

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Wednesday, 4 November 2020 at 5.00 pm at the Virtually.

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

Councillor S. Rees-Owen (Chair)

Councillor J Edwards	Councillor S Evans
Councillor H Fychan	Councillor A Calvert
Councillor S Powell	Councillor M Powell
Councillor M Griffiths	Councillor D Owen-Jones
Councillor S Morgans	Councillor G Stacey
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 P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Ms A Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services
Mrs C Tyler, Service Development Officer, Children's Services

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

19 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors J Brencher and W Jones.

20 Declaration of Interest

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

21 Children's Services: Recovery and Contingency Planning Report

The Director of Children's Services presented Members of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee an updating report which focused on the Children's Services response to the continuing impact of the pandemic along with recovery and contingency planning.

As Member would recall at the Children & Young People Scrutiny Meeting held on the 9th September children's Services provided an overview in relation to the functioning of the services during the Covid 19 Pandemic and the developing

Recovery Plan.

The Director of Children's Services continued to explain that since the last meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee the Service has moved from contingency planning mode to that of a business critical one in preparation for the national Fire Break following the First Minister's announcement on the 19th October 2020.

Members were presented with an overview of the Children's Service recovery planning in line with the national framework for children's services recovery plans. The Director of Children's Services provided Members with a table which highlighted the actions taken by the service to date which includes the following:

1. Develop a fit for purpose agile/ home working framework for Children's Services, which supports both physical and emotional wellbeing of staff and optimises our work with families;
2. Building upon business critical and emergency functions currently being delivered, develop a safe sustainable service delivery model to provide Children's Services statutory responsibilities that will meet WG guidance;
3. Ensure staffing capacity in Intensive Intervention is sufficient to meet need;
4. Ensure vulnerable children have access to education and emergency childcare provision, working in partnership with education;
5. Ensure robust safeguarding arrangements working with partners in Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board.
6. Ensure the Youth Offending Service undertakes its duties and delivers its core functions: and
7. Youth Engagement and Participation Service (YEPS) continue to offer virtual open access activities and plan for re-introduction of face to face provision and provide virtual information advice and guidance to vulnerable young people using WICID TV and You Tube.

The Director of Children's Services continued and informed the Committee that a contingency plan was considered and finalised in September 2020 and the results of which seen the service prioritise business critical services, it was also explained that in preparation for the Firebreak period the service is re-categorising all cases by risk and need under the R.A.G system whilst maintaining critical services which include:

- Access to Services and Family support;
- Safeguarding Duties;
- Children Looked After; and
- Youth Offending Service (YOS).

Members were reminded that at a previous meeting there was a request for more outcome based evidence within reports, the Director explained that performance data had been included with the report which highlighted a comparison between Quarter 2 - 2019 Performance and Quarter 2 -2020 Performance data. There were three areas that the Director of Children's Services wish to highlight, these being the number of adoption placements which had remained the same as the previous year the Officer explained that this was pleasing to see especially during these uncertain times. Another was that the percentage of children being placed with kinship carers had increased slightly and staff are working closely with extended families. Finally a concern for the services is the decrease in the number of care leavers who are engaged in education, employment or training.

The Director concluded her report by explaining that the service will continue to provide services to families in line with the Welsh recovery framework principles and opened up the debate to Members of the Committee.

The Chair thanked the Director for her report and passed the questioning on to Committee Members.

Members put forward many questions in respect of staff wellbeing, face to face contact with families along with questions relating to the performance data comparisons.

A Member asked in relation to the staff survey that had been carried out what had been done to address response of “77% staff felt access to team/ peer support was important to them” at these unprecedented times.

The Officer explained that although face to face contact is the best way for communicating this is not always possible during the pandemic, however staff have regular contact via various applications such as Microsoft TEAMS and the service has provided some office space for confidential work etc. It was also highlighted that there is a staff wellbeing week where staff are encouraged to participate in various activities along with the support from HR and the Occupational Health Service.

In respect of the data relating to children on the Child Protection register and the total number of Children Looked After Members wanted clarity on the reason why there was an increase in the figure in comparison to the previous year. Members wanted reassurance that all children on the register were being seen and contact was being made. Officers explained that contact was being made with these families however in new way video conference telephone and if necessary face to face contact.

A Member thanked officers for their hard work and asked if the Authority had a target data bench mark for carer leavers not in education or employment or training. It was explained that there are no targets set however this needs to improve going forward and it will be considered as part of the corporate planning to improve outcomes.

