

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, 21 April 2021 at 5.00 pm .

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

Councillor J Edwards (Chair)

Councillor J Brencher Councillor A Calvert
Councillor M Griffiths 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:-

Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Mr P Mee, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Ms A Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor W Lewis

80 Welcome and Apologies

The Vice Chair Councillor J Edwards explained to Members that she would be Chairing the Committee this evening due to the Chair having work commitments. The Vice Chair read a statement out from Councillor Rees – Owen thanking Members and Officers for all their hard work throughout the year which been challenging due to the Pandemic.

Apologies were received from County Borough Councillors S. Rees Owen, S Evans, H Fychan and G. Stacey.

The Chair explained to Members of the Committee that Agenda Item 7 would not be presented at this evenings meeting due to unforeseen circumstances, it was explained that the report would be presented at a future meeting in the next Municipal Year.

81 Declaration of Interest

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

82 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 03/02/2021 and 24/02/2021 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

83 Consultation Links

The Senior Democratic Services Officer referenced the consultation links, which were available through the 'RCT Scrutiny' website. The Officer 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

84 UPDATE OF EDUCATION'S LATEST POSITION IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services thanked Members for the opportunity to provide an update on the most recent changes in Education during the spring term in response to the ever changing COVID-19 position.

The Director of Education reminded Members of the previous actions taken by the Welsh Government and continued to explain that on the 5th February, the Education Minister announced that schools would begin a phased return for foundation phase from 22nd February. Learners in nursery, Year 1 and Year 2 were able to return to their school setting by the end of that week.

Members were informed that on the 3rd March, the Education Minister announced that further year groups would be able to return to school from the 15th March. The Director of Education explained that the following arrangements applied to all schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

- All foundation phase learners (i.e., nursery, reception, Year 1 and Year 2) continued to attend school throughout the phased introduction of new year groups back in to school.
- Arrangements for the phased return of learners in Key Stage 2 (i.e., Years 3, 4, 5 and 6) commenced on the 15th of March 2021.
- Arrangements for the phased return of learners in Years 11 and 13 commenced on the 15th of March 2021.
- Flexibility was offered to secondary schools, all-through schools and PRUs to provide access to the onsite education provision for learners in Years 10 and 12 from the 15th of March 2021 onwards.
- Learners in Years 7, 8 and 9 were to access at least one check-in on school premises prior to the Easter break.
- Vulnerable learners and the children of critical workers continued to access face to face education in school until their year group returned to school.
- Remote learning continued to be provided for self-isolating learners and those year groups not accessing face to face learning in school.

Members were presented with an overview of the remote learning within the

County Borough. It was explained that schools across Rhondda Cynon Taf have implemented a variety of remote learning options and opportunities and with support from the Council's school improvement officers. CSC has also provided comprehensive professional learning opportunities.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services also updated Members on the work that has been carried out to ensure no learner is digitally excluded. It was explained that from the start of the pandemic, digitally excluded learners who did not have access to an appropriate internet connected device and/or internet connection have been supported with devices to engage in online learning activities. The Director highlighted that an audit of digitally excluded learners was refreshed this academic year to identify any new families that have moved into the area or were experiencing challenges in accessing education remotely. Data showed a total of 2,868 devices were provided to DELs in 2019/2020 academic year and a further 2,570 were provided to newly identified DELs in NCY 1 – 13 between January 2021 and March 2021. Members were pleased to see that Welsh Government will make a further 4,456 Chromebooks available to Rhondda Cynon Taf in May 2021 and the plan will be to prioritise further learners that are eligible for free school meals.

Members were also presented with an update in respect of the following areas:

- Examinations
- Business Continuity Plans
- Health and Safety
- Managing Confirmed Cases
- Lateral Flow Testing
- Attendance
- Partnership Working
- Free School Meal Provision
- Breakfast Club Provision
- Childcare Settings

In conclusion, the Director of Education and Inclusion Services informed Members that going forward a termly update report could be provided to Members to encapsulate all of the key changes and the wide-ranging documentation sent to schools to ensure that they are kept abreast of national and local changes.

The Chair thanked the Officer for a very comprehensive report and opened up the meeting for Members questions and observation.

A Member asked a question regarding the Lateral Flow Test and asked if there is any data available on the take up of tests across schools.

The Member also asked where the service is in terms of a recovery plan, and if there is any plans to extend term times to enable pupils to catch up during the summer. Also, from a governance point of view are there any suggestion for returning to schools in the near future for hands on support for schools as at present the engagement with schools are being done remotely.

In response to the take up of the lateral flow test, the Director explained that at present there is no data collated as the use of the lateral flow test is not compulsory. Officers could review the data we have and could make this available to Members if required.

