



City and County of Swansea

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

Committee Room 5, Guildhall, Swansea

Thursday, 13 February 2020 at 4.00 pm

Present: Councillor L R Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

C Anderson
D W Helliwell
J A Raynor

Councillor(s)

A M Day
L James
L J Tyler-Lloyd

Councillor(s)

L S Gibbard
S M Jones

Co-opted Member(s)

D Anderson-Thomas

Co-opted Member(s)

Co-opted Member(s)

Other Attendees

Jennifer Raynor

Cabinet Member - Education Improvement, Learning & Skills

Officer(s)

Michelle Roberts
Brian Roles
Cath Swain

Scrutiny Officer
Head of Education Planning and Resources
Integrated Transport Manager

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): M Durke, S J Gallagher, B Hopkins and M A Langstone

1 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

Cllr Susan Jones and Dave Anderson Thomas gave personal interests for items 5 and 6.

2 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

None

3 Letters and Minutes

The Minutes and Letters were received by the Panel.

4 21st Century Schools Programme Update

The Panel thanked Cllr Raynor, Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning and Skills for providing a report and attending the meeting to discuss

progress with the 21st Century School Programme. The following points were discussed:

- It is a positive update on the programme, things have been moving forward well in this long term approach to improving our school provision and is consistent with the aims of the wellbeing and future generations act.
- Band A nearing completion and this has had a major impact, showing positives in doing it in this planned way.
- Moving to Band B, which is 3 times the size of Band A. Good progress is being made given delivering it with less officer capacity and resources across the Council including legal support. This reduced capacity and resilience is exacerbated by the demands of other capital funding initiatives that the Council is also seeking to deliver in relation to reducing infant class sizes, childcare grant, Flying Start and 21st Century Community Hubs. There is also a lack of resilience and capacity outside the authority, as the number of contractors on the current framework has reduced, and the financial risks for those remaining have increased.
- Fragility in the construction sector and the ability of the council to recruit and retain skills when higher wages offered outside are issues that also affect how quickly we can move forward with projects not just those in education. The council is providing training and support for medium size company's so that they are able to enter and bid in this market alongside those larger organisations who have teams of people trained and employed to make bids. This will help to get more companies into the market and help to employ people locally.
- £61 million pounds has already been drawn down from Welsh Government for Band B. The work is phased and prioritised in the programme as with Band A and includes at present:
 - Gorseinon Primary new build
 - Pupil Referral Unit new build
 - YSS Tan-y-lan Welsh Medium Primary new build
 - YSS Tirdeunaw Welsh Medium Primary new build
 - Extension and remodelling of YG Gwyr Welsh Medium Secondary School to increase capacity by 195 pupils
 - Pre-construction phase works for remodelling, refurbishment and extension of Bishopston Comprehensive School
 - Also heard that work will continue to develop detailed business plans for the remaining capital schemes, as capacity and officer resources allow.
- The panel felt it is an exciting report that shows all these new builds that are coming through.
- The Panel asked what the backlog figure for structural maintenance across schools in Swansea is currently. The panel were informed that there is currently a condition survey being carried out on schools across Swansea and once that is complete a figure will be available. The Panel asked to see the condition survey report and breakdown of structural maintenance figures once they are available.
- What is the percentage intervention rate from welsh government for the new builds was asked? The panel were told that there are two sources of funding (1) the traditional capital and maintenance funding from Welsh Government which gives 65% mainstream, 75% PRU and Special Schools and (2) Mutual Investment Model, which gives 81% but has costs further down the line.

- The Panel wanted to thank all those involved for their hard work in moving these schemes forward so efficiently.

5 Briefing on School Transport

A member of the public raised an issue for the Panel to consider, namely *'You cannot tell or ask a parent to take their child to school in their mobility car. Why has this not been properly looked at as it is a massive concern for some parents. If you start using this as a target, it will be discriminatory and not lawful and create conflict between the Council and parents'*.

The Panel heard that this was mentioned only as part of this overview report as something that could be considered in the future. That no decision had been made on this, that it had not yet been fully worked through yet and if/when it is, legal advice will be sought, and consultation would take place, before any decision would be made.

