

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

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr J Fish, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Officers in attendance:-

Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Mr D Williams, Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service
Ms C Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion
Ms C Edwards, Head of Service Transformation And Data Systems

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor W Lewis

71 Welcome & Apologies

The Chair welcomed Members and Officer to the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

Apologies were received from the following, County Borough Councillor G Stacey, Co-opted Voting Members Ms R Nicholls and Mr L Patterson, It was also noted that Councillor S Powell would be leaving the meeting early and that due to work commitments Councillor H Fychan would be late attending.

72 Declaration of Interest

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

73 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 27th January 2021 as an

accurate reflection of the meeting.

74 Matters Arising

Minute No: 49 - The Chair informed Members that the Cabinet and Scrutiny Chair engagement Session had yet to take place and would report back to Members once it had been confirmed.

Minute No 50- The Chair informed Members that the data in respect of digital learners and the FSM data would be presented to Members as part of a termly update from officers going forward.

75 Consultation Links

The Democratic Services Officer referenced the open consultation links that are available on both the Welsh Government Website and the RCTCBC Website and reminded Members of the procedure that is in place to participate if they so wish.

The Chair reminded Members that on behalf of the Committee the Chair along with Officers input participated in the Welsh Government Consultation in respect of the School Improvement Guidance and explained that as soon as any information has been received Members will be updated with the findings.

Members **RESLOVED** to Note the Consultations links provided.

76 Update on the Implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act (2018) in RCTCBC

The Head of Inclusion Services explained that the purpose of the report was to provide Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with an update on the implementation of the ALNET (Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal) Act (2018) along with providing Members with information on the implications of the new legislation for the Council from a local perspective.

Members were reminded that considerable changes are planned in Wales in relation to the statutory provision required to meet the needs of learners within Special Educational Needs (SEN) / Additional Learning Needs (ALN) with the implementation of new legislation, the ALNET Act (2018), in September 2021. The ALNET (Wales) Act 2018 (The 2018 Act) received Royal Assent in January 2018.

The Head of Inclusion Services continued and explained that the new statutory framework is underpinned by three overarching objectives:

- A unified legislated frame work to support all children of compulsory school age or below with additional learning needs (ALN) and to support young people with ALN who are in school or further Education (FE);
- An integrated , collaborative process of assessment, planning and monitoring of support provided to ALN learners which facilitates early , timely and effective interventions; and
- A fair and transparent system for providing information and advice, and

for resolving concerns and appeals.

The Officer went on to explain that the new ALN system is expected to be implemented over a three year period. The implementation period is expected to run from September 2021 to August 2024. However Welsh Government is yet to publish its revised implementation timetable following its decision to delay its original implementation over three years from September 2020.

Members were provided with an overview from a local context, it was explained that Local Authorities and all those who work with children and young people with SEN must ensure that they continue to comply with duties placed upon them by the Education Act 1996 and continue to have regard to the SEN Code of Practice for Wales (2002).

It was highlighted to Members that during the three year implementation period from September 2021 local authorities will need to implement the new ALN system in parallel to the current SEN system which will gradually be phased out. The Officer continued and explained that to support its implementation the act introduces three new statutory roles which took effect from 4th January 2021 these are:

- **Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo) ;**
- **Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer (EYALNLO);**
- **Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO).**

Members were also informed that Welsh Government is providing financial assistance to support the implementation of the Act through a £20M package funding. A substantial proportion of funding is being used to support workforce development.

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

A Member thanked the Officer for the report and asked for clarity in relation to what the local authority has done so far with regards to preparation for the implementation of the act and what as an authority is still left to do. The Member gave some examples “there is a statutory requirement that ALNCo’s were to be in position by January “has this happened and also governor training what has been done to ensure governors are updated.

In response the Officer explained that governors have been made aware of timescales of the implementation and governor training has been provided. The Officer highlighted that there was a regional event that took place recently where by 300 governors participated, there is also written information available for governors to consider and the Central South Consortium have information on the Hwb.

The Officer continued to explain that a robust professional learning programme for ALNCo’s has been put in place by the local authority in conjunction with the ALN transformational lead. This includes a series of ANCo forum events and cluster-based working groups. The Officer continued to explain various ways the authority are planning to support the implementation of the new legislation through the use of grant funding. The Member thanked Officers for the response and highlighted that identifying the development needs for schools was crucial to the success of the above..

