



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

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 21st 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