



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Thursday, 22 October 2020 at 5.00 pm at the Virtually via Zoom Application.

### **County Borough Councillors - Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-**

Councillor S. Rees-Owen (Chair)

Councillor J Edwards	Councillor J Brencher
Councillor H Fychan	Councillor A Calvert
Councillor M Powell	Councillor M Griffiths
Councillor D Owen-Jones	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor L De Vet	

### **Co-Opted Members in attendance:-**

Mr J Fish, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative  
Mrs R. Nicholls, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

### **Officers in attendance:-**

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication  
Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services  
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services  
Ms L Davies, Service Director – Public Protection Services  
Ms C Edwards, Head of Service Transformation And Data Systems  
Ms A Richards, Temporary Service Director for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools

### **County Borough Councillors in attendance:-**

Councillor W Lewis

#### **12 Welcome & Apologies**

The Vice Chair opened up this evening's meeting due to there being a technical difficulty with the Chair of the Committee's device. Members acknowledged that once the Chair was able to join she would then take back the role and continue with the proceedings.

Apologies were received from County Borough Councillor S. Evans, W Jones, S Powell and G Stacey.

#### **13 Declaration of Interest**

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

#### **14 Minutes**

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2020 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

## 15 **Children & Young People Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/2021**

The Service Director Democratic Services & Communications presented Members with the Draft Work Programme for 2020/2021 from (October to December in the first instance).

It was explained that following the Council's AGM held on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2020 Scrutiny is now able to present its forward work programme for 2020/2021 Municipal Year, It was highlighted to Members that the work programme would initially be that of a three month basis with the Committee having the opportunity to review its Work Programme in December 2020.

Members acknowledged the current pressures on the Council as it focuses on the impact of the pandemic and its associated plans for response and recovery and agreed that this approach allows for business critical matters to be priority.

The Chair proceeded to ask the Committee to identify any areas that they wish to review in greater detail and opened up the meeting to Members.

A Member highlighted the FPN Working Group report and it was agreed that this would be added to the work programme for a future meeting. After further consideration Members **RESOLVED** to Agree the Children and Young People Scrutiny Work Programme for 2020/2021 (October to December)

## 16 **Update of the Council's Latest Position in response to COVID -19 from an Education Prospective**

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communication explained that the Committee has the opportunity to scrutinise review and challenge the Council's current position in response to the ongoing Covid19 pandemic and explained that the Director of Education & Inclusion along with Service Director Public Protection and Temporary Service Director for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools would provide Members with a verbal update, firstly to update Members on the critical actions taken by the Council over the Summer period including the current COVID 19 processes and practices in RCT and secondly, to inform Members of the current plans being undertaken for the Autumn Term and the up and coming Firebreak announced by the Welsh Government..

The Director of Education & Inclusion thanked the Committee for the opportunity to once again update Members on the actions taken during the pandemic and explained that the Service Director Public Health and Temporary Service Director 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools was also presented to answer any questions from Members in respect of collaborative actions taken to minimise any positive Covid 19 cases within our schools.

The Director of Education continued to explain that she would provide Members with an overview of some of the support mechanism provided to schools during this current time, it was highlighted that a great deal of guidance had been provided to all schools and communication channels were strong are illustrated in frequent Headteachers meetings, cluster meetings and termly updates with Chairs of Governing Bodies where Schools and the Local Authority are able to address any current issues and concerns.

Parent and carer communication is frequent with information being passed through various means such as text messaging, Director's letters to parents/carers, quick referral guidance or frequently asked questions for parents/carers made available on the Council website etc.

It was also explained that a lot of engagement and partnership working has taken place to ensure that schools are running as smoothly and as safely as possible and to minimise the risks for pupils and staff. Some examples are as follows:

- Staggered start times and finishing times;
  
- Sneeze screens
- PPE , Face coverings;
- Sanitiser
- Social distancing measures appropriate signage etc.
- Enhanced cleaning
- Maintaining discrete contact groups

The Temporary Service Director of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools presented Members with an overview of the extensive Health and Safety measures the authority and schools have put in place for pupils' safety. It was explained that clear guidance documents are in place for all areas such as traffic impact assessment, cleaning, hygiene compliance checks, along with support from health and safety colleagues. All risk assessments and support plans were checked by the Council Health and Safety Team and advice provided where required to ensure completeness and are signed off by Chair of Governors. The Director thanked the Temporary Service Director 21<sup>st</sup> Century School for her update.

The Director of Education continued to explain that home/distance learning continued at the end of the Summer Term. The Central South Consortium has developed guidance, support and professional learning for blended/distance learning which has ensured that our schools are well supported and unskilled.

Members of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee were also provided with data in respect of Covid 19 cases within Rhondda, Cynon Taf schools. The Director asked that when Members are considering the data it was important to consider learner population which is approximately 38,800 learners.

Members were advised that there had been a steady growth of cases with RCT, however this fluctuated day to day. Members were provided with graph data which gave the Committee an overall view of both pupil and staff cases.

