

**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  
Wednesday, 24 February 2021 at 5.00 pm at the .

**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 Griffiths	Councillor D Owen-Jones
Councillor S Morgans	Councillor G Stacey
Councillor L De Vet	Councillor L Walker

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

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

**Officers in attendance:-**

Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services  
Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services  
Ms A Richards, Temporary Service Director - 21st Century Schools and Transformation  
Ms D Humphries – Senior 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Project Manager (Childcare & Special Projects)  
Ms C Seery – Managing Director Central South Consortium (CSC)  
Ms L Blatchford – Deputy Managing Director Central South Consortium  
Mr S Davies – Central South Consortium  
Mr A Hurley - Central South Consortium  
Ms N Gould - Central South Consortium  
Mr A Williams - Central South Consortium  
Ms L Barry – Estyn Inspectorate Wales  
Ms N Thomas – Estyn Inspectorate Wales

**County Borough Councillors in attendance:-**

Councillor J Rosser – Cabinet Member for Education and Inclusion Services  
Councillor W Lewis – Vice Chair Overview & Scrutiny

**61 Welcome & Apologies**

The Chair Welcomed Members and Officers to the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee. The Chair also Welcomed Officer from Estyn who observing the meeting this evening.

Apologies were received from County Borough Councillor S Evans, M Powell, S Powell.

## 62 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's code of conduct the following declaration of personal interest was received from Voting Co- Opted Member Mr J Fish

In relation to Agenda Item 4 – "I have recently taken up a position regional leader of governance for the consortium."

## 63 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 13<sup>th</sup> January 2021 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

## 64 Report of the work of the Central South Consortium in the region and Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Authority (April 2019- September 2020)

The Chair welcomed Officers from the Central South Consortium and asked the Managing Director to introduce Officer to the Committee before presenting the report.

After introductions the Managing Director Central South Consortium informed Members that the purpose of the report is to update Members with the contribution of the Central South Consortium (CSC) and Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Authority to raising standards in schools across the RCT from April 2019 – September 2020.

The Managing Director CSC explained that this report details the work of the consortium for the academic year September 2019-2020 and the financial year April 2019 – April 2020. It was highlighted that the global pandemic caused schools to be repurposed in March 2020, requiring CSC to amend its approach to supporting schools.

The Officer continued and informed Members of its Business Plan and the following six priorities:

- Develop a high- quality education profession
- Develop inspirational leaders to facilitate working collaboratively to raise standards;
- Develop strong and inclusive schools committed to wellbeing , equity and excellence;
- Develop robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements, supporting self-improving systems;
- Provide professional learning (PL) opportunities to support the Curriculum for Wales;
- Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of CSC.

Members were presented with an overview of the progress made against each of the above objectives in respect of schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf and this was detailed within the report.

With regards to comparative data the Managing Director CSC reminded Members of the Ministers statement of the 3 July 2020 which was that the cancellation of the 2020 summer examinations due to the pandemic and that performance measures would not be published. That decision related to all

school and post -16 performance measures.

The Managing Director Central South Consortium continued and informed Members of the Central South Consortium's position, it was highlighted that it is important to note and understand that following Welsh Government's suspension of statutory data collection and publication of outcomes for 2019-20 and 2020-21, there will be a reduction in analysis available within CSC. However schools will have their own internal systems for tracking and analysing pupil performance /outcomes and whilst there is no expectation that schools will need to provide this information to CSC IPs for accountability reasons, a range of questions may still be used by colleagues in discussion with school leaders to inform CSC support for school improvement and partnership working in 2020-21.

Members were also provided with an overview of the challenge and support that had been provided by the consortium before and during lockdown on behalf of RCT some of which are:

- In 2019-20, RCT LA £1,014,176 towards the core functions of the consortium. In addition to the core costs of the consortium, this has provided funding for 15 IPs (6.96 FTE) plus support from Accelerated Progress Leads (0.23 FTE) effective from September 2018 and Principal Improvement Partners (PIPs) (2 FTE).
- Estyn suspended their inspection activity in March 2020. Eight schools were inspected during 2019-20 (Ty Gwyn Education Centre, Caradog Primary, Porth Community, Ynysboeth Community, Hawthorn High, St John Baptist High, Cilfynydd Primary and Penygawsi Primary). Of these, one school (St John Baptist High School) was asked to write an excellent practice case study, one school was placed in a follow up category of Estyn Review, one school was judged as having important weaknesses that outweighed the strengths and was therefore placed in the statutory category of Significant Improvement, and one school has been placed in Special Measures. Two further schools were identified for inspection (Trallwng Infants and Our Lady's RC Primary) but these were cancelled due to COVID-19.
- Due to COVID-19, Estyn ceased any follow up activity for schools in statutory categories in March 2020. Of the schools inspected in previous years, two schools were removed from an Estyn category and six schools remain in an Estyn follow up category. Three schools (Aberdare Community, Craig-Yr-Hesg and Cefn Primary) are in Significant Improvement. Three schools (Mountain Ash, Williamstown Primary and Abernant Primary) are in Estyn Review.

