



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, 27 January 2021 at 5.00 pm.

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 S Powell	Councillor M Powell
Councillor D Owen-Jones	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor G Stacey	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 C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Ms A Richards, Temporary Service Director - 21st Century Schools and Transformation
Ms C Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion

County Borough Councillors in attendance: -

Councillor W Lewis and Councillor J Rosser

45 Welcome & Apologies.

Apologies received from the following County Borough Councillors S Evans, L De-Vet and M Griffiths

46 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the following declaration of personal interest was received: -

In relation to Agenda Item 8, Eye to Eye Counselling County Borough Councillor J Edwards - "representatives from Eye-to-Eye Service sit on the board for her main employment"

47 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 18th of November 2020 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

48 Consultation Links

The Service Director Democratic Service referenced the consultation links which were available through the RCT Scrutiny website. Members were reminded that the information is provided in respect of relevant consultations for consideration on a monthly basis by the Scrutiny Research Officer.

49 Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2020/2021 (January - April 2021)

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications presented Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with the forward 4-month work programme (January 2021 to April 2021) for their consideration.

Members were reminded that given the current climate the forward work programme would focus firstly on the impact of the pandemic and its associated plans for response and recovery, whilst still trying to ensure a balance of scrutiny activities within their work programme.

Members discussed various item for the agenda, a Member made a comment relating to the Report of the FPN Working Group. In response, officers explained that due to the pandemic plans would be put in place to reconvene the working group to finalise any outstanding items.

Another Member wanted clarity on the 21st Century School Programme and asked for more information to come back to the Committee in respect of reviewing the impact on the schools that had been the focus of Band A funding, particularly as there had now been some Estyn outcomes.

The Chair explained that the Committee had already received information relating to the impact of the Band A 21st Century Schools from both a building, pupil and staff perspective.

The Director of Education and Inclusion reminded Members of the meeting and explained that Estyn outcomes and the progress of schools in a category are reported in the annual performance reports provided by Central South Consortium. This includes all schools, including schools that have been the focus on Band A funding where relevant.

The Chair explained to the Member that she agreed that Committee needs to assess the impact of the 21st Century Schools however at present there is nothing to compare them to.

The Chair and Officers agreed that this would be discussed in the Cabinet and Scrutiny Engagement Sessions and will bring back this information when appropriate.

Another Member thanked Officers for all the hard work that has been carried out during these unprecedented times.

After further discussion Members RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the content of the Work Programme.
- 21st Century Schools update when available.

50 COVID Response Update

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services provided Members with an update on the critical actions taken by the Council following the recent announcements made by the Education Minister and the recent escalation into lockdown. Information was also provided on the current Covid 19 processes and practices that are in place to ensure schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf are kept abreast of all developments.

The Director of Education highlighted areas under the following headings:

- Recent Developments in response to the Escalation in National Restrictions.
- Education Provision: -
 - All Learners.
 - Critical Worker Provision.
 - Vulnerable Learner Provision.
 - Digitally Excluded Learners (DELs).
 - Examinations.
 - Business Continuity Plans.
 - Health and Safety.
 - Managing Confirmed Cases.
 - Attendance.
 - Partnership Working.
 - Free School Meal Provision.

Members were also presented with links to various key guidance documents which are sent out to key stakeholders for easy access.

The Chair thanked the Director for a very comprehensive update, however before opening the meeting to Members of the Committee the Chair asked if there was any way the Committee could receive the same correspondence as others when key decisions are taken. Officer responded by explaining that this is currently provided in the Members updates which go out to all Councillors when there is a significant change to any procedures.

A Member commented that April budgets are on the horizon and asked a question relating to underspend in schools and whether Welsh Government had made any information available in terms of the situation especially in relation to the accelerated learning grant and other grant funding streams.

The Director commented that there had not been any recent communication on this matter, but further updated would be checked with finance colleagues and further information provided.

Another Member thanked Officers and Teachers for their hard work during the current pandemic and wanted some clarity in relation to the questionnaires and surveys that have been sent out to parents / carers. The Member wanted to know if there is any data showing the responses from parents especially those

who do not have the availability to respond digitally as their responses are clearly important in helping us to identify any potential barriers.

In response the Director of Education explained that the questionnaires were in the early stages of development at present. It was explained there are many ways schools can get this information to parents/carers.

Members put forward several questions relating to digital learning, many Members were concerned about the number of children potentially not having access to devices which are essential to continuing with home learning. Officers continued to explain that many families may not have come forward during the first audit potentially due to them having a device in the household. However, with the continuation of the pandemic, may well have experienced later pressures with more than one family member needing to use device at the same time.

Another Member asked what was being offered to support vulnerable learners in transitioning back to school. The Member felt that the number of pupils needing support in the future was likely to increase especially with the introduction of the ALN Act. It was enquired whether the Local Authority was ready for this.

