



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee meeting held virtually on Wednesday, 21 July 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 A Fox	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor S Powell	Councillor M Powell
Councillor S Trask	Councillor D Williams

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr J Fish, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Officers in attendance:-

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
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 A Richards, Temporary Service Director - 21st Century Schools and Transformation
Mr B Harries, Youth Services Manager
Ms Z Lancelott, Head of Community Wellbeing & Resilience

1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed Members to the first meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee for the Municipal Year 2021/2022. The Chair took the opportunity to thank non- returning Members for the contribution they had made to the committee in the previous year and also welcomed new Members to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

Apologies were received from the following County Borough Councillors:

A Calvert
S Evans
E Griffiths
G Stacey
D Owen Jones
and Co-opted Voting Members Ms R Nicholls and Mr L Patterson.

2 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations

made pertaining to the agenda.

3 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 03/03/2021, 24/03/2021 and 21/04/2021 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

4 Consultation Links

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

Members **RESOLVED** to acknowledge the information

5 Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Draft Work Programme 2021/2022

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications provided Members of the Children & Young People Scrutiny with the suggested Draft Work Programme for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

Members were reminded that the Scrutiny Work Programmes have a reduced number of meetings for this Municipal Year to enable the Committee to focus on key topics and create a more outcome-focused way of working and to add value to the work of the Council. It also allows for more a more flexible approach to any items that may require a working group setting.

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications continued to inform Members of the items set out in the Work Programme attached at Appendix A of the report. He explained that there had been agreement with the Chair to one amendment that the Early Years Report will now come to December's meeting.

The Chair explained to Members that the SHEP Report would come as an information report as there is strict criteria form Welsh Government whilst a very important item it will be for information only.

The Chair welcomed comments from Members before finally looking for agreement of the Work Programme.

A Member asked for clarity in respect of the changes of available data for scrutiny to consider at a strategic level, the member stated that he had concerns how the Committee were going to understand what is going on from an education outcome perspective going forward. In response, officers explained that concerns were raised from the pandemic, and this has been raised with Welsh Government and officers are looking to put appropriate actions in place.

The Chair thanked the officer and took Members to the recommendations, Members **RESOLVED** to:

- Agree the Children & Young People Scrutiny Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2021/ 22
- Agree the Work Programme be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure the items identified for inclusion are relevant.

6 Director of Social Services Draft Annual Report

The Group Director Community and Children's Services thanked Members for the opportunity to present the Draft Director of Social Services Annual Report for 2020/2021 year.

It was explained that Members are asked to consider the draft version of the report before going to public consultation and reminded Members that feedback from this meeting will be considered before the final report is presented to Cabinet for its approval.

Members were reminded that the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 includes in Part 8 A Code of Practice with regards to the role of the Director of Social Services. The Code of Practice states that the Director of Social Services must prepare and publish an annual report about the exercise of the Local Authority's social services functions and that the annual report must be published as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of the financial year.

The Group Director gave an overview of the response to the COVID -19 Pandemic, graphs were presented to the Committee for consideration showing the rates of cases across the Authority. Members were also asked to consider the impact on the staff across the services throughout this time. Members took time to acknowledge the work that has been carried out by staff across the sector and asked for it to be recorded that Members thanked all staff for their hard work and resilience throughout these unprecedented times.

Officers explained that staff wellbeing has been at the forefront for the service and a new staff wellbeing model has been developed. Members were presented with an overview of the community and wellbeing support that was delivered during the last twelve months.

The Group Director gave a summary of the financial support for the service, he also highlighted the ongoing work with partners such as Health etc.

The Director of Children's Services gave an overview of the work throughout the last year within Children's Services under the following headings:

- Demand on the Service;
- Child Protection Register;
- Children Looked After;
- Improving Performance , Working towards improvement;
- Work of Children's Services;
- Future development
- Challenges.

Finally, the Group Director concluded by explaining that the service will continue

to work towards strengthening family support, ensuring where possible that accommodation for children looked after is brought as close to home as possible, and they will listen to the voice of the young person when developing interventions and making early intervention and prevention key priority.

The Chair thanked the officers for a very informative report and opened up the meeting for Member's questions and observations.