Members were also provided with an overview of other support provided by the consortium to schools in RCT which was pleasing to see. Members found it pleasing that a number of schools with RCT had been identified as Welsh Government Pioneer Schools during 2019-20 along with a great number of our schools providing support as part of the Hub programme in 2019-2020.

Members were informed of the number of schools with RCT that had taken up the opportunity to benefit from the leadership programme of these:

- 11 Head Teachers have undertaken the New and Acting Head Teacher programme
- One Senior leader has completed the Aspiring Head Teacher pilot

programme etc.

Officers continued and presented Members with an overview of the work carried out during the national lock down from March to July 2020 highlighting the role of the improvement partners and the principal improvement partners along with the finer details in relation to supporting distance learning, developing a blended approach encompassing distance learning and face to face learning, supporting professional learning and supporting the repurposing of schools.

The Managing Director CSC continued and presented Members with information regarding RCT's report on distance learning for the summer term 2020 and along with the work carried out with improvement partners to support the reopening of schools.

The Managing Director continued with the report highlighting many areas and after concluding proceeded to hand the floor back to the Chair of the Committee to take any Members' questions.

The Chair opened up the meeting for Members questions and observations.

A Member wanted to understand what support was given from Improvement partners for Head teachers and other members of staff during this time, it was asked if there had there been any wellbeing support as our teaching staff have had to cope with extreme pressure and changes due to the pandemic.

The Officer explained that the Improvement partners had regular contact with Headteachers and their main concern is to ensure the staff's wellbeing is at the forefront. Improvement Partners have also managed to help Headteacher filter down some of the details that have been provided to schools from Welsh Government etc. which has helped elevate some of the pressures. Counselling Services has also been offered to Headteachers and it was explained that Headteacher are able to self-refer if required. Feedback from staff is very positive and also Unions have praised the work of the service.

Another Member thanked the Officer for a very comprehensive report and explained that she wanted to focus her question on outcome 4 :( To continue to develop robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements supporting a self-improving system). The Member felt that this was the best way to improve education for children however this means more time more commitment of staff. In 2019-20 we haven't had the benefit of many school inspections and the Member wanted to know whether the consortium have been able to assess how the self-improvement system is working in schools RCT.

In response the Managing Director stated that there has been a huge variation with our schools and cluster working has helped and identified new ways of working. Officers gave an example of how schools are working with Improvement Partners to better their understanding. Officers also highlighted that there is a new evaluation framework set out by Welsh Government urged Member to contribute to the consultation that is now being taken.

The Chair explained that the Committee would draft a response and submit its comments to Welsh Government.

Other Members put questions for in respect of accountability and raised concern in relation to how as a scrutiny committee are we going to measurer impact

accountability and outcome of learners going forward.

Members continued and wanted clarity on many other points within the reports such as HLTA training, Governor training, inspections along with mental health and wellbeing support in schools for both staff and pupils.

With regards to the low numbers in RCT who took part in the HLTA training officers explained that there was a dip 2019/20 however this may change this year.

Also in response to the governor training it was highlighted that there has not been a significant turnover in RCT so there was no need of training. Officer also clarified that Governor Improvement Groups were still in the process of being developed and the focus and progress has been effected through Covid, in future GIG's information will be put in future reports.

In terms of the inspections the Director explained that it was also important to highlight positive outcomes achieved by a number of schools. Progress meetings have continued for schools in statutory category and a number of schools have continued to make progress and will welcome Estyn back into schools to share the improvements made.

A number of Red and Amber schools have made improvements with strategic developments continuing, with support from the LA and CSC.

Another Member asked in terms of the Welsh provision and the work carried out by the consortium before the pandemic with the introduction of the Welsh Charter etc. The Member queried what work is being done regarding people's confidence in terms of continuing with Welsh medium education as this has been a concern for many parents as they feel there is lack of support for parents/carers that do not speak Welsh.

The Managing Director explained that this was a priority area and will continue to be a focus. She continued to explain the work that had been done since March to elevate many of the concerns of parents and staff had around the support being provided. It was explained that there had been a lot of creative work carried out by teachers also there is far more Welsh medium material shared across all schools. WIEO have been made available to schools to work with them to inform them on how to use material to help students.

It was highlighted that it has been a problem in recruiting staff for these post and are continuing to work to fill these posts.

The Chair thanked the Officers for the report and asked for clarity on what work was being carried out encourage Welsh medium teachers to take up roles with our schools. It was also queried how CSC are working to retain Welsh medium to stay with the profession in our Welsh medium schools.

Welsh teacher recruitment is a challenge and we are looking at other way to encourage teachers to take up these posts and will be continually look at this going forward.

