



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, 16 March 2022 at 5.00 pm

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

Councillor J Edwards	Councillor J Brencher
Councillor A Calvert	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor M Powell	Councillor G Stacey
Councillor S Trask	Councillor D Williams

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr M Veale
Ms R Lydon
Mr L Patterson

Officers in attendance:-

Paul Mee – Group Director Children’s and Community Services
Gaynor Davies – Director Education and Inclusion Services
Zoe Lancelot - Head Of Community Wellbeing and Resilience
Mr Paul Nicholls – Director Legal Services
Catrin Edwards - Head Of Service Transformation and Data Systems
Daniel Williams - Head Of Attendance and Wellbeing Service
Christian Hanagan – Service Director Democratic Services and Communication
Sarah Daniel – Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

22 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair took the opportunity to welcome Members into the Committee Meeting, with a particular welcome to Co-opted Members, Mr M Veale and Ms R Lydon.

Apologies of absence were received from County Borough Councillor and Chairperson, S Rees-Owen. Vice Chair, County Borough Councillor J Edwards took the Chair for the meeting.

23 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Councils Code of Conduct the following declaration of personal interest was made:

Co-Opted Member Mr M Veale – Personal interest as he sits on the Audit

Committee for Hafod Housing Association.

24 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 16th February 2022 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

25 Consultation Links

The Scrutiny Officer advised Members of the consultations open should they wish to make a contribution individually or as a committee.

26 Resilient Families Service

The Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience presented the report to Members on the performance of the Resilient Families Service during the financial years 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22 to date.

Members were directed to section 4 of the report; It was advised that the Resilient Families Programme was established in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) on the 1st January 2018; the programme was aimed to deliver timely and effective services to vulnerable families across RCT, and demonstrate the Councils commitments to the wider early intervention and prevention agenda embedded in the principles of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, and the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The Resilient Families Service (RFS) adopts a collaborative and integrated approach in co-ordinating the contribution of a wide range of partners in delivering the right support at the right time to the right families and ensuring that families remain central to delivering any services. The service delivery model employs a strength based, relational approach to working with families that offers practical support to remove barriers to positive change. The Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience advised Members that the Service adopts a proactive approach in assessing and improving the level of resilience families and how to deal with challenging matters. The Service sits within the Children's Services structure and is Social Worker led, comprising of seven core teams which contribute to the delivery model. As part of RFS family assessment process, families within the programme go through a 7-step process until a case is closed once families have established resilience.

The Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience directed Members to section 5 of the report, which details the effects of Covid-19 towards the Service. Members were informed that the Pandemic resulted in increased pressure for family support, demand for services and the need for innovative delivery of these services.

Members were advised that during the Pandemic RFS continued undertaking face to face contact with families on safeguarding grounds, however, the vast majority of services delivered had to be amended quickly into hybrid working in order to provide families with support despite national restrictions. Due the increased demand during the Pandemic, the Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience informed Members that 12 new staff members were employed in

order to cope with demand. The additional posts were significant in RFS to ensure support was provided directly to families and ensuring that despite increases in demand there are no waiting lists for families in accessing RFS support.

The Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience guided Members through section 6 of the report which highlighted the performance of RFS since operating in 2018. Members were informed that since the establishment of the Service, RFS has had contact with over 7000 families in RCT. The table within the report provided a breakdown on the performance of the Service from 2018-2022 to date.

As part of section 7 of the report, this provided an overview of the service development priorities for 2022-23; It was advised that as part of the Early Years Transformation process, the delivery of the Early Years system for 0–7-year-olds will begin to be piloted in RCT and will be subject to rigorous external evaluation. This will include evaluation from RFS model as a means of providing universally accessible early year intervention and prevention services.

Members were advised of the MAGU Project which has been approved by Cabinet and construction of the service is underway. The MAGU Project will include the creation of new integrated delivery pathway between Community Midwifery, RFS and Children's Services to embed an early intervention approach and facilitate smooth and effective transitions between services for the benefit of children and families.

The Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience presented a presentation which provided Members with context in terms of the work undertaken by RFS towards families.

Based on table 6.1, a Member inquired on how the Service has managed based on the increase in RFS referrals in March 2022 and how that has impacted on the outcomes for families. Additional information was also requested on the financial appraisals received from Citizens Advice RCT.

The Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience advised Members that it was challenging to see the increase in referrals however staff have been delivering services through a hybrid model. Careful planning has been implemented towards the RFS assessment process to ensure all facilities and services provided to families are within a 6–12-week intervention. It was advised that RFS focus on providing intense support to families over a shorter period of time due to numerous complex cases coming in. Members were reassured of the extensive experience across the whole RFS team which ensures families are provided with the best support channels possible. Additional training and support are also provided to staff to enable caseload management.

