



City and County of Swansea

## Minutes of the **Scrutiny Performance Panel – Education**

Remotely via Teams

Thursday, 9 December 2021 at 4.00 pm

**Present:** Councillor L R Jones (Chair) Presided

**Councillor(s)**

C Anderson  
D W Helliwell  
S M Jones

**Councillor(s)**

A M Day  
B Hopkins  
R V Smith

**Councillor(s)**

S J Gallagher  
L James  
L J Tyler-Lloyd

**Co-opted Member(s)**

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**Co-opted Member(s)**

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**Other Attendees**

Robert Smith

Cabinet Member - Education Improvement, Learning & Skills

**Officer(s)**

Helen Morgan-Rees  
Michelle Roberts

Director of Education  
Scrutiny Officer

**Apologies for Absence**

Councillor(s): No apologies received

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**1 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.**

None

**2 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips**

None

**3 Minutes and Letters**

The Minutes of the 18 November were agreed as a correct record.

The Conveners letter and Cabinet Member response following the Panel meeting on the 21 October were accepted. An update was made relating to a national Estyn report recently published relating to harassment in schools. The Panel heard that the report contains 3 recommendations, the Education Directorate have looked at these and will be progressing them via a working group. The Cabinet Member agreed to update the Panel on progress in due course.

The Panel accepted the Conveners letter and Cabinet Member response following the Panel meeting on the 18 November.

#### **4 Public Questions**

No public questions were received.

#### **5 School Meals - Verbal Update**

The Panel Convener asked the Cabinet Member and Director to update them on the Policy in Swansea in relation to the provision of school meals when a family may be in debit in their school meal account.

The Panel heard that no child in Swansea should go hungry when at school and that there are contingencies for schools put in place if parents do not have monies in the school meal account. The Cabinet Member said that we are here to support families and would encourage any family struggling to pay for school meals to have confidential dialogue with their child's school. He also said that if any Councillors become aware of a situation arising, they can contact him and he will look into it.

#### **6 Performance against identified education priorities (RAG) and Cabinet Member Q&A**

The Panel asked the Cabinet Member and Director to update them on the performance of the Education Directorate against its key objectives.

- The Cabinet Member said that it is a positive set of outcomes especially given the complications caused by the pandemic.
- The Education Scrutiny Performance Panel normally receives an annual performance report from the statutory chief officer for education. During the pandemic externally verified examinations have ceased and Welsh Government no longer collects end of key stage assessments. In addition, the national categorisation of schools is suspended alongside the inspection of schools by the education inspectorate Estyn. As a result, it is difficult to make comparisons and report on schools' performance. The Panel therefore looked at the education performance against its key objectives including the RAG status.
- The Panel heard that the key education and skills objectives are
  - we want Swansea to be one of the best places in the world for children and young people to grow up
  - we want every child and young person in Swansea to achieve, to be healthy, to be resilient and to be safe
  - we want children and young people to attend school regularly because they are more likely to achieve the skills and qualifications that they need to go on into further education, higher education, employment or training
  - we want children and young people to obtain qualifications and skills that are suited to the economic needs of the future and to be able to contribute positively as active local citizens
  - we want to prevent children from becoming disengaged from learning

- as corporate parents of Looked After Children, we want our Looked After Children to succeed in school and to have opportunities for further education, higher education, employment or training
  - we acknowledge that a child or young person with additional learning needs requires timely and effective support to allow them to reach their full potential
  - we want our children and young people to be aware of their global rights and responsibilities so that they can be active and responsible citizens, fulfil their potential and make a difference to their communities
  - we want our children and young people to have good Welsh language skills
- The Panel heard that it has been an unprecedented year in education but can point to several successes some of these include for example the work around Additional Learning Needs Reform agenda ensuring we are responding appropriately to new Act. Also, the ongoing improvements and new schools via the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme.
  - In conclusion, the Panel heard that performance against key objectives is good and for a majority of objectives and reflects a status of suitable progress, addressing the priorities in most aspects. Only minor aspects require further attention. However, performance against a few priorities and a few objectives is weaker due to resource issues, the effects of the pandemic or by other external factors. Importantly, the evaluation of progress is honest. Where there are key blockers to performance, matters are reported as part of the corporate risk management process. Overall, the performance against historic key headline indicators is impossible to report. The key assurances for school management, governance and performance are now mainly achieved through monitoring and evaluation by education officers.

