

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

**REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE EDUCATION AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**SUBJECT: EDUCATION AND LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 22ND JUNE, 2021**

**REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER**

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**PRESENT: COUNCILLOR H. TROLLOPE (CHAIR)**

Councillors J. Holt (Vice-Chair)  
M. Cook  
M. Day  
L. Elias  
S. Healy  
J. Hill  
J. C. Morgan  
T. Smith  
B. Summers  
D. Wilkshire  
T. Baxter (Co-opted Member)

**WITH:** Corporate Director of Education  
Head of School Improvement & Inclusion  
Strategic Education Improvement Manager  
Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change  
Service Manager – Young People and Partnerships  
Press & Publicity Officer  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

**Aneurin Leisure Trust**

Phil Sykes, Director of Operations

**Representative of EAS**

Hayley Davies-Edwards, Principal Challenge Advisor

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<p><b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from:-</p> <p>Councillor Derrick Bevan Councillor Clive Meredith</p> <p>Service Manager Inclusion</p>	
No. 3	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>Councillor Stewart Healy declared an interest in item 10 - Aneurin Leisure Trust Performance and Monitoring Report (April 2020 – March 2021).</p>	
No. 4	<p><b><u>TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS</u></b></p> <p>The Committee AGREED that future meetings be held on a Tuesday at 10.00 a.m.</p>	
No. 5	<p><b><u>SPECIAL EDUCATION &amp; LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Special Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 1st April, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 6	<p><b><u>EDUCATION &amp; LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Education &amp; Learning Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 20th April, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	

No. 7

**ACTION SHEET - 20TH APRIL 2021**

The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 20th April, 2021 was submitted, whereupon:-

**Grants Awarded to Education Directorate**

A Member enquired why the amount of funding received for Tredegar Comprehensive School was nearly double the funding received for Brynmawr Foundation School and Abertillery Learning Community. The Corporate Director of Education said he would look into the variances and report back to the Committee.

In response to a Member's question regarding how PDG Challenge Advisors would interact and challenge Headteachers, the Corporate Director of Education explained that the Challenge Advisors would work closely with the schools to make sure that there was appropriate use of this funding across the schools and ensure that the resource was used effectively to support those learners who were targeted, in line with the grant criteria.

A Member referred to the differences shown in the PDG amounts, these grants were based on the number of free school meal pupils within schools and felt that an item could be put forward on the interventions in different schools and how it was helping free school meal pupils progress. The Member referred to the percentage of free school meals in Blaenau Gwent and enquired if this could be looked at, as he felt that not all free school meal children were having what they were entitled to and this affected grants going into schools. He felt that information regarding free school meal entitlement was difficult to find on the Blaenau Gwent website and the link for applications should be more prominent. He also raised concerns that free school meal assessments were now carried out every 3 years.

The Corporate Director of Education said that in relation to the situation around free school meals and the way that is assessed within schools, a lot of work had been carried out during the pandemic which had resulted in a significant increase associated with eligibility around free school meals. The latest position was that in the region of 1,700 children were now entitled to free school meals and the situation was being closely monitored. The Director

advised Members that there was probably a 30 to 40% increase in terms of families and children entitled to free school meals due to the impact associated with COVID around the socio-economic status of the area. In relation to the Member's first point, one of the briefing notes outlined some of the areas for potential spend on the Pupil Development Grants so that Members were appraised of the way that resource could be used to support learners both from an FSM and CLA perspective across the school estate. The Director would provide anonymised information regarding this matter to Members and also ensure that the link for applications for FSM was made more prominent on the website.

In response to a Member's question regarding what percentage of families were claiming FSM, the Director reported that the percentage was in the region of 30% but stressed it was a fluid situation and subject to change. The Member commented it was important to engage with those families not claiming their entitlement as this was money that the families, the schools and the Education service was losing. The Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change said they were working closely with the schools in order to get the message out to parents and liaising with schools when new eligibility came online, they worked closely with both the Benefits and Performance sections and held discussions with schools who in turn picked up the discussions with parents around ensuring they take up their entitlement to apply for FSM. Regular messages around the eFSM application rounds were circulated via the schools directly, via their parent communication channels, the team also picked up a significant number of calls. She advised there was a lot of communication, information and plans in place to support those parents and to look to engage newly eligible families.

