

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday,
16 February 2022 at 5.00 pm at the Virtual.

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

Councillor S. Rees-Owen (Chair)

Councillor J Edwards	Councillor J Brencher
Councillor J Barton	Councillor A Calvert
Councillor A Fox	Councillor E Griffiths
Councillor S Powell	Councillor G Stacey
Councillor S Trask	Councillor D Williams
Mr J Fish	Mr L Patterson

Officers in attendance

Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Ms A Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services
Mr P Mee, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Ms A Richards – Service Director 21st Century Schools and Transformation
Ms J Allen – Children and Young Peoples Service Manager
Ms C Jones – Head of Inclusion
Ms S Corcoran- Head of Achievement and Wellbeing
Ms C Seery – Central South Consortium
Mr A Hurley – Central South Consortium
Mr S Davies – Central South Consortium
Ms A Theaker – Eye to Eye Counselling
Ms S Daniel – Principal Scrutiny Officer

Apologies

Cllr S Evans
Cllr M Powell
Cllr S Morgans

12 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct the following declarations were made

Cllr S Trask – personal interest on an item on the agenda, not be disclosed due to sensitive information. With agreement from the monitoring officer information relating to Cllr Trask's personal interest was accepted as sensitive information, pursuant to paragraph 16(1) of the Code of Conduct and as such obligations under paragraph 11 (disclosure of personal interests) to disclose such information are replaced with an obligation to disclose the existence of a personal interest only.

Cllr J Edwards – Personal interest in item 6 as it refers to her employer and board of trustees

Cllr Brencher – Personal Interest in item 6 as a School Governor

Mr Jeff Fish – Personal Interest in item 5 as Regional Leader for Governance at the Central South Consortium

13 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 8 December 2021 as an accurate reflection of the meeting, following amendment to

14 Consultation Links

The Scrutiny Officer advised members of the consultations open should they wish to make a contribution individually or as a Committee

15 Information Reports

The reports detailed below were submitted for member's information. Members were reminded that if they had any queries on the reports to contact Democratic Services who would follow up

[Breakfast Clubs](#)

[Seren](#)

[FPN Working Group report](#)

RESOLVED: Members noted the reports

16 Central South Consortium School Improvement Support

The Committee welcomed representatives from the Central South Consortium who were invited to provide an overview of the work of the Central South Consortium (CSC) and to update Members with the contribution of the CSC, working in partnerships with the local authority to raising standards in schools across Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT).

The report details the work of the consortium for the academic year September 2020/2021 and the financial year April 2020 to April 2021. The global pandemic caused schools to be repurposed in March 2020 requiring CSC to amend their approach to supporting schools.

Members heard that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Welsh Government cancelled most of the statutory data collections for both 2020 and also for 2021. The publication of performance data on "My Local School" is also suspended, with the publication of the national categorisation also being suspended for 2021-22 due to the processes not being held for the academic years 2020-21 and 2021-22.

The representatives continued that all Estyn inspections were suspended in March 2020; therefore, no analysis is included in this report as no inspections took place between September 2020 and July 2021. However, the report reflects on Estyn follow up visits undertaken with RCT schools.

The consortium [business plan](#) for April 2020 to March 2021 has five priorities:

- Develop a high quality education profession;
- Develop highly effective leadership to facilitate working collaboratively to raise standards;
- Develop strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and wellbeing;
- Continue to develop robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements supporting a self-improving system;
- Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of CSC.

Members heard that the Consortium used a categorisation process to identify the schools in need of support using both data and judgement of leadership and capacity to improve. During 2020/2021, the consortium continued to work closely on behalf of the local authority to monitor the progress of the schools in need. Of the 115 schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf, 16 schools required enhanced level support

Members were then taken through section 8 of the report that detailed the delivery of a range of national leadership programmes in order to enhance current and future leadership and to provide a comprehensive pathway which were detailed in the report.

Officers were thanked for the comprehensive report and overview and members questions were welcomed

A Member asked for an update on the readiness for the new curriculum in September.

The representative replied that whilst the journey throughout 2022 gives schools the actions needed to complete to be ready for the curriculum and it was not intended for it to be a tick box exercise and support is being provided for schools to identify their vision for the curriculum that they want. She added that the minister will meet with head teachers shortly to reassure the system that September isn't a finish line and very much a starting point. But we will need to ensure they are legally compliant for September. CSC will send a survey to schools after half term which will lead to an update report to Local Authorities who will be informed of the outcomes.