In response the Director of Education noted that the emotional impact on the wellbeing of all learners has been a great concern. However, there are many protocols in place to address the wellbeing needs of learners and Cabinet have approved various funding streams to support the needs to learners with significant needs. If schools are worried about children not engaging, then they can bring children into school to ensure their needs are met in a school context.

In respect of critical care workers and the fact that more groups of workers had been added to the group of eligible workers, Members wanted to know if this had an impact on staffing capacity.

The Officers explained that the service has kept a close eye on numbers attending schools at present and that a 20% cap has been put in place. Current learner numbers on school sites are manageable, schools know their families and have ensured that the families that require access to face-to-face learning are able to access it.

It was also explained that Welsh Government guidelines do not currently provide a cap on the number of learners in school.

One member queried literacy provision. Members were informed of ways schools are providing literacy support using digital schemes etc. It was also encouraging to see the creative work that was being undertaken by school staff to provide pupils with books throughout the pandemic.

Further questions were put forward by Members in relation to the pupils who were eligible for free school meals, wellbeing support and the impact of digital learning, along with what support was made available for pupils attending Welsh medium schools and whose parents did not speak Welsh.

With regards to schools' staff Members wanted to ensure that there was support available for staff who were juggling teaching and home schooling their own children. It was explained that the wellbeing of the workforce was of paramount importance, with regular wellbeing checks and support provided where needed.

The Cabinet Member for Education confirmed that work has been carried out to ensure that digitally excluded learners are identified and action taken as quickly as possible. This included identifying efsm learners.

After in depth discussion Members RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the verbal update from the Director of Education.
- Receive data in respect of efsm learners since the start of the pandemic.
- Receive an update on the grant funding.

51 Welsh in Education Strategic Plan - Annual Update 2020

The Director of Education and Inclusion Service provided Members with an update on the actions outlined in the RCTCBC's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) for the period between 2017 and 2020 as approved by Welsh Government on the 15th of March 2018. It was explained that the previous 2019-2020 annual update was due to be the last annual update for this WESP, however due to the Covid 19 pandemics, the WESP has been extended to cover the period between 2020-2021.

The Director of Education continued and provided Members with an overview of the actions taken to date against the following seven outcomes that the local authority is expected to improve Welsh medium and Welsh Language education in the locality:

1. More seven-year-old children being taught through the medium of Welsh.
2. More learners continuing to improve their language skills on transfer from primary to secondary school.
3. More learners aged 14 to 16 studying for qualifications through the medium of Welsh.
4. More learners aged 14 to 16 study subjects through the medium of Welsh, in schools, colleges and work-based learning.
5. More learners with advance skills in Welsh
6. Welsh medium provision for all learners with additional learning needs (ALN)
7. Workforce planning and continuing professional development.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services continued and informed Members that RCTCBC has the highest percentage statutory school aged learners who access their learning through Welsh Medium primary, middle and secondary schools in each of five Local Authority areas that comprise the CSCJES. This has been the case for the previous three academic years. It was explained that the majority of Welsh medium schools in both primary and secondary sector with RCT had surplus places, however there are a few primary and secondary schools where growth in capacity is needed and the authority is currently addressing the situation through its existing investment programme.

Members were informed of the commitment that RCTCBC has made to increase the quality of early years Welsh medium provision by spending £4 Million on several projects.

In respect of complex needs the officers explained that an evaluation of the provision was undertaken in the autumn term of 2019 and this showed that this inclusive model that has been adopted in the Welsh medium sector had been very positive.

Looking ahead to the new WESP, which will be consulted on later in the year, the Director of Education explained that there will be several initiatives to facilitate and support the growth of the Welsh language in the County Borough.

After further consideration of the report Members presented their questions and observations. A Member thanked the officer for a very informative report and commented that she was pleased to see the development of provision in early years settings.

The Member continued to ask questions regarding the 21st Century development and what is being done for north of Pontypridd for families wishing to send their children to Welsh medium schools especially those who live in Ynysbwyl, Coed Y Cwm area. How do we target these families who have concerns that the distance a child needs to travel is too great and have decided to send their children to an English-speaking school for that reason, is there going to be any developments in the future?

Members wanted clarity on why we are below target of 630 seven-year-old learners who are receiving their education through Welsh medium. How can we improve this? Also, questions were put forward regarding the provision for ALN and SEN through Welsh medium provision and is there the same number of supports for Welsh speaking children and well as English speaking pupils.

In answer to the above questions the Director of Education explained that there are clear criteria from Welsh Government that we must meet as a local authority to access 21st century schools funding. The LA has responsibility for ensuring that the conditions of school buildings are fit for purpose and ensuring the schools are in the right place and that there are sufficient places to meet need. All criteria are taken into consideration when deciding on priorities for investment. It was also noted that the percentage of surplus places in both primary and secondary WM schools was in the main significant.

The Director explained there were many potential reasons for the LA not achieving its target of 630 pupils. Marketing was something that needed to be developed as a priority. A marketing strategy group has been established to explore how we can promote WM education, entice learners to the sector and retain learners in Welsh medium schools once the decision is made.