A Member commented that with so much support in place why families were not claiming their entitlement to FSM, and enquired if it was due to the perceived stigma attached to FSM. The Director of Education said this could be an issue, however, there were services in place to try to address this issue such as the Catering service who work closely with schools around cashless catering so that the learner was not identified as being a free school meal pupil. There were also direct payments to families so there was no way of identifying directly those families that were receiving the entitlement.

With regard to direct payments a Member enquired if checks were

made that families receiving direct payments were actually paying for free school meals for their children. The Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change said that the eligibility was managed in partnership with the Benefits Section, then working with schools to ensure that those pupils were accessing free school meals. She advised that schools do provide additional support as do Catering when there were financial issues for families.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the action sheet be noted.

**No. 8**

**PROPOSED SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2021-22**

Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair advised that this was a fluid document and could be subject to change.

A Member commented that the report on Section 106 Agreements was an information item and felt that this should be an agenda item for Committee so that Members gain a better understanding of the benefits of Section 106 Agreements, how the money was utilised and how they link with Education, Planning and Regeneration Directorates.

The Chair proposed that the report on Section 106 Agreements be withdrawn from the information pack and be presented to a future meeting of the Committee as an Agenda item.

This course of action was AGREED.

A Member enquired if there were any reports on the Forward Work Programme regarding the large turnover of Headteachers in Blaenau Gwent and also home schooling as this impacted on pupil attendance. The Corporate Director of Education said that as part the Forward Work Programme there were reports on both school pupil attendance and exclusions that would feature as part of the Inclusion and Improving Schools reports, there would also be updates in terms of where we are with leadership, potential changes and recruitment in those schools that are a cause for concern.

The Member referred to the EAS and enquired regarding value for money. The Corporate Director of Education said there was a good working relationship with the EAS who worked closely with the School Improvement and Inclusion team. A report had been presented to Committee previously that highlighted value for money, which was based upon two key variables i.e. whether performance was increasing and standards improving and if that was being done with less resources. The Director felt that both the Authority and the EAS were improving standards with reducing budgets during the period of public sector austerity.

The EAS Principal Challenge Advisor reiterated the Director's comments and added that she was excited to be working with the new Education Directorate and Leadership team in Blaenau Gwent. She reassured Members that the partnership, which was how the Welsh Government saw the relationship moving forward, was healthy and strong. They held regular meetings and had excellent opportunities to look at the roles the Local Authority and the EAS played to ensure that the support for schools was tailored in the right way.

The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme 2021-22 be approved; and

FURTHER AGREED that the information item on Section 106 Agreements be presented to the Committee as an Agenda item for consideration.

**No. 9**

**EDUCATION DIRECTORATE – RECOVERY AND RENEWAL PLAN**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion and the Service Manager Education Transformation and Business Change which was presented to provide Members with an opportunity to scrutinise the Education Directorate's identified priorities for recovery and renewal, as part of the response to the COVID-19 situation.

The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

A Member referred to pupil behaviour in schools and felt this

should have been referenced in the report. The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion said that learner's emotional states including their behaviour and the potential impact that could have on other learners was a key priority. The report contained overarching statements of the key areas and these would be broken down into much more detailed plans i.e. learner wellbeing, emotional, behaviour etc.

The Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change reiterated this point and said that this linked into the learner theme and also the school operations and support for schools around behaviour in the form of risk assessments and staffing etc. and felt this was a cross cutting aspect that would feature as part of the detailed action plans around a number of these different impact areas.

A Member commented that it was good to see whole school wellbeing and mental health support being given priority, and also to see support for vulnerable learners and ALN reform feature so prominently, and that parental engagement, which he felt was absolutely crucial was also listed. He felt the plan accurately reflected the Local Authority responding to current and future changes.

With regard to PPE and face masks in schools a Member commented that the Authority needed to be clearer on the guidance as there was uncertainty on wearing face masks in classrooms and corridors. The Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change stressed there was clear guidance that in all secondary schools in classrooms and in communal areas, where two metre social distancing could not be maintained, that pupils wear face coverings and this applied across the school estate. If there were significant issues which were presented and schools feel that under risk assessment that they could manage and put in place additional control measures, then the team could look to review that with the school. There had been significant engagement with primary and secondary schools, special schools and all through schools and that guidance had been clearly relayed and was reinforced at every opportunity. If there were any particular concerns the Member had the officer offered to discuss these outside of the meeting.