The Chair came in at this point as she recalled that some this data had been presented to the Finance & Performance Committee previously. The Chair of the Finance & Performance Committee was present in the meeting and confirmed he would check the details and come back later in the meeting with the information.

The Member also wanted clarity on whether funding for carer leavers to attend university was still available and asked if Covid 19 had effected any person going to study. The Director explained that she didn't have the information to hand and would check with the relevant officers and sent the information out to Members after the meeting.

In respect of staffing Members raised concerns in respect of the number of vacancies within the Intensive intervention service and the impact it was having on staff which are already under pressure. Officers explained that there is real pressure on parts of the service. It was explained that under the Social Work review there has been some work done to try and encourage and retain staff however this has been challenging.

A Member asked if data could be provided to show the number of children who had also been removed from the Child Protection register to show some comparisons. The Director advised that she would obtain the information and would be forwarded to Members after the meeting.

The questioning continued and Members felt that as a Committee they would benefit from digging deeper into the reasons why more children are being placed on the Child Protection register so that they could understand the reasons why families are struggling and may be carry out a piece of work to address the problems.

Members also put their views forward in relation to the YEPS Service and the work that had been carried out during the pandemic along with work being done for young carers etc.

After further discussion Member **RESOLVED** to:

- Acknowledge the content of the report
- Receive data in relation to the number of children removed from the Child Protection register;
- Receive information from the Finance & Performance Committee report relating to the bench mark data for carer leavers not in education, employment or training ;
- Receive information regarding the effects of Cove 19 on carer leavers attending university.

22 Outcomes of the Care Inspectorate Wales Inspection Report

The Director of Children's Service along with the Service Development Manager Children's Services presented a report to update Members on the Outcomes of the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) inspection. Members were also presented with actions taken during the last year and to date.

The Officers explained that Children's Services received CIW Report on the provision of early help care and support and transition for disabled children and their families in RCT in March 2020.

Members acknowledged that the report identified a number of strengths and a number of areas for improvement. Members were also reminded that in December 2019 the Disabled Children's Service Review report was presented to Committee and Work was already underway to change the delivery model for disabled children prior to the inspection.

It was highlighted further areas for improvement were identified and these have been incorporated into the Disabled Children's Services Remodelling Implementation Plan. With regards to the 16+ Teams Members were provided with areas for improvement which were:

- Improving the outcome focused approach, ensuring that young people's wishes and feelings are evident in pathway planning;
- Ensuring Pathways Plans are reviewed in a timelier manner and involve updates from relevant agencies;

- Improving quality assurance
- Ensuring young people have an active offer of a service in Welsh.

The Director of Children's Services explained that as a service we have developed actions plans for both Disabled Children's Service and 16+ Team which incorporates the areas for improvement identified by CIW.

It was also brought to Members attention that due to the unprecedented circumstances relating to Covid 19 changes were made to working arrangements and four critical areas of work were identified to focus on. This has meant that all development and improvement activity was placed on hold and Quality Assurance monitoring was reduced to two key indicators;

- Communication and support for staff;
- Quality of work.

Members were informed that a recovery plan has been developed and that services are starting to return whilst ensuring there is minimum risk of infection.

The Committee were provided with a list of priorities with the action plan that are now being undertaken. The Director concluded her report by emphasising that there is a strong commitment with RCT to support the Disabled Children's Services and 16+ Teams to implement positive change.

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and before opening up the meeting for Members questions and observation explained that as part of the process was interviewed by the CIW and stated that after reading the report I found it was a sobering experience.

A Member requested that a detailed report with outcomes against the action plan be presented to the Committee in six month so that a better understanding of the progress made could be considered.

Another Member agreed and commented that to have sight of the action plan would be beneficial to see if the service was going in the right direction. He also wanted clarity on the disability register and the status of its functioning. Officers explained the reasoning behind it and it is a priority going forward.

All Members agreed that an action plan is needed to assess going forward. In respect to the Voice of the Child does the action plan pick up this priority going forward? It was explained that the young person's world is central to this.

The Chair pick up on some points within the report and asked for clarity on what has been put in place. Officer explained that various plans in place to take change forward and build on the work going forward.

After further discussion Members **RESOLVED** to:

- Acknowledge the content of the report ;
- Receive a progress report in 6 Months on the actions against the action plans.

23 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair confirmed the next meeting is on the 18th November and proceed to

close the meeting.

This meeting closed at 6.38 pm

**CLLR S REES-OWEN
CHAIR.**