The Panel thanked Councillor Raynor, Brian Roles and Cath Swain, Integrated Transport Unit Manager for providing the briefing report and attending the meeting. The following issues were discussed:

- There is much better countywide provision for ALN pupils and this has shown savings in the transport budget, as we do not need to transport as many pupils long distances to school.
- Free transport is provided for pupils who live two miles or more from their catchment area primary school or three miles or more from their catchment area secondary school. The distance is measured by the shortest available walking route in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy based upon the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 and associated statutory provision and operational guidance. Free transport is provided from the beginning of the school year in which pupils reach the age of five but is not provided for younger/nursery aged children.
- For children with statements of additional learning needs, the general transport policy described above applies. Free transport is provided for ALN learners where they are placed by the Education Department at a mainstream school other than their local catchment school; at a specialist teaching facility other than at their local school; or in a special school. If a parent chooses to send their child to a different mainstream school, they are then responsible for any transport arrangements and costs.
- The local authority does have discretion to provide free home to school transport according to the nature of the additional learning needs of the pupil. If the Council believe a child's needs can be met at their local mainstream school, but parents choose an alternative mainstream school, the parent is then responsible for any transport arrangements and costs.
 - There were 4,366 pupils in receipt of free home to school transport in mainstream at a cost of £3.627m in 2018/19.
 - 678 ALN pupils receiving free home to school transport at a cost of £4.071m last year
 - There were 151 contracts for mainstream transport and 409 for ALN pupils last year.

- The number of pupils requiring free school meals in Swansea has remained stable. However, the overall cost of transport provision has increased significantly. The panel heard that the medium term financial plan and operational plans reflect the need to identify further significant actions to mitigate the cost pressures and seek to ensure longer-term stability.
- The measure requires the Council when providing Home to School transport to take into account: the age of the child, the nature of the route, any wish the parent may have about educating at school providing religious education, in Welsh, the needs of disabled learners and of looked after children.
- Home to school transport policy is overseen by the Education Department and the Integrated Transport Unit in Place Department are responsible for the operational delivery of the transport needs in accordance with policy.
- Significant savings have been delivered over recent years, through consistently robust management of the service and regular re-tendering of bus and taxi operator contracts and routes, to as far as possible optimise efficiency of delivery. These have been achieved without use of costly external consultancy support.
- The panel asked a question about purchasing and use of council owned vehicles for school transport and particular ALN learning. The panel heard that wherever possible the fullest possible use of the Council's in-house fleet is ensured before contracting with other providers. The panel heard that some of the older fleet is being replaced with vehicles that will be more accessible and therefore more flexible in their use.
- The Highways and Transportation Commissioning Review identified the creation of new/improved walking routes between schools (and communities) as a potential revenue saving in the medium term. This would result from reduced burden on LA to provide statutory transport where a safe walking route is available within the statutory radius. Three routes are proposed offering a potential saving off £280 per year, in Birchgrove, Kingsbridge and Clyne.
- The panel heard that there would always be risk of challenge where the demands and expectations of parents are not met and when changes in provision are proposed.
- There is also a continuing risk of further national policy changes, which could further raise expectations as well as in future potentially limiting the income that can be generated from the sale of surplus seats. The panel recognise that these risks could affect and undermine what we are trying to do.

6 Work Programme 2019/2020

A visit to Waunwen Primary School and to Penyrheol Secondary School be scheduled into the work programme for the new municipal year.

The meeting ended at 5.20 pm



**To/
Councillor Jen Raynor
Cabinet Member for Education
Improvement, Learning and Skills**

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20 February 2020

BY EMAIL

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 13 February 2020. It is about the 21st Century Schools Programme and School Transport.

Dear Councillor Raynor,

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 13 February 2020

At our meeting on the 13 February 2020, we looked at progress with the 21st Century Schools Programme and had a briefing on School Transport. We would like to thank you, Brian Roles, Head of Education Planning and Resources and Cath Swain, Integrated Transport Manager for attending and discussing the issues with us. We looked closely at the detailed reports that you provided and will now reflect on the issues in this letter.