Creative and innovative work is now needed to inform the new WESP which will be consulted on and shared in due course.

In respect of the ALN provision, the Access and Inclusion team continually assess the needs of learners in this sector and monitors this closely.

Members raised concerns in relation to the retention of staff in the Welsh medium sector and wanted to know what was being done to try and retain staff in the Welsh medium sector and to prevent their transition into the new 21st Century English medium schools.

This is a concern, and we need to have a joined-up strategy moving forward and to ensure that plans are aligned with WG strategies aimed at increasing the availability of Welsh medium staff.

The Chair wanted clarity on how the LA promote staffing and growth in numbers. The Director explained that as an authority we needed creative collaborative

approaches and effective marketing strategies to increase numbers in the WM sector. Staffing is a significant challenge.

After further discussion Members RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the content of the Report.
- Receive the Welsh Government Guidance in respect of the Methodology used to obtain the target figures.
- Receive a report in respect of the quality of Welsh medium School Buildings later.

52 Eye to Eye Counselling Service

The Head of Inclusion Services provided Members with an overview of the provision and effectiveness of counselling services for children and young people in Rhondda Cynon Taf during the academic year 2019/20.

The Head of Inclusion Services gave Members the background to the Service. It was explained that within schools counselling complements other approaches to support the health and wellbeing of learner, such as school-based wellbeing interventions and pastoral support or more specialist interventions from teams such as the Educational Psychology Service or Behaviour Support Service as well as services provided externally by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)

It was explained that the appointment of a counselling service in the local authority is carried out via a tendering process every three to five years and in RCT, the Eye-to-Eye Counselling Service is currently contracted to provide the statutory service within schools and in the community.

Members were informed of the current position with RCT along with several graphs which demonstrated the number of young people who accessed counselling during the last three-year period. Analysis of the data suggests the overall decrease is due to a reduction in the number of referrals received during summer term 2020.

It was highlighted that that in addition to providing formal counselling sessions, school counsellors also made 714 recorded contacts with school staff over the lock down period and provided additional wellbeing and emotional support to families and young people.

Once again Members noted that when comparing males and females completing counselling during this three-year period significantly more females than males had counselling which is a common across Wales.

The Head of Inclusion Services explained to Members that this area is one which the Local Authority is looking to target intervention and development and recruitment.

Officers explained that it is important to note that due to Covid 19 providing a range of enhanced support to support the wellbeing of children and young people has been a high priority for both Education and Children's Services. Protocols were put in place to ensure regular contact between schools and learners and their families with a focus upon supporting wellbeing and identifying

at an early stage whether additional support would be beneficial.

Members acknowledged that concerns which had previously been discussed regarding counselling services for primary school aged children had been addressed and there is now provision for primary children aged 7 -10 years.

Further data and information were presented to Members relating to waiting times, the number of CLA accessing the service, the number of young people self-referring and the reason for referrals.

Members scrutinised the data in detail and put forward their questions to Officers.

The Chair thanked the Officers for the report and raised concerns regarding the decline across the summer term and asked whether there were any figures showing the uptake from September to Christmas for the autumn term and had there been an increase since children returned to school. The Officer will look for the data and come back with the answer.

A Member thanked officer for the report and congratulated the service with regards to waiting times.

Drop in the in the uptake of the service was very concerning. Members wanted clarity in respect of what is being done to address 29% drop during the summer term and how are we going to reconnect with the pupil who need the service more than ever.

Officers explained that, even though there have been fewer referrals, there has been a lot of work with schools in respect of wellbeing training support and the LA was upskilling staff to put in place interventions that can be dealt with at school level without the need to refer to the Counselling Services.

The Officer explained the there had been a number of extra counselling sessions provided for young people that did not want to take part in formal counselling sessions. These had been provided for young people during the school closure period however the LA can only record formal counselling sessions provided as part of the contract.

The Chair continued and still felt that clarity was needed in the future with regards to the reasons for the decrease in referrals and felt that Members needed to know if this is as a result of the pandemic or some other reason.

Other Members put forward questions relating to advertising the availability of counselling services both in schools and in the community, also the availability of online support for young people when needing access to Educational Psychology Service and the YEPS.

Officers explained that the Educational Psychology Service has a number of online resources for learners.

It was explained that the YEPS uses creative ways to engage with young people and that young people have responded well to this is the way of working.

A Member asked if was possible to receive a breakdown of areas where the referrals are the highest via schools and communities and to see if there may be

a common reason for the referral. This information could possibly identify issues of concern and sources of support before counselling is needed.

After further discussion Members RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the content of the report.
- Receive an updating report to consider the rate of referral to the service in the future.

53 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair thanked Members and Officer for a very productive meeting and reminded Members that the next meeting would be on the 3rd of February 2021 and it will contain reports from the Children Services portfolio.

54 URGENT BUSINESS

This meeting closed at 8.00 pm

**CLLR S REES-OWEN
CHAIR.**