The Panel asked several questions, these are summarised as follows:

- *How are the statements in the document measured, as some are qualitative rather than quantitative? Also, who determines the assessment of the category?* The Panel heard that this is not done in isolation, and it is not one person determining it, we work as a team and a group of senior learners to challenge each other about each part of the RAG status. Also, it is not just a team leader or a head of service determining this, we have conversations with all those involved and ask for feedback.
- *How much of this report is outward looking, as much of what we do depends on our partners?* The Panel heard that on frequent basis we look at understanding how well we are doing not just internally as a Directorate, but more outward facing in terms of receiving more feedback. We have not actually surveyed our head teachers on our performance and, that is something potentially that we should be considering like for example on an objective like teaching and learning. We have surveyed some of our schools in relation to their support needs over that last academic year.  
Outward facing is part of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, so ways of working have been transformed since 2015, it is an expectation that everybody works in partnership and demonstrates integrated ways of working. This report

does not really demonstrate how much work we do with other departments within this Council, but we also work with our partners in terms of for example: ALN.

- *Are we providing the right balance between measuring things and doing things?* The Panel heard that planning is important for us to deliver well on our objectives. We can aspire, but without a clear planning, those aspirations could falter. But Director agreed that right to make sure there is a balance to be struck in terms of getting two embroiled in paperwork when we should be looking on the horizon seeing what else is out there and taking the temperature of how well we're doing.
- *Do we benchmark performance with others?* The Panel heard that this is done if there is comparable data available, in for example areas of corporate performance monitoring like pupil attendance. We compare this with other local authorities, and we know where we rank. Were it is sensible to make comparisons we do, but obviously some of those strategic plans are unique to Swansea so difficult than to compare the level of planning and delivery against that plan because, for example, our additional learning plan in Swansea would look different to another authority. It is bespoke and unique to the needs of Swansea, so we have to evaluate it locally.
- *Why are more children needing Additional Learning Needs support?* The Panel heard that in the last seven years in Swansea Autistic spectrum disorder pupils have increased threefold, so we know that there is a particular demand for specialist places. We would dearly like to educate them in Swansea so by creating more places here and bringing them back from out of county places into Swansea is the aim. So that is a key objective for us in terms of making sure we've got enough places for the learners.
- *In light of the recent publicised tragic child death in England, how are we ensuring the Council is communicating effectively across departments and with its partners including Health?* In education we and school are monitoring to ensure vulnerable and at-risk children are on our radar, making sure information is shared between children service and other relevant agencies. Regular meetings take place between the Director of Education and Head of Services in Child and Family to ensure all relevant issues are looked at. We also work with Health visitors and young people's mental health services. Training is provided, both from a child protection and safeguarding perspective and general training for younger children who are not always able to speak for themselves. Both of those things together allow us to have eyes on children and observe them very carefully. When teachers have concerns, they to share with the designated child protection officers in their school.

## **7 Swansea Skills Partnership Update**

One year ago, the Panel met with members of the Swansea Skills Partnership and today they asked the Cabinet Member and the Director to update them on progress made since that meeting.

The Panel heard that Partneriaeth Sgiliau Abertawe/ Swansea Skills Partnership has made suitable progress during the last year by on building on its early foundations. The success can be summarised as follows:

- Promoting, maintaining and developing Swansea as a Learning City

- Developing a local action plan focussing on digital capacity and guidance for learners in order to inspire learners to consider the types of jobs and opportunities within the Swansea Bay City Deal
- Developed a sustainable digital platform in My Choice to support the learning and earning pathways of pupils in Swansea schools
- Reinforced the collaborative advantage of educators, careers advisers and officers working in partnership
- Identified transition and taster opportunities for Swansea learners to discover opportunities linked to their subjects, interests and ambitions
- Monitored and evaluated progress against strategic priorities and ensured appropriate linkage to the Regional Learning and Skills Partnership skills plan
- Identified and developed strong careers advice including apprenticeships and work-based learning and expanded the focus to include younger
- In partnership with higher and further education providers explored professional learning opportunities and dissemination of good practice
- Ensured apprenticeships and work-based learning align to future skills needs.
- The Panel were particularly pleased to see action taken, and a focus on, Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) by the Partnership. They heard about the progress made in relation to the NEETs strand, hearing that a real traction had developed in the last academic year and that the partnership had blossomed with range of partners working together on this issue.
- The Panel were disappointed that little progress had been made with regard to engaging with and including the business community but heard that the Partnership does have links with the regional Learning Skills Partnership, and they are represented on the board. Each of the partners also have their own links with businesses and that link is fed in through the partnership. Difficulty was express in identifying and get any nominations. The Partnership would welcome any names that we can consider approaching. The Partnership would need to change the terms of reference. A report that went to Cabinet originally did not reference the business community, although there is a clear desire for that to happen.
- The Panel were pleased with how the Partnership is progressing but agreed that we do need more involvement from the business community and this extra element will make it even better.
- *The Panel asked if a survey of partners had taken place this year?* They heard that a survey of partners has not be had this year, but it is an open agenda in terms of any partners wanting to feed into the agenda and contribute to a strategy. That invitation is always there. The Panel said that they would really encourage the Education Directorate to come talk to the partners, in order to gain some indicative feedback, asking then about how they want to see the partnership develop further and how those partners think this could happen.

