

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Wednesday, 2 December 2020 at 5.00 pm.

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

Councillor S. Rees-Owen (Chair)

Councillor J Edwards Councillor S Evans
Councillor J Brencher Councillor A Calvert
Councillor M Griffiths Councillor D Owen-Jones
Councillor L Walker

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 G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Mrs. J Allen, Children and Young People's Service Manager
Ms C Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion
Ms Z Lancelott, Head of Community Wellbeing & Resilience
Ms A Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services
Ms K Webster, Deputy Principal Educational Psychologist

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

31 Announcements and Apologies

The Chair Welcomed Members and Officers to the Joint Meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee. A special welcome was made to Mr L Patterson the newly elected Co-opted Voting Parent Governor representative as a Member of the Committee.

Apologies of absence were received from County Borough Councillors S. Morgans, S Powell, G Stacey and H Fychan

32 Declaration of Interest

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

33 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 4th November 2020 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

34 Consultation Links

The Chair referenced the consultation links, which were available through the 'RCT Scrutiny' website. The Chair reminded Members that Information is provided in respect of relevant consultations for consideration by the Committee, which are circulated on a monthly basis by the Scrutiny Research Officer

35 Integrated Wellbeing Support for Children and Young People in RCT

The Chair explained that there were a number of officers present and suggested that the presentation would be taken in sections and after each section Members of the committee would be asked to put forward their question before moving on to the next service area.

The Chair invited to the Director of Education & Inclusion Services and the Director of Children's Services to present the report and the supporting presentation.

In response to Scrutiny Committees request for information relating to the wellbeing and emotional support for children and young people during Covid -19 Members were presented with a high-level presentation that illustrates the breath of support available across both directorates.

The Directors explained that Officer from a range service areas were present to present an overview of the extensive work carried out by their individual areas and officers would be available to take question from Members at any given point.

Officers recapped on the information the Committee had been previously received regarding Covid- 19 stating that a total of 25 childcare hubs were swiftly established throughout the County Borough to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable and the children of critical workers were met during the school closure period. It was also explained that pre-school children also accessed free childcare as part of the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme.

The Director of Education continued to explain that since children returned to school in September significant numbers of families across RCT continue to face ongoing hardship such as financial difficulties, health issues and multiple adverse experiences. It was highlighted that to meet the service demands integrated service models, processes and procedures have been developed.

Members were provided with a presentation under the following headings which gave an overview of what support was provided by each service area:

- Integrated wellbeing support Service – Returning to School;
- Resilient Families Service;
- AWS – Service Changes;

- Access & Inclusion Service Wellbeing Support;
- Children Looked After Service

In relation to the Integrated Wellbeing Support Service Members were informed by the Children & Young People Service Manager of the processes that were in place when schools identify pupils not attending due to anxieties around Covid , and how they interface with work carried out by the Attendance and Wellbeing Service and the YEPS Service The objective of the pathways is to ensure that pupil's needs are addressed to assist them to return and remain in school and it highlighted the support given to pupils to help them overcome their anxieties and fears in re-engaging to the educational environment.

A Member praised the work of the service and asked whether there were any pupils who hadn't returned to school despite this support and intervention. A request was made for data on these numbers for the Committee.

It was explained that all processes are put in place to encourage and support pupils to go back to school. However, despite the best efforts of the service there are a number of pupils who haven't returned to school or education for many reasons. The Head of the Attendance and Wellbeing Service informed of the processes and procedures implemented and explained that there are currently 280 pupils across RCT who haven't returned to school. These learners have a range of issues and some have medical issues which can also present as a barrier to return to school.

The Chair asked Officers if the Committee could have a breakdown of age group, areas and reason why this was the case. Officer explained that they would collate the information and report back.

A Member commented that schools were conscious of many pupils within their care they are concerned about but that there will be others that they wouldn't know about. Therefore, the Member asked if YEPS have been offering school based drop in sessions for anxious pupils. In addition the Member asked what measures were in place for children with medical issues and could blended learning be offered for these children that need to remain at home during the pandemic.

It was also asked what procedures are in place for children who may be known to Children's Services and haven't been seen or made contact with. They asked if there was any way during the current situation that officers can visit and have contact with child face to face.

In response, Officers explained that in respect of drop in session this was something we were keen to reinstate and since September YEPS have worked with schools to arrange drop in sessions during lunch times and immediately after school. The Officer explained that it was not the same level as pre- Covid due to the restrictions that were in place but with tight risk assessments these were allowed to happen. The Officer continued to explained that since the firebreak schools risk assessments have not supported these drop-n sessions due to mixing of bubbles and instead they have now moved online. These virtual sessions are now being offered with the same worker for continuity we are hope that come January we will be able to reinstate the sessions going forward.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing explained that in cases when a child who has not been seen by the school for a number of days, they can refer to the

service and a wellbeing checks will be carried out. In respect of children on the child protection register where there has been no contact with school or social worker with 24 hours a referral for same day visit will take place. If the Wellbeing Officer is unable to sight the child then this will be escalated to 101 for a police welfare visit. The Officer explained there had been 13 cases to date and these steps were taken.

In relation to the other questions the Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service explained that with regards to medical issues and shielding we do have a small amount of children have been provided with medical certificates and authorised absence from the school agreed to. The number of learners accessing treatment for cancer, organ failure, is thankfully very small. The Chief Medical Officer has indicated that shielding has stopped and therefore children are encouraged to attend school. Parents/ carers are reassured that measures adopted by schools ensure that schools remain to be a safe place for children to attend and schools play an important role in ensuring that pupil's wellbeing is closely monitored.

