had not been included in the redraft. Officers responded that a review of Cardiff Council’s admissions policy had taken place a couple of years ago which looked at different authorities in Wales and UK and the type of oversubscription criteria. Members were advised the report was available online. In terms of people having more significant issues or more bold suggestions these were considered as part of that review. It had been found that Cardiff’s admissions policy was sound.

Members asked whether declining birth rates positively impacted school admissions. Officers responded that certain schools would always be popular than other schools. In reality, Cardiff had many good schools and it was not possible to predetermine or predict what parents would want or feel was of significant importance to them. If there was a significant surplus (and there was a growing surplus in Reception classes in both Welsh Medium and English Medium) there would still be schools that were oversubscribed. It was not just a catchment related issues the rationale for choosing schools varied according to the area and the individual.

Members asked for clarity on the impact of under subscribed classes/schools. Members were informed that there was a constant challenge where the birth rate was cyclical in nature. Members were advised that at the moment numbers were falling in primary schools, but it was still necessary to accommodate the large numbers of pupils in secondary schools with the knowledge that the numbers would start to dip again. A large part of the school budget was specific to the numbers on the roll and with less pupils the lower the school budget was. At a certain point it became a challenge to offer the same number of facilities to a school.

Members sought clarity on catchment boundary changes (Ysgol Groes Wen as the example). Officers responded that any changes regarding consultation on boundaries created a mixed reaction. When provision was expanded or a new school was provided a period of time was allowed to understand the demand arose in terms of informing the boundary.

RESOLVED: That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations captured during the way forward.

62 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None.

63 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next Committee meeting is Tuesday 16 April 2024.

The meeting terminated at 6.45 pm