A Member asked a question on support for staff whilst working from home during the pandemic especially single parents having to adapt to the digital policy and could members see the policy. He also wanted clarity on the work of CAMHS and asked if there could be an update from schools that have had input from the service.

The Group Director explained that the Council had reacted quickly to agile working and provided equipment to staff across the authority to carry out their roles. The majority of instances staff have welcomed this and this was reflected in a staff survey that had been carried out with a positive response. In terms of CAMHS, Members will be able to put their points to officers responsible for CAMHS when they attend Scrutiny later this year but Members may wish to explore access and waiting times and the range of services available.

Members asked for more qualitative data than quantitative data in the report and felt this would show more of individual story going forward. Officers acknowledged the request and stated they would consider this going forward.

Members put forward comments on the support for young people during the summer holidays, the work of the resilient families' service and whether families and young people's needs are being met especially with the lack of face to face interaction. Officers replied that work is being carried out to ensure support is available even though it may be via a hybrid approach and anyone one needing face to face contact is able to under strict guidelines.

One main concern for Members is that of staffing and staff retention especially with the sickness rates and the amount of people being contacted by the track and trace application for Covid -19.

Members asked what procedures are in place to try and attract staff to the service and also wanted clarity on what the authority had in place to retain staff as they are crucial in providing a safe haven for our child and young people and families across the County Borough.

The Chair asked if there could be a staff survey to get an understanding of what the authority can do to retain staff within the service and develop their knowledge. The Chair also raised concerns in respect of the provision of mental health and wellbeing services for our children and young people especially after what has been a very stressful twelve months.

Officers explained that there is work being carried out in respect of a pay review also looking at strategies to develop the service however this is very challenging and we will continue to work with staff etc. to get the best outcomes for our children and young people.

In relation to the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people officers explained that they are working with health and regional partnership

board to develop new strategies for the future, joint planning workshops are considering new strategies and officers would bring any information back to the Committee when they are able.

After further discussion Members **RESOLVED** to:

- Acknowledge the content of the report;
- Receive reports back in relation to staffing recruitment and sickness absences when they are able;
- That feedback from the Committee would be consider when finalising the report.

7 Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Assurance Check 2021

The Group Director Community and Children's Services explained to Members that the purpose of the report is to update the Committee on the Findings Letter from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) in respect of their recent assurance checks of the Council's Social Services.

The Group Director highlighted that the CIW assurance checks provides the Council with a high level of assurance regarding how well the Council is discharging its statutory duties in respect of social services and providing help and support to adults and children to protect safety and promote well-being. The Group Director continued to explain that this has been achieved during the extremely challenging times of the pandemic and thanked the workforce for their hard work and resilience during this time.

There had been many strengths identified within the check along with a few areas for improvement which have been identified within the delivery plans and the action plans will be brought back to Members at a future meeting.

Member put forward further questions and observation and **RESOLVED** to acknowledge the report and agreed to receive an update against the action plans and consider any aspects the wish to scrutinise n great depth.

8 Youth Engagement and Participation Service : An overview of the Support and Provision During Covid -19

Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee received an overview of the support and provision carried out by the Youth Engagement and Participation Service (YEPs) during the Covid - 19 pandemic.

With the aide of a Power- Point presentation the Youth Service Manger explained that on the 23rd March 2020, the YEPS suspended all face to face work with young people and colleagues as a direct result of the country entering lockdown. Members acknowledge the resilience of staff within the service to adapt to the fast changing situations and to ensure that young people's needs were met.

The Officer continued to inform the Committee with an overview of activities during Covid- 19 some of which can be found below:

- Referral work:
- Mental health and wellbeing work work:
- Wellbeing packs:

- Reflective practice sessions:
- Emergency childcare hubs:
- School based support;
- Summer holiday childcare:
- Tackling youth homelessness:
- Street –based youth work: and
- Virtual youth offer along with many more provisions.

The Youth Service Manager also present data on the impact of the service to date. It was explained that over the course of the year 2020/21 the service has provided targeted support to:

- 1035 individual young people on a 1:1 basis through its referral work which includes 784 new referrals accepted during the year. The number of referred open cases peaked at 504 in November 2020.