A Member referred to the identified key impacts on education on page 55 and said that in relation to safeguarding, voluntary third

sector involvement, preventative health measures and Covid-19 control measures, the report stated there had been little or no engagement and he felt this was inaccurate as there had been a lot of engagement with youngsters and their parents during the pandemic i.e. ensuring free school meals were delivered, schools making sure that youngsters were engaging and enquiring after their wellbeing, making sure they had the right equipment etc. He raised concerns with the narrative in the report and that it did not pick up on the variances between schools, and that the improvements and good work that had taken place in schools had not been referenced in the report i.e. digital technology. He also referred to the curriculum for Wales and felt it was up to schools to progress this and look at how the curriculum fits within their own areas. He felt there was room for improvement within the plan.

The Chair agreed with the Member's comments and added that through personal experience delivering free school meals etc. he felt that community interaction had been strong and working together the community understood what schools were doing.

The Corporate Director of Education agreed with the Chair and Member's comments that the partnership working around Covid had been outstanding on a number of levels. However, in relation to the narrative on safeguarding it mentioned limited access to on-site school support and he explained that this related to occasions where there had been a move to blended learning and on-site support for learners throughout Covid had been limited. With regard to the Recovery and Renewal plan it would not be a one size fits all approach, there would be differentiated approaches based upon the needs of learners right across the school estate and would be a series of bespoke solutions based on schools and the individual learners needs. He added that the focus in the plan was not just about recovery, it was also about renewal and part of that would be learning from experiences in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. Blended learning and the way learners were supported through ICT were a direct result of being in the pandemic situation, which had instigated significant positive digital change across the school estate.

The Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change said it was a very high level impact assessment which was in its infancy and they were still working with schools to support the response. With regard to the key impact - voluntary third sector and charity work and engagement – this was based

around engagement on school sites as opposed to the work around recovery that was undertaken during the course of the last academic session and prior to that. Community support had been invaluable particularly around delivery of free school meals etc. and felt this highlighted where there were gaps from a school community perspective, there was normally a significant level of engagement with various charities and voluntary third sector partners etc., however, they had been unable to go into school sites due to the restrictions around Covid.

For clarification the Chair said that the words 'school based' should be included in the key impact - voluntary third sector and charity work and engagement.

This course of action was AGREED.

Members felt that the overarching report should have included the good work that had been undertaken such as digital improvements etc. The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion reiterated these were high level statements and there would be action plans built around each of these focusing on the way schools move forward as well as the way the Local Authority can support schools and work with the EAS to move forward with all of the areas. She advised that the plan would be based on the needs of each individual school and Headteacher representatives from each of the clusters would also be working on the plans.

The Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change added that they did capture within the impact assessment, areas of notable success and would continue to do this, the learning would inform the development of the plan going forward. She felt that the report reflected the stage at which the impact assessment and planning process were at and the detail was being progressed at this point in time.

In response to a Member's question regarding how the EAS would address the issue of looking at assessing where pupils were at the moment and where they needed to be in readiness to sit their GCSE's, the Principal Challenge Advisor said the Welsh Government had announced that Estyn inspections would not resume until the spring, performance measures had been suspended again and the EAS were seeking as much information as possible regarding the progress of learners. After Easter schools would make some baseline tests to try and look at

progress children had made to see where they are now and where they needed to be and that would happen at individual school level. The EAS would have professional discussions with Headteachers in a very detailed and specialised way, about the systems that were taking place within schools to assure the Headteacher that assessment was accurate for the age and the stage of the child and that the right judgement was made about the child's progress. She advised that the Welsh Government had been out to consultation between January and April with a new working approach on school improvement and accountability systems, which explained and set out, in detail, the role of each tier within the system. The role of schools, within the system, was to ensure that self-evaluation and school development planning was accurate and so there were proposed ways of working based on overarching principles within the consultation document. For scrutiny, this would mean that the EAS were proposing to meet with every school in the autumn term, some in Blaenau Gwent, to trial a new professional dialogue i.e. a school's own self-evaluation accuracy, the systems for self-evaluating and how schools were generating the most important areas for improvement. A key part of that would be the accuracy of tracking and assessment within schools, and Headteachers and the Council could be assured that schools were holding accurate information on children and were able to identify any issues.