A Member asked if there was any commonality of issues experienced by schools. The representatives replied that common issues do tend to be around Leadership. She added that past performance is key to addressing future challenge and performance and self-evaluation will be key drivers leading in to Estyn reviews

The Director Education and Improvement added that we ensure robust information sharing protocols are in place and gather holistic data. We want to ensure the good schools remain good and celebrate their successes.

The Chair asked about Leadership challenges and shortages within Welsh medium schools and how this is being addressed as a long standing issue. The representative replied that discussions were continually ongoing how they better prepare and reassured that there are a number of people speaking Welsh,

coming into the profession. She added they are working with Welsh Government on a 10 year plan to increase the capacity of leaders and teachers to ensure its future is sustainable and to ensure the profession is recognised and gets the respect it is deserved

A member wished to place on record the Committees thanks to the improvement partners for their contributions to get our schools to where they are and the strength in their leadership is what is needed.

A Member noted that a Regional oracy and vocabulary strategies and approaches were shared through e-learning programme and asked if there was focus on speaking and listening.

The representative replied that the literacy team have ensured schools have access to Voice 21 modules to provide a central focus to what they are doing in lessons. She added that many schools had taken this up and were now focussing on this to improve literacy.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** to note the report

17 School Based Counselling

The Head of Inclusion presented a report to provide Members with an overview of the provision and effectiveness of counselling services for children and young people in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) during the academic year 2020/21 and to inform Elected Members of current plans to ensure ongoing provision that meets the needs of service users.

Members heard details of the number of young people who completed counselling during the four-year period from 2017/18 to 2020/21. The information shows an increase in the number of children and young people aged 11-18 completing counselling support in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20. However, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic during academic year 2019/20, whereby lengthy periods of school closure resulted in a significant reduction in referrals from schools, it is not possible to make direct data comparisons between the last two academic years and was therefore more accurate to provide members with data from the last four years.

Following a significant reduction in the number of children and young people being referred for counselling during 2019/20, largely due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is encouraging to note that there was an overall increase in the number of children and young people referred for counselling during academic year 2020/21 compared to 2019/20. This, in turn, resulted in an increase in the number of children and young people who completed counselling during 2020/21 compared to 2019/20.

In September 2019, Eye to Eye counselling services were extended to include primary children aged 7-10 years (years 3-5). Baseline data established in 2019/20 indicates a notable increase in the number of children in this cohort completing counselling in 2020/21, together with a significant increase in the number of sessions delivered.

It is hoped that the male engagement project undertaken by Eye to Eye through the use of additional Welsh Government grant funding during academic year 2021/22 will provide an in-depth understanding of the reasons that males are reluctant to engage in counselling and enable the local authority and Eye to Eye to address this issue and identify potential new approaches to support the

emotional and mental health of young males.

Despite the availability of grant funding to enhance the level of school-based counselling provision on offer to children and young people, Eye to Eye has faced significant challenges in recruiting additional qualified counsellors on temporary short-term contracts to fulfil this additional requirement. Eye to Eye reports that this is a common issue across Wales. This issue has been highlighted to Welsh Government in all-Wales meetings. Whilst additional grant funding is always welcomed, the short-term nature of grants does not enable the local authority to undertake long-term strategic planning to develop effective enhanced school-based counselling provision.

A Member thanked officers for the positive report and stated it is interesting to hear that it is easier to persuade younger boys to come forward for therapy. She asked if there is scope to adjust eligibility criteria and asked if it needs to be different for boys and girls.

The Head of Inclusion replied that many of the children who are referred has increased in the age group. She added they are looking at the data that they have to consider the fact that the number of referrals has increased overall too and to ensure that the service is still meeting everyone's needs and pinpointing any pressure points on the service. She also confirmed that the Counselling service also provides a Welsh speaking service so referrals from a Welsh medium school are met.

A Member stated that she was very concerned about the under 5s age group and asked what strategies are in place to overcome this challenge.

The Head of Inclusion replied that as we move forward post pandemic, the service will engage more with younger children on face to face basis. She added that whilst delivery online has been effective for 19-25 cohort and 11-18 younger children need a play element approach to therapy, and remote therapy is unlikely to be as effective as face to face. The representative from Eye to Eye Counselling reassured members that face to face Counselling has been re-established for age group 3-5 in each RCT area.