In relation to the blended learning support the officer explained that this was down to the head teacher as Welsh Government guidance states that all children should be in school or education.

Members put further questions relating to the current levels of the counselling service and asked whether it was manageable and if there were wrap around services available virtually or otherwise for pupil's wellbeing and worries along with issues of school transport and anxiety factors regarding transport. In response to the wrap around service communication eye to eye support was more virtual than face to face support.

Members were informed that out of the 280 pupil who had not returned to school transport issues was not a contributing factor.

The Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience continued the presentation by providing Members with an overview of the work carried out by the Resilient Families Service and how the service has adapted through the current Covid 19 pandemic and the impact it has had on many families. The Service still continues to visit families at home however the way in which this is carried out has changed greatly.

The Chair thanked the Officer and asked if there was an increase in referrals from families due to the pandemic. In response the Officer explained that there doesn't seem to be an increase in numbers but the reason for referrals are different and this seems to be due to the impact of the lockdown.

With regards to the impact of the lockdown Members asked for information regarding domestic violence and also suicide rates especially amongst men.

A Member asked if there was an issue regarding availability of Educational Psychologists and were concerned about a shortage as the impact of Covid would only increase as we go forward. It was explained that from the Resilient Families Service (RSF) perspective the service has now employed an Educational Psychologist to the team and there is also access to the Therapeutic Families Team for those that require therapeutic support through the triage system.

Specialist Health Visitor support is also available through Resilient Families Service although virtually at present and this through funding from Welsh Government.

The Head Attendance and Wellbeing Services provided Members with an overview of the Service changes. The officer recapped on the previous information regarding the Wellbeing Response visits and explained that since September Welsh Government had put a hold on Fixed Penalty Notice and prosecutions and the work of the AWS Service had to adjust to accommodate this factor.

After further questioning the Chair moved on to the next slide in the presentation.

The Head of Inclusion Services informed Members of the Access and Inclusion Service Wellbeing support under the following headings:

- Revised service model delivery ;
- Family Liaison Officers;
- Snap Parent Partnership;
- Access & Inclusion Website;
- EOTAS & Elective Home Education
- Collaborative Counselling initiative;
- Critical Incident Response;
- EPS Support Line;
- Professional Reflection Session;
- PERMA Wellbeing Tools;
- Wellbeing Training Programme and many other areas.

Members found this information very valuable, A Member commented that she enjoyed the Video regarding wellbeing that was shared via Council Website” It’s Ok Not to be Ok”. The Member commented that it showed parents that Officers from the service are accessible. .

The Member continued and commented on the Coffee Mornings that have been offered for parents and was pleased to see the uptake was a positive one and had been better attended in virtual sphere. However The Member noted that holding these vents during the daytime is a barrier for some working parents and asked for this be taken into consideration going forward so that when children go back to school parents will still able to attend and receive this essential support.

In respect if the Coffee Mornings it was explained that there is a Family Engagement Action Plan and that the Family Liaison Officer is considering rolling out coffee mornings at different times, together with other activities to engage parents on a larger scale.

A query was raised in relation to supporting schools with staff absences, particularly those who provide literacy intervention and numeracy intervention for pupils with ALN..

The Senior Educational Psychologist explained that maintaining continuity of support for our pupils is paramount and that support for staff is offered in two strands: support for the staff member that is absent and support for the staff who have to cover the extra work. It was explained that the Educational Psychology Service is seeing strategies for wellbeing support starting to embed in schools.

These strategies need to be embedded in to daily teaching sessions so the pupils are supported in an inclusive way.

Other Members asked questions regarding ALN funding and the use of the PERMA too along with the pupil's voice. It was noted that new exciting ways of promoting pupil voice are being developed collaboratively with YEPS but it was acknowledged that there is still a great deal of work to be done in this area.

With regards to allocating funding to schools, it was noted that PLASC data is used to identify needs of pupils at various levels.

A Member asked if there had been any base line data available with regards to the PERMA tool and how it compared to the data since the pandemic. It was explained that there is no data at present as the tool has embedded since the pandemic and the service will continue to monitor going forward and bring back data in the future.

The Member commented that a report regarding Coronavirus data was sent to Directors of local authorities and asked whether it had been shared with schools. It was explained that the report has been sent out to all our headteachers and will be used to inform support going forward.

With regards to Children Looked after Members were provided with information in respect of the advice and support that had been provided by the service and how the service has developed with the fast changing pace to support parents and carers during this time.

Members once again put forward questions and officers highlighted the way in which parents/ guardians can request help from the Children Looked After Team. The Director of Children's Services also presented Members with an over of the RCT families' website which highlighted the developments to make it easier to follow and finally presented important contact details for Members to direct any constituent concerns to.

After a very in depth discussion Members Resolved to:

- Acknowledge the context of the report;
- Receive a breakdown of the information regarding the non-attendance of 280 pupils.

36 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair thanked the Committee for all their hard work throughout the year and informed the of the next meeting. Before for closing the meeting the Chair wished both Members and Office a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

37 Urgent Business

There was no urgent business to consider.

This meeting closed at 7.25 pm

**CLLR S REES-OWEN
CHAIR.**