Members raised questions in relation to the timing of the implementation and how Head teachers and ALNCOs were coping especially with situation of change during Covid and the shift to blended learning etc.

In response the Officer explained that Welsh Government has stated that there would be no further delay and the phased implementation will need to be delivered. The Officer highlighted that it is pleasing to note the positive engagement of ALNCOs in the online ALNCO forums.

Further questions were put forward around possible delays to referrals from access and inclusion services due to the reforms. Members felt that it would be beneficial for the Committee to receive a progress report so that the Committee could understand what the service has done so far, how the service has managed the implementation and any identified priorities for development, including consideration of how the Committee could support moving forward.

In respect of staff's wellbeing Members wanted to know what mechanisms are being put in place to support school staff who are leading on implementing the new system, especially when considering the various pressures that they may face. Members also asked how best practice is shared between schools to support schools who need additional support and guidance to adjust to the changes.

The Officer explained that there were no anticipated delays in respect of referrals. In respect of wellbeing, it was explained that Headteachers will monitor staff's workloads and there are processes and support mechanisms in place to support staff, including ALNCO's. The Officer informed Members of the work carried out in respect of best practice and reported that all schools had been required to undertake an ALN Readiness Audit to identify priorities for improvement at a school, cluster and local authority level. This work will be supported collaboratively with CSC and the Transformational Lead.

After further scrutiny Members RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the content of the report ;
- Receive a progress report at a future meeting
- Receive a report from the Transformational Lead

77 School Admissions Annual Report

The Head of Service Transformation presented Members with a summary of the annual school admissions process. Members were reminded that a report was provided for the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in February 2020, which detailed the Council's school admissions process. The Officer continued and explained that the report before them provides Members with an update on developments within school admissions in the last 12 months along with planned development for the next round of admissions.

Members were reminded of process in place for routine admissions. It was explained that in September individual letters are annually sent to parent/ carer(s) of every pupil registered in nursery, year 2 in an infant school and year

6. The letter details their User Identification Number and application process that they need to undertake to apply for a school place for the following September. It was also explained that the information is also provided to the Welsh Medium primary schools in Merthyr Tydfil and two schools in the Vale of Glamorgan for children who plan to attend schools in RCT (e.g. Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywyn and Y Pant Comprehensive School).

In relation to application made for academic year 2020 /21 the local authority processed 8782 applications of which 7188 (i.e. 81.85%) were applied for on line. There were 1302 pre- nursery, 2352 nursery, 2534 reception, 71 junior and 2523 year 7 applications.

Members were also reminded that within RCT there are 8 voluntary aided (church) schools and the administration for these schools have been formulated by the schools governing bodies and admission requests are approved by the relevant governing bodies.

Members were pleased to see that of the 7310 applications made for nursery, reception, junior and year 7 children 98.95% were offered their first preference. Members also considered the pre- nursery figures.

Members were also presented with information in relation to admissions for the year 2020/21. In respect of the all through schools Members were informed that children already attending an all through school, do not need to apply for a secondary school, unless the wish to attend a different secondary school. Children will still have to apply for a pre-nursery, nursery and reception place at the relevant time. Members were given information in relation to timetabling for 2021/2022, waiting lists, admissions at other times, Welsh Medium Transfers and special educational needs.

The Officer continued and presented Members with information in respect of the Fair Access Protocol this ensures that appropriate protocols are in place for admitting children considered hard to place so that unplaced children, especially the most vulnerable are offered suitable school places promptly. It was explained that in the academic year 2019/2020, 40 children were brought forward to discuss and placements made. Of the 40, 16 were managed moves, 24 were parental in year- transfers.

After scrutinising the information within the report Members presented Officers with questions and observations in respect of school admissions, A Member ask question in respect of the in year transfer and the number of FSM pupils for 2019/20, the Member asked if there had any specific reason for this high percentage figure for this. Officers explained that if required I can look again at the breakdown however we are limited to what we can breakdown. Members continued to question for what is procedures are in place for new developments

Following further discussion Members RESOLVED to:

- Receive additional information when presenting the report at a future meeting.

78 **Unauthorised Absence & Post -16 Attendance report**

The Service Director Legal Services explained to Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee the purpose behind the report put before them.

It was explained that at the meeting of the Audit Committee on the 20th October 2020 Members were presented with 'Finalised Audit Assignment Report' where a number of priorities were identified relating to 'Attendance, Referrals and Intervention' and post 16 Planning and Funding.