## **8 Update on progress with the Regional Education Partnership**

The Cabinet Member and Director updated the Panel on progress made in relation to establishing the new regional education partnership and the winding down of ERW. The Panel heard:

- The Legal Agreement for the new regional education partnership known as Partneriaeth has been established with all three local authorities agreeing it at their Cabinet meetings this Autumn.
- This Legal Agreement allows us to have a Joint Committee proper. Partners have met as a shadow joint committee but now we can look forward in the new partnership, with a proper joint committee for the first time and that can start to make decisions.
- We also need to wind down ERW by closing down the accounts and will need a final ERW Joint Committee meeting for that to happen.
- Everything is still in the position of flex in the sense that the existing staff structure is going through change, we have been able to retain some of those staff, others have gone to other jobs, and there may be positions that we will need to fill. The size of the organisation has much reduced, and the staffing reflects that. The staffing structure should be in place by the end of January.
- It will have a scaled down focus as opposed to ERW and will focus on professional learning and leadership development. The School Improvement aspects will set within each local authority.
- The agreement contains a strong governance structure which includes the Scrutiny Councillor Group.
- The Panel asked whether all the original partners were expected to contribute to the winding down of ERW? The Director confirmed that this is the case.

## **9 Work Programme 2021/2022**

The Panel received the Work Programme.

The meeting ended at 5.15 pm

**Chair**



**To:**  
**Councillor Robert Smith**  
**Cabinet Member for Education**  
**Improvement, Learning and Skills**

**BY EMAIL**

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*Dyddiad:*

21 December 2021

**Summary:** This is a letter from the Education Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning and Skills following the meeting of the Panel on 9 December looking at the Education Performance against key objectives, the Swansea Skills Partnership and the Regional Education Partnership.

Dear Cllr Smith,

### **Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 9 December 2021**

We would like to thank you and Helen Morgan Rees for attending our meeting. We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion and to share the views of the Panel.

#### **Harassment in Schools**

Thank you for updating us in relation to the recently published national Estyn report relating to harassment in schools. We heard that the report contains three recommendations and the Education Directorate are considering these and will be progressing them via a working group. You agreed to update the Panel on progress.

#### **School Meals**

We asked you to update us on the policy in Swansea in respect of the provision of school meals when a family is in debit in their school meal account. You told us that no child in Swansea should go hungry when at school and that there are contingencies in place for schools should parents not have monies in the school meal account. You said we are here to support families and would encourage any family struggling to pay for school meals to have a confidential dialogue with their child's school.

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU**

**SWANSEA COUNCIL / CYNGOR ABERTAWE**

**GUILDHALL, SWANSEA, SA1 4PE / NEUADD Y DDINAS, ABERTAWE, SA1 4PE**

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I dderbyn yr wybodaeth hon mewn fformat arall neu yn Gymraeg, cysylltwch â'r person uchod  
To receive this information in alternative format, or in Welsh please contact the above

## **Performance against identified education priorities (RAG)**

You told us that the report gives a positive set of outcomes especially given the complications caused by the pandemic. We understand that the annual performance report from the statutory chief officer for education we normally receive is not available. Also, during the pandemic externally verified examinations have ceased and Welsh Government no longer collects end of key stage assessments. In addition to this, the national categorisation of schools is suspended alongside the inspection of schools by the education inspectorate Estyn. As a result, it is difficult to make comparisons and report on schools' performance. We were therefore pleased to look at the education performance against its key objectives including the RAG status.