In relation the second half of the question, The Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience advised Members that the financial appraisal commissioned Citizen's Advice across the board for families needing debt management support, benefit screening; the financial appraisal was a proactive approach in removing barriers and ensuring household finances are in the best position.

A Member inquired how long RFS worked with Family P and if they are still monitored. The Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience advised that the

family was under the Service for a 6-week period and if further support was required it would have been extended to 12 weeks. It was advised that families can come back through the Service for further support and that cases are not closed until there is no risk present.

A Member requested further information on how families can access Flying Start since being made universally available and how since the introduction of the Section 1 Children Act (Wales), how this has aided RFS in identifying those families and not criminalising parents. Lastly, the Members asked if RFS had sufficient confidence in the long-term funding sustainability based on the work being undertaken by the Service.

The Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience advised Members of the impact on RFS's delivery model. It was advised that full Flying Start offers infrastructures that provide complete security and ensure monitoring is undertaken to match resources with need.

As part of the Children Act (Wales), it was advised that RFS have had numerous conversations and been collaborative to ensure processes do not criminalise parents. RFS have also been utilising the RFS Parenting Team to support and provide interventions. In relation to additional funding, it was advised that Welsh Government have agreed for a further year for early year health services. The Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience advised Members that there is always an appetite for addition funding however Members were reassured of the better position of RCT in providing early intervention due to increments made by the Council prior to the Pandemic; this has created a level of confidence in the support for the next year or two.

In relation to Family P, a query was raised on the interventions used in tackling mum's Dyslexia. It was advised that partnership arrangements were in place with adult learning and communication services.

A Member inquired if RFS had a housing appraisal in place to help people looking for housing. The Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience advised that RFS do have housing appraisal units which looks at resolving housing problems; It was advised that RFS have a good relationship with the housing support teams.

A query was raised from a Co-Opted Member Mr Veale, he inquired if the RFS had exceeded its targets set since establishment in 2018. The Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience advised that in 2018 RFS expected to support 1,200 families a year however, they have exceeded expectation. Since establishment engagement in the Service has increased by 49% from referrals through to assessments, however that has now increased to 68% engagement which has been a positive indicator that the Services provided are what families require.

To add, the Group Director – Community and Children Services commented on the effectiveness of the Service and the community hubs before the pandemic as its aided in responding to these matters in a timely and effective manner. It was advised that RFS has been a positive investment in early intervention and prevention. The Group Director – Community and Children Services advised Members that demand for the Service will increase and passed on credit to the Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience for the extensive work and effort undertaken.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the comprehensive report as it highlighted the support in place for Children and Young People across RCT. The Chair queried the interventions on how many professionals this will include and what it will look like. A query was also raised on RFS timescales of 6-12weeks and whether this is enough time. Lastly a query was raised on hard-to-reach parents and how RFS aim to maintain contact.

The Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience advised Members that RFS comprises of 7 teams which work with families to ensure they work their way through a wider service approach. It was advised that there are no waiting lists due to highly trained assessors that can go in and enable progress to be made. Members were informed of the 5-day assessment process and once that's completed, the families will progress through the programme based on an arranged plan. An Intervention worker will work for the full 6 weeks with the family and act as their central point; They will manage their plans and other professionals around that too. Extension of the timescale can be extended if needed and exit strategies will be set in order to provide on-going support. In relation to the hard-to-reach parents, the Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience advised Members that as parents work full-time changes have been made in order to make services available remotely to allow greater flexibility for parents.

Lastly a query was raised in regard to the face-to-face contact; the Member inquired if RFS are confident in the service in ensuring that children and young people are not falling through the gap as a consequence of a reduction of face-to-face contact.

The Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience advised Members that throughout the Pandemic, RFS has worked alongside AWS to ensure robust pathways are in place for children by working closely with schools, and youth services to ensure all children are identified.

All Members in the Committee thanked the Service for its extensive work towards supporting families across RCT.

RESOLVED: Members noted the contents of the report

27 School Admissions

The Head of Service Transformation presented the report to Members which provided a summary of the annual school admissions process. Members were reminded that a report was provided for the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on the 26th of February 2020, which detailed the Council's school admissions process. This report provides an update on developments within school admissions in the last 12 months and application date for the forthcoming 2022/2023 admissions year.

Following the report, a Member raised a query based on table 4.2, it was asked, for children who do not take up their offer, how the school admissions team monitor children to make sure they are in the system.

The Head of Service Transformation advised Members that the team utilise robust systems to ensure children are not missing education. It was advised that when children are born, checks are undertaken during the Autumn term on how many children should be applying to ensure all children take up a place. Overall, the team track over 40,000 children attendance.

A Member queried from the 159 children who were awarded an offer but did not take up, where did they go. It was advised that parents apply for different places in different areas in case their children are not accepted within their first choice in RCT. It was advised that some schools process their own application as a result the team work closely with faith schools in order to track children attendance.