21st Century Schools Programme

We heard that it is a positive update on the programme, that things have been moving forward well in what is a long-term approach to improving school provision and is consistent with the aims of the Wellbeing and Future Generations Act. That Band A is nearing completion and this has had a major impact. That we are now moving to Band B, which is three times the size of Band A. Good progress is being made with £61 million pounds already been drawn down from Welsh Government. The work is phased and prioritised in the programme, as with Band A, and includes at present:

- Gorseinon Primary new build
- Pupil Referral Unit new build
- YSS Tan-y-lan Welsh Medium Primary new build
- YSS Tirdeunaw Welsh Medium Primary new build

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- Extension and remodelling of YG Gwyr Welsh Medium Secondary School to increase capacity by 195 pupils
- Pre-construction phase works for remodelling, refurbishment and extension of Bishopston Comprehensive School
- In addition, work will continue to develop detailed business plans for the remaining capital schemes, as capacity and officer resources allow.

We were told that Swansea is delivering the programme now with less officer capacity and resources across the Council than previously including less education and legal support. There is also a lack of resilience and capacity outside of the Council to deliver on schemes. The number of contractors on the current framework has reduced and the financial risks for those remaining have increased. We also heard this reduced capacity and resilience is exacerbated by the demands of other capital funding initiatives that the Council is also seeking to deliver in relation to reducing infant class sizes, childcare grant, Flying Start and 21st Century Community Hubs.

We recognise there is fragility in the construction sector and understand the difficulty the council can experience in recruiting and retaining skilled people when higher wages are offered elsewhere. We were pleased to hear that the Council is trying to improve the deficit in the number of construction contractors able to bid for work by providing training and support for the medium size companies. These contractors will then be able to enter and bid in this market alongside those larger organisations who have teams of people trained and employed to make bids. This will not only help to get more companies into the market but also help in employing more people locally.

We asked about the current backlog figure for structural maintenance across schools in Swansea and we were informed there is currently a buildings condition survey being carried out on all schools in the area. We understand that the overall maintenance figure will be based upon the results of this condition survey. We would like to see the buildings condition survey report and breakdown of structural maintenance figures once they are available.

We are pleased and excited by the number of schemes that are coming through and would like to thank all those involved for their hard work in moving these projects forward so efficiently.

Briefing on School Transport

We were pleased to hear that there is much better countywide provision for Additional Learning Needs (ALN) pupils and this has borne out showing savings in the transport budget, due to not needing to transport as many pupils long distances to school.

We understand free transport is provided for pupils who live two miles or more from their catchment area primary school or three miles or more from their catchment area secondary school. The distance is measured by the shortest available walking route and this along with ALN transport information is contained within the Council's Home to School Transport Policy which is based upon the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 and associated statutory provision and operational guidance.

We heard that the number of pupils requiring free school transport in Swansea has remained stable. However, the overall cost of transport provision has increased significantly. Hearing the medium term financial plan and operational plans reflect the need to identify further significant actions to mitigate the cost pressures and seek to ensure longer-term stability.

We were interested to hear about the significant savings that have been delivered over recent years, through consistently robust management of the service and regular re-tendering of bus and taxi operator contracts and routes, to as far as possible optimise efficiency of delivery. We were encouraged to hear that the savings have been achieved without use of costly external consultancy support.

We asked a question about purchasing of, and the use of, council owned vehicles for school transport and particularly for ALN learners. We were informed that wherever possible the fullest use of the Council's in-house fleet is considered before contracting with other providers. We were pleased to hear some of the older fleet is being replaced with vehicles that will be more accessible and therefore more flexible in their use, but we noted that would not provide extra capacity.

We pleased to hear about the creation of new/improved walking routes between schools (and communities) but Panel members raised concerns about:

- a) Lighting and safety of walking routes in winter because of our role in safeguarding pupils.
- b) Possible increase in traffic around those schools concerned, as parents may start to drive children to school when school buses are no longer available.
- c) That the estimated potential savings £280,000 from stopping the provision of school buses, in these three areas, has already be taken out of budget.

We welcome your thoughts on any of the issues raised in our letter and on this occasion do not require a formal written response. However, can you please provide the schools building condition survey report and breakdown of structural maintenance figures, once they are available?

Yours sincerely,

COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES

Convener, Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel

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