The Officer continued and highlighted that the service has provided open access opportunities to young people to the level of:

- 250 exciting virtual activity programmes for young people to take part in during lockdown, totalling 708 individual sessions;
- 1,521 individual young people attended these sessions over the year;
- 124 street based sessions in the Autumn 2020 (the were not introduced until October 2020 and had to be suspended in December 2020) and during those sessions officers made contact with 2785 young people on the streets of RCT.

Members also considered the response of the consultation with young people in response to the pandemic along with staff feedback and explored the recovery planning and next step that the service aim to have in place.

The YEPS provided Members of the Committee with a video that captured the work of the service and the interaction staff had with young people across the County Borough. Members commented that it was very humbling to see and congratulated staff for some very inventive ideas, which made the young person's experience during the pandemic a less frightening.

The Chair thanked the Youth Service Manager for an extremely comprehensive report and opened up the meeting for Members questions.

A Member wanted clarity in respect of the views of the young persons and asked various questions in relation to the demographics of youth services, and asked if young people across Rhondda Cynon Taf will be able to access a safe place to meet with friends without having to go back to an education setting. Along with provision for young people during the summer holidays.

In response the Youth Service Manager explained that some education settings work well as youth club settings and where this hasn't worked the service has aimed to move to a community setting. Covid hasn't allowed to have an open access service and the street- based setting has allowed the service to travel around which has provides the provision further afield, street shelters are being considered as a work for the future.

Another Member asked a question around the community provision and asked if the service is aware of where the gaps are and how are addressing disengaged young people. In reply the officer explained the work that is being carried out. The Officer continued to explain the work with is being done with disengaged young people and highlighted that this cohort of young people will have the first opportunity of all provision and will be monitored very closely.

Another Member wanted to thank the service for all its hard work in her community and wanted to praise the staff and young people who have taken part in the provision.

Members request information of services to be distributed to the Committee to enable them to direct young people to the services and activities such as poster, web pages etc.

The Chair asked for figure of young people who have been referred to the service for mental health issues and requested that this be sent to the Committee for future reference.

After further discussion Members **RESOLVED** to:

- Acknowledge the information contained in the report and to receive further updates at a future meeting:
- Receive any promotional content which will allow Members to promote the Service within their communities.

9 Summer Term Update in relation to Education's Latest Position in response to Covid- 19

The Head of Capital Projects & Support Services Management provided Members with some contextual information on the most recent changes in Education during the summer term in response to the changing COVID -19 position.

Members were reminded that the local authority continues to work very closely with all schools and provides advice and guidance to school staff as well as regular updates to parents and carers. It was explained that operational guidance continues to be provided in relation to re-opening of schools and this is regularly updated to reflect the latest advice and announcements from Welsh Government. The Officer explained that guidance is also updated and shared in relation to the offer of lateral flow testing for all school staff and learners in Year 10 and above.

The Head of Capital Projects & Support Services Management provided Members an update of provision under the following headings:

- Remote learning:
- Digitally Excluded Learners (DELs):
- Examinations:
- Business Continuity Plans:
- Health & Safety:
- Managing Confirmed Cases:
- Lateral Flow Testing:

- Attendance:
- Partnership working:
- Free School Meal Provision:
- Breakfast Club Provision: and
- Childcare Settings

The Officer concluded her report and explained that any further changes will be brought forward to the Committee when appropriate.

The Chair thank the Officer for a very informative report and invited Members to put forward their questions.

A Member raised concerns in respect of the more complexity of the guidance framework document and felt that this document should be made simpler for schools and governing bodies.

Members found the significant growth in the number of learners eligible for free school meals quite alarming and along with the extra pressures on IT provision Members wanted to know if these pressure have had any major impact on any other part of the service with regards to delivery and capacity and how was this going to be addressed.

FSM figures in partnership with CSC is looking at strategy to address issues and gave examples.

Members also raised questions in respect of examinations and central assessed grades, remote learning and attendance. Officers gave an overview of the work carried out amongst schools and the authority.

Further question were put forward and Members **RESOLVED** acknowledge the content of the report and receive further information when available

10 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair thanked Members and Officers for a very productive meeting and advise that the next Meeting would be 22nd September 2021.

This meeting closed at 7.45 pm

**CLLR S REES-OWEN
CHAIR.**