



**To/
Councillor Jennifer Raynor
Cabinet Member for Education
Improvement, Learning & Skills**

BY EMAIL

cc Cabinet Members

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SPC/2019-20/7

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Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member following the meeting of the Committee on 14 October 2019. It is about Pupil Health & Safety, Climate Change / Biodiversity in Schools, School Condition Surveys, Education Through Regional Working (ERW), School Attendance, NEETS, Skills & Talent City Deal Project, and Learning Opportunities for Adults with Disabilities.

Dear Councillor Raynor,

Cabinet Member Question Session – 14 October

Thank you for attending the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 14 October 2019 and answering questions on your work as Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning & Skills. We also thank the Director of Education, Nick Williams, and the Head of Vulnerable Learner Service, Mark Sheridan, for their support and contributions to the session.

We appreciate you providing a written paper in support of your appearance at October's Committee meeting. The Q & A session gave us an opportunity to explore priorities and achievements in relation to your areas of responsibility.

We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion, and share the views of the Committee, and highlight any outstanding issues / actions for your response. The main issues are summarised below:

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU
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Pupil Health & Safety

A concern that we have previously expressed has been around the risk to pupils' respiratory health from vehicles waiting with engines running in the vicinity of schools, including contracted buses / coaches and taxis. You had agreed last year to ensure that governing bodies would be asked to consider whether or not their wellbeing policies take into account health risks associated with exhaust emissions and request that they agree a strategy for communicating a message to parents. We also felt that schools participating in the Eco-Schools Programme could be encouraged to look at this issue.

We noted from your written paper that:

- the Pollution Control and Private Sector Housing Team currently assess local air quality in accordance with Welsh Government Policy
- there are several monitoring sites around Swansea that have been created in order to quantify the exposure for school children on their way to school
- currently there are no exceedances of the National Air Quality Objectives for Nitrogen Dioxide at school sites being monitored.

You undertook to write to the Committee to confirm where specifically the monitoring of air quality around school sites was taking place.

You urged anyone concerned to pass evidence about the conduct of those driving school transport vehicles, such as vehicle registration numbers, to the Council in order to enforce the contract.

We also discussed concerns about the conduct of parents / carers in private cars picking up children and dangerous parking around schools, putting lives at risk. We recognised this was a matter for the Council's highways and parking enforcement officers, and asked whether there was any co-ordinated effort to target school sites to make them safer. We certainly felt this required a corporate approach and action. You indicated that your understanding was that regular patrols of schools takes place but have asked for more details about where and when such patrols happen, which you agreed to share with us.

We also asked about actions that schools themselves can take to address the problem. It was noted that unfortunately there have been instances of abuse being directed towards those trying to make traffic around schools safer. You again encouraged people to report such behaviour and pass on vehicle registration numbers to schools. You gave example of initiatives by some schools to use pupils to get the message across about dangerous parking and safety. We noted that a health and safety audit was taking place and discussions being held with schools where there is significant concern. We heard that you felt firmer action may be necessary if problems persist such as considering the restriction of vehicle movements around schools at certain streets and times of the day.

Climate Change / Biodiversity in Schools

We asked you about steps taken to increase the focus in both primary and secondary schools on issues around climate change, environment and biodiversity, given its importance and urgency, and evidence-based education on these issues in schools.

We were pleased to hear about plans to support the growth of such teaching and you specifically referred to an upcoming conference at the end of October, supported by Swansea University, designed to help schools address this agenda.

You provided reassurance that both primary and secondary schools were well placed in terms of 'eco' awareness and understanding, and pointed to the new Curriculum for Wales 2022, which has a focus on the environment and sustainability.

We also discussed the role of school governors. You will be aware of the recommendations of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry, which Cabinet responded to in July. Cabinet agreed with the recommendation that all governing bodies appoint an environmental link governor, which the Scrutiny Panel felt could then promote and champion relevant issues, share information, and report on a school's environmental education and activities. We understand the Nature Conservation Team will be liaising with the School & Governor Unit on this. You pointed out that this would be a matter for governing bodies to take forward but highlighted positive steps already taken by school governors in relation to the eco-schools programme, and various environmental schemes delivered in schools.

School Condition Surveys

The Committee referred to the closure of Bishopston Comprehensive due to water damage during the recent spell of poor weather. We asked whether there were any known maintenance issues in relation to the roof, and how often condition surveys were carried out generally for all Swansea schools.

You paid tribute to all involved in resolving the issue at the school to minimise disruption. We understood that the roof at Bishopston was due to be replaced as part of the Council's 21st Century Schools Strategic Programme / Band B funding, therefore nearing end of life. You stressed that the incident was not the result of poor maintenance or incomplete work. You added that work should be commencing early in the new year, and it would now be replaced in one go rather than on a phased basis as was originally envisaged.

We noted that condition surveys of school roofs are carried out annually with results reported to governing bodies and head teachers, who would be expected to discuss implications.

Your written paper referred to the overall Band B Programme funding of £149.5m, subject to the approval of individual project business cases. We asked about the extent of the Council's contribution to this amount, compared with Welsh Government. You referred the Committee to Cabinet papers, which explained the Band B funding arrangement, however agreed to confirm to us in writing the funding split.