With regard to the consultation document the Principal Challenge Advisor said there was a move away from the hard edged data in looking at provision in schools to a more qualitative triangulated range of multi-dimensional data, including children's voice, parents voice and lessons. This was the steer from Welsh Government and the auspice in which the EAS would be working towards in the coming months. She would share the consultation document with Members for their information.

A Member referred to the new ALN Bill due in September and the Service Manager Inclusion leaving the Authority and enquired how this would be managed moving forward. The Corporate Director of Education said that a report had previously been presented to Scrutiny outlining the preparedness for ALN reform and that this report had given Members assurances that the Authority was well prepared for the September implementation. He expressed thanks to the Service Manager Inclusion for all the work he had undertaken in preparing the Authority for ALN reform and also his work around the inclusion agenda. There was now an opportunity

for recruitment, and building on experiences from appointing the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion an approach had been agreed to offer the post on a secondment basis across the school estate. The benefits of this approach would be that it would provide a CPD opportunity for a member of staff and also give the Local Authority the opportunity to see how the member of staff settled into the role. The Director was looking to initiate the recruitment process in the near future to ensure capacity for the move towards implementation from September 2021.

The Member referred to the timing of the secondment as the school would need to replace the successful candidate which could be a Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher for the secondment period and this could take a considerable amount of time. The Director said it may not necessarily be a Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher that applied for the position, it could be for example an Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator or specialist in the Inclusion field. There was no intention to destabilise any school arrangements with this appointment and they would work closely with the schools to ensure there was continuity.

The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion said that with regard to capacity and to be able to support schools, in particular senior leadership, to ensure they had everything in place to meet the needs of the new ALN Bill, Tredegar Comprehensive School had received some additional funding for extra capacity to go out and work specifically with schools in this regard.

A Member raised concerns that with school inspections no longer taking place, how the improvements made to the two schools that were categorised as a cause for concern would be acknowledged moving forward. The Principal Challenge Advisor said categorisation had been suspended for another year and gave assurances that schools would continue to receive the right level of support, the EAS were proposing as a region that they would still have that professional discussion with the Headteachers and the levels of support the school would have for the coming year would be determined in those discussions. The local Authority, the EAS, the Headteachers and senior leaders would all look at the school's needs to ensure that the right number of days were agreed, this could be in the region of 5 days with additional days added if the school needed more support.

In relation to the schools causing concern categorised as red, this

was still a statutory process and the EAS would need to follow this process to ensure that those schools were supported and that their progress was reported to Members and to all stakeholders. However, the colour categorisation would no longer be reported as one of the limits of categorisation was that a school could be improving in the background, but actually it could still be categorised as red without those improvements being recognised by the community. She felt there was now an opportunity for the schools in Blaenau Gwent that were improving to showcase their improvements by working with parents, the Council's Corporate Communications section and local press to get their school improvement information into local forums to keep the community informed. She referred to the literacy festival at Brynmawr Foundation school and said that was exactly the kind of news that needed to be out in the community.

The Corporate Director of Education said that progress was being made particularly with the two schools that were currently in an Estyn category. With regard to communication and the improvements that were being made for both of these schools, Corporate Communications worked closely with these schools to get positive messages out in the community. He referred to the fantastic literacy festival at Brynmawr Foundation school which had received national TV coverage and said that was one strand of the work that Corporate Communications were supporting. He advised that Estyn had recently announced that core inspections were being suspended but Monitoring Visits would continue to take place and that was the opportunity for the Inspectorate to assess the progress that was being made. This would give those schools the opportunity to demonstrate progress and provide encouragement for their respective improvement journeys.

The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion commented that there had been weekly meetings with schools to ensure that as much information as possible was in the local press and also that the literacy festival was shared with all the Headteachers in the last joint Headteachers meeting and all of the schools were able to participate and join in with a number of the activities. She felt this was another way of promoting across the school estate the fantastic work that was going on.

