

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: **THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

SUBJECT: **PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 13TH NOVEMBER, 2023**

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

PRESENT: Councillor T. Smith (Chair)

Councillors C. Bainton
D. Bevan
G. Thomas
G. Humphreys

WITH: Interim Corporate Director of Education
Interim Head of School Improvement and Inclusion
Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships
Head of Children's Services
Head of Adult Services
Service Manger Young People & Partnerships
Service Manager Children's Services
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer

AND: Councillor S. Edmunds, Cabinet Member for People & Education (Item No. 6)

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
No. 2	<u>APOLOGIES</u>	

	Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jen Morgan, J.P. and D. Wilkshire.	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.</p>	
No. 4	<p><u>PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The decisions of the People Scrutiny Committee held on 19th September, 2023 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the decisions be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>ACTION SHEET</u></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the meeting held on 19th September, 2023 was submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Action Sheet be noted.</p>	
No. 6	<p><u>CABINET DECISION - INCLUSION AND ALN STRATEGY / POLICIES / GUIDANCE (REVIEW AND AMENDMENTS)</u></p> <p>The Interim Corporate Director of Education said there was a firm commitment to work with Headteachers and Senior Leaders on any new policies when ASOS allowed.</p> <p>At the invitation of the Chair, the Cabinet Member for People & Education said she recognised the importance of Scrutiny and thanked Members for their examination of the report when presented to Committee.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member said she wanted to provide comment on advising against Option 2 when presented, and stressed that it she was in no way trying to undermine the work of Scrutiny, but felt that there was a number of issues surrounding the consultation that had not been communicated to the Scrutiny Committee and led to misunderstanding which would impact on the Education Directorate's ability to perform its statutory duties.</p>	

Firstly, issues of ASOS procedures had, and still was having a detrimental effect on Primary Schools and Headteachers refusing to engage in the consultation that was offered due to ASOS, and the Cabinet Member outlined the level of engagement offered.

Secondly, we needed to make changes to our Inclusion Strategy to ensure it was in line with policy changes coming from Welsh Government. As part of the consultation process, a Teams Channel was established with the policies uploaded and Headteachers asked to email their views rather than meet, in order to provide an opportunity to engage without going against ASOS, however, no responses were received.

Finally, there was a full formal consultation which took place in between April and June, and as a result Statutory Notice was issued and closed on 26th July, 2023 with no objections to the proposals.

The Cabinet Member said further efforts had been made to engage with Headteachers despite continuing ASOS, but she said it was imperative that the statutory responsibility of the Authority, and its responsibility to children with additional needs was not hindered by industrial action.

The Cabinet Member concluded that there was a series of events that could have been communicated better to Scrutiny, which she felt would have resulted in the report being more positively received. She would endeavour to ensure those lines of communication with Scrutiny are better performed and more robust moving forward and hoped that the explanation provided gave Members a better understanding of why she asked Cabinet to support Option 1, against the recommendation of Scrutiny.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for attending and providing an explanation. He also thanked her for the opportunity to attend Cabinet on behalf of the Committee, and said he was pleased that communication would be improved moving forward.

<p>No. 7</p>	<p><u>PROGRESS REPORT: CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL HOMES</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager, Children's Services.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted as an accurate representation of the progress to date in respect of the development of Blaenau Gwent's residential children's homes. (Option 1)</p>	
<p>No. 8</p>	<p><u>UPDATE ON PROGRESS AGAINST ESTYN RECOMMENDATIONS</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director of Education.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted as provided. (Option 2)</p>	
<p>No. 9</p>	<p><u>IMPROVING SCHOOLS PROGRAMME</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director of Education.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted as provided. (Option 2)</p>	
<p>No. 10</p>	<p><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 19TH DECEMBER 2023</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Scrutiny and Democratic Officer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICT Strategy to be moved to February/March meeting. <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the FWP for the 19th December, 2023 be accepted.</p>	