It was explained that after consideration of the report the Audit Committee agreed that Officers from the Education and Inclusion Services attend the Audit Committee meeting in November to discuss the findings as a result of this discussion Members of the Audit Committee felt that issues regarding attendance and post 16 attendance should be referred to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee for further consideration.

The Service Director Legal Services introduced the Head of the Attendance and Wellbeing Service who continued to present the report. It was explained that the main concerns from the report surrounded unauthorised absence levels for statutory school aged children and for post 16 settings, settings not always maintaining class registers for academic lessons as well as Key Skills/ Welsh Baccalaureate lessons.

Members were presented with tables which showed Primary and Secondary schools absence rates for Members to consider. Members were also informed that data setting for 2019/20 and 2020/2021 we not complete due to the Covid 19 pandemic. It was explained that as expected during this period, absence levels have increased drastically at the onset of the pandemic and subsequently in this academic year. The Officer continued and explained that various changes have been made to coding guidance during this time from Welsh Government. In respect of the increase in unauthorised absences at both phases officers highlighted that this seems to be a consequence of parental/ pupil anxiety and refusal to return to school , where this refusal has continued schools have begun to unauthorise absences where there are no mitigating circumstances.

The Head of the attendance and Wellbeing Services outlined the work that has been done within the service to support the key areas. All schools are on a three day rota for visits and staff will attempt to establish contact to determine the reason behind absences/ non engagement and work with families to support them.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing presented Members with an update in respect of post 16 attendance practices. It was explained that the original audit into this subject was not attendance focused, however a concern raised during the audit that attendance registers were not always completed in academic lessons as well as key skills/ Welsh baccalaureate lesson and learners were leaving site at various times without being challenged.

It was explained that post 16 attendance is not statutory therefore we do not

ordinarily report on attendance at this level within annual attendance progress reports and similarly there is no Welsh Government requirement to collect data for post 16 learners.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing continued and explained that there is still a need to maintain safeguarding practices. Schools with Post 16 provision have been encouraged to ensure safeguarding practices are considered and pupils adhere to these practices. The schools and pupils have been reminded that any Post 16 learner leaving the school site must sign –out and unexplained absences should be acted upon.

In conclusion the officer explained that unauthorised absence levels have increased during this time however this is expected as settings have responded to changes that have been outlined in the report. The Covid 19 pandemic has changed the expectation of settings for post 16 learners to remain on site in libraries etc. The Officer continued and commented that hopefully going forward when educational settings return to more normal operating procedures and the guidance around risk of transmission reduces then we can revisit schools to consider this aspect.

Finally the Head of Attendance and Wellbeing highlighted to Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee that the service will work with internal audit to consider an audit aimed at Post 16 attendance practices to determine where further improvements have been made.

The Chair thanked officers and before opening up for questions and observation Members asked when the Service would carry out the said audit, it was explained that this would happen as soon as we are able and revisit at the start of the next academic year.

Members thanked the Officer for the report and put forward their questions, a Member asked if Coleg Y Cymoedd has experienced the same as other Post - 16 provision. The Officer explained that Coleg Y Cymoedd is run differently to school provision and students are only expected to be on college site during their lessons. The Officer continued and explained that the concern of the audit was that there was no record of pupils leaving the school site at 6th Form levels.

Another Member asked if the concerns around a specific setting in 4.1 of the report relating to high level of unauthorised absences in that one setting had been address as this was a concern for the Committee. In response the Officer informed Members of the family engagement pilot scheme that had been put in place in schools and this is showing a lot of improvements in that area.

The Vice Chair of the Committee asked whether the Service had considered looking at digital platforms in respect of signing in and out of school which could be used as a safeguarding process. Officer replied and stated that this may be away we could look to take this forward.

After further consideration of the Report Members RESOLVED to:

- Receive the findings of the internal audit in respect to attendance and make any recommendations to Cabinet in the future;
- Reconvene the FPN Working group to address any extra information before concluding it findings;
- To consider the digital platforms for recording attendance in

- respect of post 16 pupils;
- Provide the Audit Committee with an update from the Committee after consideration of the Internal audit of the attendance for post 16 pupil.

79 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair thanked both Members and Officers for their time and contribution to the meeting and explained that the next meeting would be held on the 24th April 2021.

This meeting closed at 6.55 pm

**CLLR S REES-OWEN
CHAIR.**