The Service Director Public Protection informed Members of the work carried out by both Services, it was explained that at the start of September robust measures and processes were in place to deal with any sudden increases. There had been around the clock support from the track and trace teams, Education and Public Health and Protection teams to help schools deal with cases.

It was also explained that in secondary schools robust recording of seating plans in all subject areas enable schools to identify close contacts requiring self-isolation. Partnership working and support is paramount and is working extremely well with schools in our County Borough. Members were pleased to see that Public Health Wales acknowledged that there are very tight practices to

deal with contact tracing in our schools.

The Director paused at this point of her presentation to take questions from Members of the Committee.

A Member thanked the officers for a very informative update and asked for clarity on a few points, firstly in respect of the general wellbeing of pupil and staff the Member asked for reassurance that there were procedures in place to monitor both physical and mental health of staff as many are dealing with complex situations and are going above and beyond their normal duties to ensure our pupils are at the forefront.

The Director explained that wellbeing is a priority for the Service, and it was acknowledged that these were challenging times. In respect of pupils the childcare hubs had been a lifeline to many of our vulnerable pupils and provided a familiar setting for many. In respect of staff it was explained that HR provides very good support and guidance in line with the trade union support and this is constantly being monitored to ensure help and support is available at all time. Frequent forums are established to ensure that we are responsive to the needs of schools and that the guidance provides clarity in relation expectations, processes and procedures. Schools are well supported in the hope that this impacts positively on their wellbeing.

The Member continued to question officers in respect of the social distancing aspect of pupils within schools. With regards to our older school buildings there were concerns raised in relation to the width of school corridors and classroom sizes and as whether this affected the social distancing measures required for Covid 19 in comparison with the newer 21<sup>st</sup> Century school buildings. Also one of the main concerns for Members was that of parents and guardians congregating outside of the school with very little social distancing and no face coverings, Members wanted to know if there was anything that could be done to address this behaviour for the safety of staff and pupils.

Officers explained that there is no particular patterns with our older schools however staff have robust measures in place to ensure that safe social distancing is adhered to where this is possible. Guidance had been provided for schools in relation to Covid safe measures in both old and new buildings. With regards to addressing with issue of groups congregating outside the school premises, officers explained that schools follow the guidance provided by Welsh Government and have issued information to parents/carers. The Director has also issued letters to parents/carers, as have headteachers. Signage has been provided for schools to reinforce expectations, along with staggered start and finishing time to minimise the numbers at the school gates etc.

Another Member asked a question in regards to the congregating outside the school building and asked whether it was possible to make the wearing of face covering mandatory for parents of guardians. The Director explained that face coverings outside it is not a mandatory requirement therefore as an Authority we can only encourage their usage.

The Member wanted clarity on school attendance and if there are any statistics on pupils attending school or are parents keeping children home due to the current situation, also the Member wanted to know if there is any evidence of pupils moving from Welsh medium education to English medium education and the reasons behind the move.

Officers explained that attendance rates are stable at present with 90% attendance rate in primary settings and 80% in secondary settings. Announcements of the changing lockdown measures, such as local lockdowns can have a slight impact on attendance however there is a steady improvement in relation to attendance. With regards to Welsh medium education and any move towards English schools officers explained that this doesn't seem to be an area of concern at present.

Members continued to ask questions in respect of transport, breakfast clubs, afterschool clubs where there seems to be minimum spaces at this time and Members wanted to know how as an authority we were dealing with this situation. An updated was provided on provision and Members advised that a reduction in provision was necessary on health and safety grounds.

Members congratulated staff on how effectively the system of tracking positive cases is working with our schools and the quick communication between all staff, governing bodies and parents.

Members asked if there had been any issues with staffing capacity during this time and if there was the need for agency cover and if the governance function effectively across schools.

With regards to teaching capacity in schools Welsh medium provision is a challenge however there are no great issue so far and this will be monitored on a regular basis .In respect of governance Members found it pleasing to see that virtual meetings and discussion have been very effective with an increase in governor attendance at meetings and also training session.

The Director of Education continued to inform Members of the current position within our schools and the plans in place for the autumn term and coming Firebreak that has been put in place. Local arrangements are informed by detailed local authority guidance which reflects the national position.

After further discussion and questioning for the Committee Members  
RESLOVED to:

- Acknowledge the Verbal update from the Director of Education & Inclusion in conjunction with the Service Director Public Health & Protection.
- Receive a report at a future meeting to provide Members with data in respect of Welsh medium children transferring to English medium schools and any reasons behind the potential move.
- Receive a report in respect of crossing control at schools and what is being done to minimise pupils congregating outside schools especially during the pandemic

## **17 Chair's Review and Close**

The Chair thanked Members and Officers for their time and contribution to the Meeting and at that point wished Members a good evening and closed the meeting.

## **18 URGENT BUSINESS**

**This meeting closed at 6.45 pm**

**CLLR S REES-OWEN  
CHAIR.**