Another point which concerned the Chair was the provision of digital device for pupils to carry out home learning especially children from multiple households, the Chair continued and asked for clarity on the number of device that had been

distributed throughout the pandemic and if there were any pupils who were still without some form of device.

With regards to pupil's workloads and catch up the Chair queried what is being done to address this situations. The Managing Director explained that some work has been done with Welsh Government to develop some module to address this. There is also some work being done with Universities and further education providers to establish what is needed to support year 13 pupils going forward.

With regards to the digital devices officers explained that back in March when the digital device had been distributed many families did not identify as being in digital poverty as they had a device .However as time has gone by, it has become more clear to them that the deceives they have may not been fit for purpose. Work has been done to ensure that there is an alternative to live lessons where there are challenges in accessing this.

The Director of Education explained that there had been two audits undertaken within our schools to identify any gaps in provision and address this issue. Welsh Government have confirmed that further Chrome Books will be made available to our schools. The Director of Education presented the Committee with an overview on the Hwb Programme and connectivity with our schools.

A Member congratulated Tonyrefial School in respect an initiative that they set up of "pinning a book to the fence" which was so well received by parents of the school the Member suggested this could be replicated in other schools. Officers agreed that it was lovely initiative and this could potentially be highlighted through our media team.

Members thanked Officer for the report RESOLVED:

- Acknowledge the content of the report
- Receive a further report in the future.

## **65 Childcare Sector Position update in RCT**

The Temporary Service Director 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and Transformation provided Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with an update on the current position of the childcare sector in RCT and the support that has been offered by the Education and Inclusion Services.

The Officer explained that Section 22 of the Childcare Act 2006 (the 2006 Act) places a duty on the Council to secure 'as far as is reasonably practicable' sufficient childcare to meet the requirements of parents in its area who require Childcare to enable them to take up, or remain in work, or to undertake education or training which could reasonably be expected to assist them to obtain work.

It was explained that the Council has a dedicated childcare development team to support all childcare settings within RCT. The team provides guidance and training along with administrating a grant scheme.

The Officer explained that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the childcare sector across Wales has been significant and the Council is incredibly proud of all the Childcare providers in RCT who have continued to deliver safe , quality care for children and their families throughout the last year in a professional and

compassionate manner.

The Temporary Service Director 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and Transformation updated Members on the effects of the pandemic. It was explained that data from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) suggests that 18 registered settings permanently closed in RCT during the last year, the vast majority of these being childminders and those that remain have adapted their settings physically to comply with protective and preventative measures required.

Officers explained that in response to the national lockdown in March, Welsh Government instructed all childcare settings in Wales to close for all children , other than for those who were deemed vulnerable or of critical workers . Members acknowledged that Welsh Government established the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme. This provided eligible children aged from birth to four years with fully funded childcare if there were no other caring options available to the families. The Education and Inclusion Services childcare team took lead in this scheme with support from the Resilient Families Service. It was highlighted that 717 children accessed the scheme from March to August 2020, including 95 vulnerable children. 102 childcare settings participated in the scheme at various points including three council run Flying Start setting.

Members were provided with a summary of the support under the following headings:

- Guidance and Support;
- Stakeholder feedback from the sector;
- PPE Provision;
- Financial Support;
- Positive Covid-19 Cases – Impact on Setting;and
- Attendance of children at childcare settings;

The Chair thanked the Officer for the Report and opened up the meeting for Members questions and observations.

Members asked clarity in respect of communication with the childcare settings as he was aware that some parents were having issues relating to contacting the Resilient Families Services. Officers explained that there had not been any issues with regards to accessing the childcare settings however Resilient Families Service is a different area and there may be some confusion in this regard.

The Member requested clarity on the no smoking policy in school ground and wanted to know if signage was being made available to all childcare settings to discourage any social gathering for parents etc.

In response the Officers explained the protocols that have been put in place.

A Member asked for clarity on what measure were going to be put in place once the restrictions were lifted to deal with decline of registered childminder provision when children go back to school, and parents go back to work. Also the Member asked what financial support was available for the sector going forward especially those whose grant application were unsuccessful.

The Officers explained that with regards to grant funding and the unsuccessful applications this was down to the applicants not being able to provide all the

required evidence.

Members continued to discuss the report in great detail and before proceeding to the recommendation the Chair invited the Cabinet Member for Education and Inclusion to comment.

The Cabinet Member thanked the officers and Members for their time and effort that had been put into tonight debate and congratulated the Service on the work it has carried out of the last twelve months along with all the childcare provider who have continued to deliver a safe quality of care for children and families across the County Borough.

Members RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the content of the report
- Receive any updating information in due course.

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

The Chair thanked Officers and Members for their contribution to the meeting and reminded Members that the next meeting would take place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021 where the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service would be in attendance to provide an overview of the service.

**This meeting closed at 7.10 pm**

**CLLR S REES-OWEN  
CHAIR.**