A Member asked whether there is a school in RCT which is constantly oversubscribed and whether since the advert of the 21st Century has the school admissions team noticed a decline in patterns of admissions. The Head of Service Transformation reassured Members that no child is refused a place in their catchment school. It was also advised that there has not been an increase since the 21st Century advertisement.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the extensive report which provided informative data.

RESOLVED: Members noted the contents of the report

28 Period Dignity

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service presented the report to Members with provided an update on the Council's progress of tackling period poverty within schools across Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) and to look at the way forward.

Members were reminded of a notice of motion which was brought to the Council in July 2017 seeking that the Council research the availability of free sanitary products, such as tampons, and towels, in all secondary schools in the County as an acknowledgement that they are as essential as toilet paper for personal hygiene of female pupils. The Council supported the move in 2018, which required all schools in RCT with pupils aged 9 and above to provide free sanitary products for female learners to access independently.

In the current financial year, the grant funding for Period Dignity in Schools has been combined with the Period Dignity in Communities for the first time with Local Authorities (LA) being able to determine themselves how much spend is allocated to each area. Of the total £203,701, £42,000 was allocated to the community element of the grant which is controlled by Community Services and the remaining £161,701 was allocated to schools.

The current grant conditions stipulate that a 'minimum of 50% of the total amount spent on period products must be used to purchase eco-friendly period products.

Since the last review, the Welsh Government Programme for Government 2021-2026 priorities embedding period dignity in schools as well as expanding free period product provision in communities and the private sector. It was advised

that the team have formed part of the Welsh Government Roundtable Discussions and the Information and Good Practice Sharing Sessions to highlight the work that RCT has undertaken, and continue to undertake, within this area.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service advised Members that RCT are involved in the mapping of period products availability across Wales via NHS Wales Mislif/Bloody Brilliant resource tool. This has been updated with the 113 schools who distribute free period products as well as the 34 community groups/third sector/ LA buildings which those on low income including young people can also access for products. The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service confirmed to Members that the service should launch in the new financial year and will be enhanced with education resources.

A Member commended the Officers for their commitment and work towards the project in ensuring dignity of girls across RCT is upheld. The Member advised that upon a visit to a school it was suggested that the project was a great initiative however posed concerns such as the lack of flexibility and storage spaces for bulk period products. The Members advised of the importance of empowering schools to utilise the products in the best way through educational training. The Member reinforced the importance of listening to pupil voices in order to widen the scope of all schools. The Member asked, based on the new curriculum how it's been engaged into the new national curriculum.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Services advised that they have been working with the WG on educational resources for schools such as through the Hubs, schools can access those materials and use them for PHSE lessons or any other. The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service agreed with the Councillor, advising that to date the grant has been very specific to be spent on products and therefore concerns have been raised on children's utilisation of the products and awareness of what eco-friendly products are. As a result, a meeting with the WG was requested last summer in order to progress the educational element by seconding someone to provide regular training sessions directly with children, young people (Male and Female) and staff to educate them of what re-usable products are.

A Member was pleased with the discussions occurring with Welsh Government in order to provide resolutions. However, the Member raised a query surrounding the locations of the dispensers and how the introduction of mix gender toilets may cause embarrassment for young girls.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service advised Members that the dispensers are located within toilet cubicles and schools have been provided with stickers to be placed on doors to indicate the location the dispensers.

To add, the Member required further information regarding conversations that have been had surrounding mix gender toilets and the maintenance of dignity for girls.

The Service Director – Education and Inclusion Services advised Members that for the 21st Century, gender neutral toilets will be integrated with sinks which will permit children and young people to be able to clean and re-use the products.

A Member asked whether the programme is also running in RCT special school

and if so, what extra support is provided for those schools in terms of how to use the products.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service advised that the programme is located in all RCT schools except 2 infant schools. Members were advised that there are materials within the Hub on the utilisation of the products and additional training can be provided to the Special Schools.

A Member was pleased with the conversation being held around maintaining dignity and creating safe spaces for girls in schools. The Member reinforced the importance of pupil voices as the project moves through the next stages. The Service Director – Education and Inclusion Services advised that the whole process on designing schools is undertaken with the collaboration of staff, stakeholders, and young people to ensure its fit for purpose. It was advised that the effective design process of school's results to better spaces fit for the 21st Century.

The Chair noted the importance of eco-friendly products as reinforced by the Welsh Government thus indicating a culture shift with young people and wider communities. The Chair inquired if more could be done to progress the project further and if the programme is an ageless opportunity which sees a widespread of products across RCT communities.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service advised that the Community Services department have rolled out the programme in Food Banks, Community Centres and to those with low incomes. It was advised that WG are focused on progressing the programme further in order for products to be accessed in public spaces with high foot fall such as Theatres, Stadiums, and Communities.

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report

29 Urgent Business

None

This meeting closed at Time Not Specified

**CLLR S REES-OWEN
CHAIR.**