RESOLVED: Members noted the report

18 Statutory Play Sufficiency Assessment

The Children and Young Peoples Service Manager presented a report to Members to seek endorsement from members for the Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) and action plan to be submitted to the Welsh Government by 30th June 2022, as per statutory obligation placed upon the Council in the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 and the Play Sufficiency Assessment (Wales) Regulations 2012.

The preparation of the Play Sufficiency Audit is a statutory duty of the Council. As well as establishing a baseline of provision, the Play Sufficiency Assessment enables the following:

- Identification of gaps in information, provision, service delivery and policy implementation;
- Support the establishment of evidence to give an indication of distance

- travelled in relation to play sufficiency;
- Highlight potential ways of addressing issues relating to partnership working;
- The input and involvement of all partners increasing levels of knowledge and understanding;
- A monitoring system which will involve and improve communication between professionals;
- The identification of good practice examples;
- Increased levels of partnerships in assessing sufficient play opportunities;
- The identification of actions for the Securing Play Sufficiency Action Plan which accompanies the Play Sufficiency Assessment.

The Children and Young Peoples Service Manager continued that the findings of the PSA have informed the action plan for 2022-25 to ensure that work undertaken next year addresses the shortfalls in provision identified by the 2022 PSA. The key priority areas for 2022-25 are to improve the gathering and use of data to target play opportunities; Increase the amount of Welsh medium play provision; to roll out WG's quality assurance framework; and to promote play opportunities across the county borough via online platforms.

A member commented that there is a red action for welsh play providers and asked for clarification and what is needed to resolve this. She added that parents have asked about this as currently there is no welsh medium holiday provision.

The Children and Young Peoples Service Manager clarified that the PSA does not include holiday schemes or any childcare provision and it was strictly just play opportunities. She added there has been a challenge around being able to commission Welsh Medium play activity during term and holiday time. Part of the plan moving forward is for the development team to work with organisations to upskill to learn welsh to enable them to deliver through the medium of welsh or assisting welsh language organisations to become play providers across all areas for RCT

In response to a query regarding funding for the provision the Children and Young Peoples Service Manager advised that funding has allowed the service to put on far more opportunities in RCT, which was very much needed after a difficult 15 months for children and families. Being able to maintain the activities during the winter has been challenging, in addition to restrictions.

RESOLVED: Members endorsed the Play Sufficiency Assessment and Action Plan to be submitted to Welsh Government

19 Children Looked After Prevention Strategy

The Service Director Children's Services presented the report to members which provided assurance to Members that Children's Services are reviewing and improving services that have impact in safely avoiding child-parent separation.

Members heard that an evaluation of the existing looked after children strategy took place during 2021. The evaluation was informed by a rapid research review, secondary data evaluation, a deep dive of 70 relevant cases, and focus groups. Overall, the evaluation found that the first looked after children prevention

strategy had delivered important changes that have enabled the service to make progress

A Member expressed her concern at the increasing rate of children coming in to care or placed on the child protection register and asked what strategic approach the Authority can make such as intervention strategies.

The Service Director responded that they are looking at how they can break those patterns and cycles and offer a systemic approach and advised how difficult it can be in reaching these parents. She added that this was the primary reason for the development of MAGU to help earlier on in pregnancy, to look for example at parental wellbeing. The evidence points to missed opportunities to reach parents at the early stage. In addition, she added that the RPB and adult mental health and wellbeing programme, also feed in to these evidence based preventions.

A Member asked about the support offered to parents after their children have been taken in to care. Is the relationship and support with them ongoing. She also commented that she was pleased to hear a Welsh Government announcement that care leavers on a basic income will be further supported

The Service Director stated that notwithstanding the difficulty in maintaining that relationship with the parent, it needs to become a comprehensive offer. The Service area are trialling a parent advocacy support service to support those who have care experience of their own. We also have a contract with Barnardos reflect service.

Following discussions it was **RESOLVED** to note the report

20 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair thanked all officers and Members for attending Committee and paid particular thanks to Mr Jeff Fish, co-opted Member as this was his last meeting. She thanked him for his dedication and support to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee over the last 13 years and that his contributions had been invaluable.

21 Urgent Business

None

Cllr S Rees-Owen