The Strategic Education Improvement Manager said that changing perception can be very challenging and a number of strategies had to be involved and through the work of Corporate Communications

they were working to support the schools to engage better with their parents. She gave an example that Abertillery Learning Community had requested that they facilitate a meeting in relation to launching their school prospectus.

The Chair referred to the recruitment of the Service Manager Inclusion and suggested that the Education Directorate liaise with the Social Services Directorate as this post linked in with the Social Services Directorate. The Corporate Director of Education said there was a good relationship between the Directorates and he was looking to build on this collaborative work e.g. through the Bridging the Gap work on early intervention and prevention.

A Member referred to the two weekly involvement in shaping the Curriculum for Wales on page 75 and enquired how they would ensure that this was implemented in the correct way. The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion said the new curriculum gave schools the freedom to shape the curriculum to meet the needs of their local school communities. They were working closely with the EAS to ensure they had the right training to put in the support for school to school working and to broker that support that different schools would need. This ensured that provision was in place to enable schools to be empowered to develop the curriculum in the way they wanted.

The Principal Challenge Advisor said the EAS had a national programme to deliver on behalf of the Local Authority. The Local Authority, Headteachers, Deputy Headteachers and senior leaders had all been part of the national programme and that programme was now being delivered to middle leaders within Blaenau Gwent. She referred to the professional discussions and the information gained from these discussions such as what are the schools strengths, what are the areas for development etc. and most of that would be delivered via a school to school delivery model whereby one school supported another.

The Member commented that school to school working was working well with schools helping each other. He felt that self-evaluation had made a massive difference in education.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the report, associated documentation and proposed course of action be accepted; and

FURTHER AGREED that the words ‘school based’ be included in the key impact - Voluntary/Third Sector/ Charities work and engagement - Opportunities to engage partners have been restricted significantly due to operational implications associated with COVID-19.

No. 10

**ANEURIN LEISURE TRUST PERFORMANCE AND MONITORING REPORT (APRIL 2020 – MARCH 2021)**

Councillor S. Healy declared an interest in the following item and remained in the meeting.

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education and the Service Manager – Young People and Partnerships which was presented to update Members on the performance of the Aneurin Leisure Trust and to clarify the future performance monitoring arrangements.

The Service Manager Young People and Partnerships spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

The Chair commented on the improved relationship between the Council and the Trust and said this was beneficial to the community. The Director of Operations of the Trust said there had been a team effort all round, Blaenau Gwent Council had openly engaged with the Trust to get a better relationship. He added that the Trust’s staff had done outstandingly well in supporting the Council’s response through the Covid period.

In response to a Member’s question regarding hubs in Libraries, the Director of Operations said they had worked closely on this project from start to finish and he felt there were no disadvantages as local residents could now use the service on their doorstep, it was also good for libraries as it opened up a whole new audience.

The Chair enquired regarding the possibility of leisure centres so that the service could open more than one day a week. The Director of Operations said this could potentially present a problem in relation to staffing. The decision for only opening one day a week was only for the first month, from 21st June until 24th July and this was due to occupancy numbers with social distancing in place, from the 25th July they would move to the new phase and reopen fully.

A Member commented that it was an excellent report and was pleased to note that staff had been redeployed to help with the Covid response and wanted to put on record his thanks that Bedwellty House had been opened as a Covid vaccination centre for the residents of Tredegar as the new hospital was still under construction. He was also pleased to note that the Trust were now accessing grant funding and hoped this would help to bring the facilities up to standard and be successful going forward.

Another Member commented that he felt the Trust was now in a different place from 2-3 years ago and gave credit for the work undertaken in the turning the Trust around. He said that staff morale was much better and the relationship with schools had also improved.

The Corporate Director of Education agreed with the Members comments on the progress that had been made and said he had attended the sport centres recently to look at the recent developments that had taken place within the fitness areas and felt the work undertaken there was cutting edge and the developments places the ALT well for the future. He felt there was professionalism and commitment from staff across the board and expressed his appreciation to the Director of Operations and the Service Manager Young People and Partnerships for building the improved relationship between the Council and the Trust.

The Director of Operations thanked the Corporate Director for his comments and said that the Service Manager was an outstanding link between the Trust and the Council and had been a real help throughout the whole process. He felt that the new alignment with education was working really well and the Trust was very excited about the future.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that Members scrutinised the annual performance and the report's proposals for future reporting arrangements be accepted.

