



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the Education & Skills Policy Development Committee

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Wednesday, 9 December 2020 at 4.00 pm

Present: Councillor R V Smith (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

J P Curtice
L R Jones
S Pritchard

Councillor(s)

B Hopkins
M A Langstone
D W W Thomas

Councillor(s)

O G James
M B Lewis

Also Present:

Councillor J A Raynor - Cabinet Member for Education, Learning & Skills

Officer(s)

Damien Beech	Head of Primary Phase Unit
Gareth Borsden	Democratic Services Officer
Rob Davies	Head of Secondary Phase Unit
Helen Morgan-Rees	Interim Director of Education
Chris Rees	Leader of Learning for Digital Competence
Stephanie Williams	Principal Lawyer

Apologies for Absence

None.

4 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

In accordance with the code of conduct adopted by the City & County of Swansea no interests were declared.

5 Minutes.

Resolved that the minutes of the Education & Skills Policy Development Committees held on 11 November 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

6 Continuity of Learning.

Rob Davies, Chris Rees and Helen Morgan-Rees introduced a report which provided Members with a detailed and comprehensive overview and background around the basis of the continuity of learning programme, including blended learning that the authority had developed since the initial national lockdown in March.

They detailed the particular emphasis around issues that had been identified around access to digital devices and connectivity, and outlined the various different approaches utilised (with best practice), professional learning to practitioners and the capturing of learners' and parents views that has been undertaken.

They indicated that the department had and continues to work closely together during the Covid pandemic period in developing and delivering education services to young people across Swansea.

They indicated that during the initial lockdown a blended learning provision of online lessons and paper based work, distributed by schools had provided the majority of learning opportunities for pupils. These had been replaced in the main by face to face lessons when the school returned in September, though due to staff/pupil isolation cases in schools, blended learning continues.

The issues around the lack of available devices in households, particularly during times of family isolation, various connectivity issues and problems and various reasons around young people having access to "quiet space" to undertake their work at home were outlined and debated.

They outlined that Welsh Government had provided a second round of HWB grant monies which has enabled the authority to purchase a large numbers of devices including iPads, pc/laptops, chrome books and Mifi devices (dongles), these have been distributed to the young people identified as in need of digital support. This supply and distribution of equipment continues to proceed going forward thanks to continuing support from Welsh Government.

The huge logistical challenges of preparing and distributing the devices to young people were outlined and discussed.

The varying levels of engagement in home learning, parental support and attitudes and parents ability to support learning at home were outlined as a very difficult area to monitor.

Welsh Government HWB grant monies has also been used to improve the networks and connectivity within schools to enable teachers and support staff to better deliver lessons both in school and online.

They outlined that blended learning guidance had been produced and distributed to schools.

In terms of blended learning, schools have deployed a wide range of approaches to best suit the needs of their pupils, with some schools focusing on asynchronous approaches to mitigate potential issues with access to equipment at home, whilst other schools have adopted synchronous approaches to encourage greater structure and engagement for pupils while at home.

Live lessons can be recorded so that pupils can view at a later point if needed. Some have adopted adopting a hybrid of asynchronous and synchronous approaches. Nearly all schools have indicated that they still use paper based resources to support learners where needed.

The feedback on online home learning provision from learners and parents indicates that regular live lessons at structured times are preferable to the vast majority of pupils, although some pupils prefer the flexibility of recorded lessons and the ability to view and review them at various times was also outlined, particularly for older pupils. The increase in pupils being "home schooled" as a result of the pandemic was reported.

The fact that teachers had been learning “on the job”, and adapting and evolving their online teaching methods through practice, experience and feedback was outlined, this related to both live and recorded lessons.

The issues around the potential for the widening of the gap around disadvantaged pupils as a result of the pandemic was raised, Officers indicated that the recent Welsh Government funding for this was specifically targeted and they could collate information around this and how schools had spent their allocated funding and provide information and feedback on this going forward.

The support and assistance given within the teaching profession to colleagues during the pandemic to upskill and support colleagues was outlined and commended. This had been supplemented by support and advice from the department via online training, advice and webinars.

Councillor J A Raynor, Cabinet Member for Education, Learning & Skills supported the approach taken by the department and the praised the work put in by both school based staff and officers from the department during the pandemic.

Both she and members of the committee discussed the issues raised above and asked numerous questions of the Officers who responded accordingly.

The Chair and Members of the committee fully supported and commended the work of all the school based staff during the pandemic and asked that the Interim Director convey their thanks and appreciation to all teachers, learning assistants and other school based staff in the next departmental e mail to all schools to reflect their appreciation of the extraordinary efforts during the past months.

The Chair indicated suggested to avoid putting unnecessary pressure and strain on schools to be asked to attend meetings of the PDC and asking them for their views and feedback on the impact of the pandemic for the next few months, the next meeting could consider taking feedback from Challenge Advisors on their opinion on the issues being faced and dealt with by schools at the next meeting of the PDC in the new year.

Resolved that the next meeting receive a verbal update/feedback from Challenge Advisors around the issues being faced by schools linked to the Covid pandemic.

The meeting ended at 5.18 pm

Chair