In respect of plan for recovery, the Director highlighted that many statutory regulations have been temporarily suspended due to the pandemic and this makes it difficult to plan ahead. However, the Directorate is currently self-evaluating which will help with forward strategic planning. It was also explained that the impact of Covid on outcomes is being assessed at a school level. The Director continued to explain the key priorities that the Authority is working on to ensure our schools are effectively supported to manage the situation moving forward.

In respect of governance, the Officer explained that this will continue virtually, and engagement levels had been good

In reference to moderation processes, Members raised the importance of consistency of approaches particularly in relation to year 6 learners. The Member also asked a question in respect of ventilation within our schools, especially in older school buildings where space seemed to be area of concern. The Member referenced the strategic planning and asked if there had been any consideration to adapting the Swedish model whereby formal lesson times have been reduced and summer outdoor classrooms have been their main focus. Performance and wellbeing has shown to be better as a result of these approaches. The ALN responsibility for teachers is a concern and some staff are thinking of leaving the Authority because of the pressures.

Officers replied, with regards to the ALNET Act there are many changes ahead and that we have been preparing for these changes for a number of years. It was suggested that it would be beneficial if the Transformation Lead came to the committee to update Members on the work that is being done both nationally and regionally. The Director explained that we were fortunate in RCT to have high levels of specialist provision. In respect of ventilation, the Officer explained there has been an exercise carried out within our schools in relation to this, and funding had been received from Welsh Government to improve school buildings so that risks could be minimised e.g. Many schools across RCT have received funding for canopies to extend the outside learning environment. Outdoor learning has been occurring extensively in our schools and forest schools' programmes are in place in some settings. The Officers continued to highlight that the SHEP (School Holiday Enrichment Programme) will be in place to support vulnerable families throughout the summer.

In respect of moderation, Officers updated Members what is in place for schools to prepare learning for transition. Schools have effective tracking systems throughout the County Borough, and this ensures that reliable data is provided on transition.

Further questions and observations were put forward and after a lengthy discussion Member RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the content of the report;
- Receive an update from the ALNET Transformational Lead on the work in place for the implementation of the Act;
- Receive a report updating Members on the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP)

The Director of Children's Services thanked Members for the opportunity to provide the Committee with an overview of the response by Children's Services to the continuing impact of the pandemic, recovery and contingency planning.

The Director of Children's Services reminded Members of the previous reports Members have received in recent months and continued to explain that since December the service has moved forward with some focussed improvement and development work during this period and is beginning to respond to the adjustments to restrictions at the exit of the lockdown.

The Director continued to highlight that there continues to be uncertainty about the specific mid and long term impact of the Pandemic for vulnerable families, however given the rate of referrals and the conditions families face which in many cases are understood to compound adversity, the service is sadly projecting increasing demand, whilst working to connect as many families as possible to early help or preventative services.

The Director provided an overview for Members to get a better understand of the Service areas under the following headings:

- Children's Services Critical Approach;
- How Are we Doing;
- Service Improvement;

Members were also provided with information in respect of critical business services which include:

- Access to Services and Family Support;
- Safeguarding Duties;
- Children Looked After; and
- Youth Offending

After concluding her report the Director welcomed Members questions and observations.

A Member thanked the officer for her report and asked for clarity in relation to 4.7 of the report that Children's Services have terminated the commissioned external resources to increase social work capacity in the Intensive Intervention Service. Also the Member reference section 5 of the report and wanted to understand the reason behind the decrease in new child protection registrations as there is an increase in domestic violence which would surely effect the safety and wellbeing of children.

In response the Director explained that social work vacancies and retention has been a problem across the region and the Authority had commissioned outside agencies to increase capacity, this had worked in the initial stages however the provider could not continue to provide a good enough service and therefore the contract had ended. Recruitment is a challenge and work is being carried to address this at present.

With regards to the Child Protection Register the Director informed the Member of the processes that are in place. It was explained that there is a 10% increase at the front door and some with complex issues. It was also explained that not all cases end up on the register as there are care and support packages that are put in place to support families and this may be enough support and placing on

the Child Protection Register would not always be necessary. However we will need to keep a close eye going forward.

Other Members put forward questions regarding care leavers' and what support would be provided the service for care leavers especially in the situation were are in at present, also questions were raised over data relating to Children Looked After and asked for clarity on the 25% increase in the number of care leavers and asked if this is due to the age of the young person or were there any other factors. The Director explained that the increase represent numbers that have become 18, also the number of child been adopted. The Director also highlighted that reunification of families is also a factor and great deal of intervention work with families has meant child have been able to return to family units.

Further questions were put forward and after in depth discussion Members RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the information within the report

86 Youth Engagement and Participation Service: An Overview of Support and Provision During Covid -19

Members RESOLVED to defer the item to a future meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

87 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair thanked Members and Officer for participating in the Meeting and wished them well.

88 Urgent Business

Resolved to note there was no urgent items.

This meeting closed at 6.45 pm

**CLLR S REES-OWEN
CHAIR.**