We heard that it has been an unprecedented and difficult year in education, but you did point to several successes in that time, including for example the work around the Additional Learning Needs Reform agenda that is ensuring we are responding appropriately to new Act.

Your report concluded that performance against key objectives is good for the majority of objectives and reflects a status of suitable progress, addressing the priorities in most aspects. Only minor aspects require further attention. However, performance against a few priorities and a few objectives is weaker due to resource issues, the effects of the pandemic or by other external factors but importantly, the evaluation of progress is honest. Where there are key blockers to performance, matters are reported as part of the corporate risk management process. Overall, the performance against historic key headline indicators is impossible to report with the key assurances for school management, governance and performance are now mainly achieved through monitoring and evaluation by education officers.

We discussed a number of issues with you, including how the statements in the document are actually measured. Also, who determines the assessment of each category. We heard that this is not done in isolation. However, the Education Directorate work as a team and as a group of senior leaders you challenge each other about each part of the RAG status. Also, it is not just a team leader or a head of service determining this, conversations are had with all those involved and feedback is asked for.

We heard that in the last seven years Swansea Autistic Spectrum Disorder pupils have increased threefold, which indicates a demand for specialist places. We were encouraged to hear that we are creating more places here and bringing pupils back from out of county places into Swansea closer to home. We were pleased to see that making sure there are places for all our learners was a key objective for Swansea.

In light of the recent publicised tragic child death in England, we asked you how you are ensuring that education and schools are communicating effectively with council departments and across its partners including Health? We heard that schools and the education department are continually monitoring to ensure vulnerable and at-risk children are on our radar, making sure information is shared between education, children services and other relevant agencies. Regular meetings take place between the Director of Education and Head of Services in Child and Family to ensure all relevant issues are looked at. We also heard that education and schools work with health visitors and young people's mental health services in relation to this. Training is



provided, both from a child protection and safeguarding perspective and general training relating to younger children who are not always able to speak for themselves. We were reassured to hear that these things allow children to be observed carefully. Also, when teachers have concerns, they share these with the designated child protection officers in their school.

### **Swansea Skills Partnership Update**

We were pleased to hear Partneriaeth Sgiliau Abertawe/ Swansea Skills Partnership has made suitable progress during the last year by building on the early foundations we heard about at our meeting this time last year. You outlined some of those successes including for example: the promoting, maintaining and developing Swansea as a Learning City and developing a local action plan focussing on digital capacity and guidance for learners in order to inspire learners to consider the types of jobs and opportunities within the Swansea Bay City Deal.

We were particularly pleased to hear about action taken and the focus on Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) by the Partnership. You told us about the progress made in relation to this strand, hearing that a real traction had developed in the last academic year and that the partnership had blossomed with a range of partners working together on this issue.

We were disappointed that little progress had been made with regard to engaging with and including the business community on the Partnership. You did tell us that the Partnership does have links with the regional Learning Skills Partnership and they are represented on the board. Also, that each of the partners have their own links with businesses and that link is fed in through the partnership. You said that there have been difficulties in identifying those business who would participate but there is clear desire for this to happen. We were pleased with how the Partnership is progressing but agreed that we do need more involvement from the business community and this extra element would make a big difference because businesses are the job creators.

We would also encourage the Education Directorate to have a conversation with different partners to gain some indicative feedback. We feel it is important to ask them about how they want to see the partnership develop further and how they think this should happen.

### **Regional Education Partnership**

We were pleased to hear that the legal agreement for the new regional education partnership known as Partneriaeth has been established with all three local authorities agreeing it at their individual Cabinet meetings this Autumn.

We heard that the legal agreement will now allow the Partnership to have a Joint Committee that can start to make decisions. We were pleased to hear that the agreement contains a strong governance structure which includes a Scrutiny Councillor Group.

We understand that ERW still needs to be wound down by closing down the accounts so will need a final ERW Joint Committee meeting for that to happen. The Director

confirmed that costs arising from the winding down of ERW will be borne by all original Local Authorities that were members of ERW.

We heard that staffing is still in a position of flux as the existing staff structure is going through change. Some staff have been retained but others have moved on and there are also some positions to fill. The size of the organisation has much reduced, and the staffing reflects that. The staffing structure should be in place by the end of January.

### **Your Response**

We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised in this letter but on this occasion do not require a formal written reply.

Yours sincerely

**COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES**

Convener, Education Scrutiny Performance Panel

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