**No. 11**

**IMPROVING SCHOOLS PROGRAMME 2021**

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education, the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion and the Strategic Education Improvement Manager which was presented to provide Members with an overview of those schools that have

been inspected in the period, including those schools that have presented as a cause for concern, their progress and the work delivered or currently underway to continue to support them to improve.

The Corporate Director of Education spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

The Chair enquired regarding the turnaround at the River Centre for students to get back into mainstream schooling. The Corporate Director of Education said the River Centre was a 64 place school with 40 turnaround places and 24 permanent places and one of the considerations that needed to be developed and strengthened was the work undertaken around the 40 turnaround places. There were concerns that learners were not being placed back into mainstream settings with the support they needed and this was a consideration linked to the pre-warning notice letter. He added that a Service Agreement was being developed. It would be a tripartite partnership arrangement between the Local Authority, the River Centre and the receiving school and he felt that the school needed to demonstrate more of a collaboration approach with partners in terms of working towards the return of learners back into mainstream settings and this was a priority piece of work to take forward.

A Member commented that it was quite concerning that the River Centre had gone from Amber to Yellow and was now in the position of a warning notice. He referred to para 4.1.2.3 school pupil capacity and admission arrangements for learners and said there had been an on-going issue with administrative paperwork i.e. on some occasions the correct paperwork had not been forwarded to the River Centre for them to be aware of potential problems and also when pupils returned to mainstream settings the paperwork had not followed and enquired if these issues had been addressed.

The Corporate Director of Education felt that the categorisation of the River Centre previously as a Yellow school was a historic reflection on the status of the performance at the school and this categorisation was questionable. The Governing Body had been strengthened with three LA appointed Governors supporting the work of the Governing Body. Admission arrangements featured as part of the pre-warning notice letter and he felt more engagement from the school was needed, they were not currently

engaging in the Additional Learning Needs Panel arrangements. The administrative paperwork was being produced but he felt that the school needed to participate at ALN Panel when learners were being discussed for potential placement within the River Centre and again this was part of the pre-warning notice letter and that needed to be resolved with the school.

The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion had been in discussions with the Headteacher to identify and resolve any ongoing issues and felt it was important that a member of the senior leadership team was involved in all the discussions so they were aware of pupils that were potentially going to be placed at the River Centre. From September, the service was looking to resume dual placements where pupils were placed in the River Centre for four days a week and then back in their original school for one day a week and this would be part of supporting those young people to be able to go back into mainstream schooling.

The Principal Challenge Advisors pointed out that from the perspective of categorisation, the school's admission arrangements were not part of that discussion and so the EAS were unable to make any judgements in relation to admission arrangements as part of the categorisation discussion. There were aspects of leadership of the school during the pandemic, where there was less clarity around the school's provision for learners. She also pointed out that the school was not under an official warning notice but had received a pre-warning notice letter from the Corporate Director of Education. There were now strong plans in place to support the school and move it forward.

The Member again referred to the administrative paperwork as it was important that the correct paperwork was administered with the pupil's records so that the school was aware of potential issues before the pupil attended the school. He felt that this issue needed to be improved in order to help pupils go back into mainstream education.

The Chair said this had been a problem for a number of years and had hoped that it was improving and that meetings were held to discuss children attending the school. He felt it was especially important for out of county placements going to the River Centre so that the school had all the correct information regarding that pupil.

The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion confirmed that meetings were held to discuss the information regarding a child attending the River Centre but unfortunately members of the River Centre staff were not always present and that was an issue they were trying to resolve as that was the opportunity to share the paperwork and discuss any issues. On some occasions the statutory paperwork was provided but the River Centre had requested additional paperwork and this could lead to GDPR issues which they were trying to resolve so that from September there would be no further issues.

The Chair suggested that a further report on the River Centre regarding the numbers of learners that go back into mainstream education be prepared. The Corporate Director of Education said that he would ensure that the Improving School reports that were presented to Committee would contain narrative that outlined the progress that was being made around the 'revolving door' turnaround arrangements at the River Centre.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the report as provided be accepted.