We also noted that the £9.642m new build bespoke Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) facility on the Cockett House site is now under construction - scheduled for completion in August 2020 and due to open to pupils in September 2020.

Education Through Regional Working (ERW)

We discussed issues and improvements that have been made to the working of the regional school improvement consortium. The Committee was aware that ERW has been reviewed and reformed during the last two academic years. Your written paper outlined some of the benefits of consortium working in terms of the support and challenge it provides, and reported that schools in Swansea have shown improvement for the fourth successive year under the Welsh Government's school categorisation system. We noted that the Joint Committee has agreed new core functions, namely developing leadership, professional learning for new curriculum and curriculum design. In addition, the Joint Committee has agreed a new staffing structure. As a result, the local authority has retained its challenge advisers for school improvement activity and has rationalised curriculum support staff.

However, you were aware that there were still outstanding challenges to ERW, e.g. the ERW footprint includes a large rural region and rural issues can predominate and can be reflected in the allocation of funding across the region; and one partner authority has issued a notice of intent to withdraw from the consortium. In addition, we noted there has some contention between schools' perceptions of ERW in relation to its role in challenging performance and schools feeling that it causes increased workload. However, you told us that a significant review of ERW, the model, delivery and governance is nearing completion. We also asked about the Council's current and future financial contribution to the consortium, as we noted that new governance arrangements have yet to be approved by the ERW Joint Committee, and the future funding arrangements are not finalised.

School Attendance

We asked about the recording of attendance in schools and consistency across Swansea in the way the data is coded and reported. The Committee was concerned that the accuracy of figures can stand up to challenge.

You reported that all Swansea schools have the 'SIMS' data monitoring and recording systems, which allows a consistent approach to registration and recording of all pupils in every school. You stated that register checks and audits are undertaken regularly. The use of 'SIMS' enables data to be analysed and identifies any issues. The data is used to track pupils, check on attendance at lessons and identify vulnerable groups. We noted the work that Education Welfare Officers do in partnership with schools to support and help improve school attendance. Overall we were assured that school attendance performance is good across Swansea and has not been an issue of concern in Estyn reports, though there was some acknowledgment from you that processes could be improved.

NEETS (Not in Education, Employment or Training)

You were asked to provide the Committee with a progress update in relation to NEETS prevention and support for those Not in Education, Employment or Training. We were concerned whether the Council has a firm grip on numbers and whether we could be confident that all young people were adequately tracked and not slipping through the net.

You told us that the Council was working very closely with secondary schools and reported that officers are currently completing an audit of schools' support and provision for vulnerable learners who are most at risk of becoming NEET. Working in collaboration with Young People's Services, we noted that the audit will assess current provision, identify good practice and set out recommendations for improvements.

You clarified that that the 2018/19 annual review of performance shows that there has been a 9.6% increase in young people known to be NEET at 16 on leaving formal education, compared with 2017/18, which represented an increase of five.

Skills & Talent City Deal Project

One of your portfolio responsibilities is for the Skills and Talent Project for the City Deal. We understand that the Skills and Talent project, or initiative, aims to deliver a regional solution for the identification and delivery of the skills and training needs for all City Deal projects. Working alongside partners from the private sector, higher and further education, schools and the third sector, the project team will map out gaps in current provision and establish the skills and training needed for students, teachers and lecturers both now and in future. Bespoke education and training solutions will then be introduced, which align to the needs of industry and key City Deal themes. Investment will include funding for equipment and the development of courses to support the projects. We asked about progress with the project, and partnership working. It was confirmed to us that there are regular meetings to discuss the project between partners, through the existing South West and Mid Wales Regional Learning & Skills Partnership.

Learning Opportunities for Adults with Disabilities

We raised with you a question that the Committee had received from a member of the public. There were specifics shared by the member of the public that were perhaps a matter for Adult Social Services, in terms of the help and support that could be available, and this is being followed up with them directly. However, we invited comment from you given your responsibilities for lifelong learning, and accessibility to courses for those with significant health issues, such as brain injury.

You championed 'Learning for Life' opportunities for all, but recognised that depending on an individual's circumstances they may not be able to get the most out of these. The Cabinet Member for Care, Health & Ageing Well was also present while we discussed this matter and stressed that the goal is to fulfil people's learning aspirations and that he would help the individual concerned to access this and signpost to specialist service provide where appropriate.

Your Response

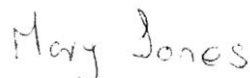
In your response we would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised in this letter. We would be grateful, however, if you could specifically refer to our request for you to:

- confirm where specifically the monitoring of air quality around school sites was taking place;
- share with us information you have requested on the regular patrols carried by Parking Enforcement Officers around schools; and
- confirm the comparative Council and Welsh Government financial contribution to Band B funding for the 21st Century Schools Programme

Please provide the response to this and any other comments about our letter by 28 November. We will then include both letters in the agenda of the next available Committee meeting.

We will arrange to follow up on portfolio developments and invite you to a future Committee meeting in due course.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR MARY JONES

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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