



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, 22 September 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 S Evans	Councillor A Fox
Councillor E Griffiths	Councillor D Owen-Jones
Councillor S Morgans	Councillor S Powell
Councillor M Powell	Councillor G Stacey
Councillor S Trask	Councillor D Williams

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr L Patterson

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 G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Ms A Richards, Service Director 21st Century Schools and Transformation
Ms C Williams, Service Manager Disabled Children
Mr A Cope, Regional Development Manager
Ms L Peake, Chief Executive Kinship
Ms K Owen, Gatsby Project Manager
Ms S Woolson, Employment, Education and Training Team Manager
Mrs S Daniel, Senior Scrutiny Services Officer

11 Declaration of Interest

Cllr S Trask declared a prejudicial interest in agenda item 7 (Kinship Care Notice of Motion) and withdrew from the meeting during the discussion of this item

Cllr S Evans declared a personal interest in Agenda item 5 (Gatsby Project report) due to her work at the University of South Wales.

Cllr M Powell declared a personal interest in Agenda item 7 as his wife works in children's services

12 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 21st July 2021 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

13 Consultation Links

Members were provided with information to consultations which may be of interest to them

14 Scrutiny Research

The Senior Scrutiny Officer reminded members of the Scrutiny research facility that was available to them and advised that members should email the scrutiny mailbox with any requests.

15 Gatsby Project Report

The Chairperson welcomed the officers to the meeting and invited them to present the report.

The Gatsby Project Manager supported her report with a presentation to members, which gave an overview of the Gatsby Benchmark Good Career Pilot. She explained that the pilot gives a commitment to each and every child within the RCTCBC area between the ages of 11-18, to receive the highest quality career experiences to provide them with the opportunity and confidence to achieve success and fulfilment in their working lives.

The Gatsby Project Manager advised members that the benchmarks had been devised, arising from research from the Gatsby Foundation and they were:

- A stable careers programme
- Learning from career and labour market information
- Addressing the needs of each pupil
- Linking curriculum learning to careers
- Encounters with employers and employees
- Experiences of workplaces
- Encounters with further and higher education
- Personal guidance

Upon conclusion of the presentation, the Chairperson invited members of the Committee to ask questions of the Gatsby Project Manager.

A member applauded the efforts of the Project Manager for her work on the pilot. He added that the Committee should also recognise the accolade of Hayley Jacobs, Career Leader at Bryn Celynnog Comprehensive who had been shortlisted twice for the prestigious UK wide Career Development Institute Career Leader of the Year award and winning the title in 2021. He recommended that a personal letter of congratulations from the Committee be sent to Hayley Jacobs and also Bryn Celynnog Comprehensive School who had featured in the BBC Teach programme.

Another member congratulated the Gatsby Project Manager on the work in the pilot and felt it captured many of the concerns and challenges that young people faced. She asked for more information on the availability of good quality work placements for young people to support them in their aspirations. She asked also if school staff were still able to provide a mentoring process to students due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Gatsby Project Manager responded that the role of the career leader can be

described as the career conductor of the school. They work alongside herself to create a career plan that is individual and bespoke to each school and considering individuals that need to look outside of their own community for opportunities. She added that the Gatsby Benchmark plan ensured that the governing body and the senior leadership team at each of the schools involved were updated on the progress of the Gatsby profile on a termly basis. She further added that the Employment, Education and Training team were also involved and had developed some bespoke mentoring for individuals.

In terms of work experience placements, she informed members that they worked very closely with schools to offer and identify high-level placements for the young people in RCT, particularly throughout the pandemic where a number of virtual work experience placements were successfully delivered. She added that whilst the country were going through the global pandemic, they didn't feel it was fair that the class of 2020 were to miss out on what they consider vital placements and opportunities.

A Member asked what the intention was on reporting the outcomes of the pilot and the impact for learners and how success was measured. The member also asked for more information on the engagement and involvement with universities and other higher education settings.

The Gatsby Project Manager responded that they had undertaken three full audits on the programme to measure outcomes and impacts. They have now put in place a tracking model to look at the interactions of schools, career interventions and other key markers that had been identified, to look at attainment markers that can measure the impacts in the schools. She added she felt the pandemic had delayed the process somewhat.

In response to the interactions with universities and higher education she advised that further work was needed to develop this area and would be happy to work with the member and also update at a later meeting with more information on the outcomes and impacts of the Gatsby Project.

A Member referred to the Gatsby+ trial that has provided bespoke and intensive career planning and work experience support aimed at pupils who are not reaching their academic potential that has initially supported five students. She asked how this ties in to the strapline every one, every person and what were the interventions used for these students.

The Officer responded that one of the key focus areas in benchmark two focussed on the needs of the individual child. She added that they were working on making the benchmarks as effective as possible for the schools in RCT. A small group of pupils were selected with high attainment, that move further away from their potential through years 9-11 and through to KS5 and she felt focussing the Gatsby Project on those pupils from an early age could positively affect their attainment. She concluded that this was in the early pilot stages and was happy to report back on the Gatsby+ progress at a later meeting. This was welcomed by the member

In response to a query from a member, the Gatsby Project Manager responded that the Curriculum Benchmark 4 was a focus at the moment and that careers being taught through the curriculum and not being a separate entity were an integral part of curriculum. She added that over the Summer term four working parties (Science, English, Humanities and PE) met on a weekly basis for four weeks to plan how those faculties can plan career interventions in those curriculum areas. She added that the working groups were an ongoing piece of work.

The Director of Education added that going forward she was hopeful of being able to share some meaningful data which would demonstrate the impact of learner outcomes and destinations but there were current restrictions on reporting on key performance indicators.

A Member asked if officers felt the Authority had the partnerships in place for careers training with schools and businesses.

The Gatsby Project Manager advised that relations with businesses could be stronger and more work needs to be undertaken in that area. She added that there was a career leader within the Employment and Education team who was helping to develop work in that area.

A Member asked if the Authority uses data from business intelligence around growth sectors to ensure the future proofing of the objectives. The Officer responded that they are continually updating schools on labour market information to ensure their offer to schools is clear and follows the market trend. She added in her opinion it is an area that they can improve on.

A Member referred to the emergency measure for Covid-19 Benchmarks that were set out in the report and asked if these were still being used and when they would be reviewed.

In response, the Project Manager advised that Covid-19 Benchmarks were put in place to support schools. She stated that they are led by the leadership of the Local Authority on how to progress in the future and this would not be a decision she would make without their advice.

A member asked when officers expected to see face-to-face work experience return.

The Gatsby Project Manager responded that they have been flexible and adapted depending on the Covid-19 restrictions and circumstances. Schools had been given the options of virtual or face-to-face placements. She acknowledged that face-to-face placements were certainly more powerful and whilst they were keen to return to face-to-face work experience the Health and Safety guidance had to be followed.

A Member asked how the five pupils and schools were selected to take part in the Gatsby+ programme.

The Gatsby Project Manager replied that the Gatsby+ is a pilot to understand if the additional support has an impact. She stated that it was very resource heavy as support was delivered on a 1-2-1 basis. The schools were chosen due to the strong working relationships established with them, which, when undertaking a pilot is vital that they will deliver results so the results can be shared with other schools. The Schools selected also have a strong career leader so were in a good position to try something new. She added that the schools selected the pupils, with specific criteria set for those who were not achieving their academic potential.

A Member thanked the officers for the report and asked if this could be revisited in the spring when the two years had been completed and outcomes from the project could be demonstrated to the Committee. He asked if the schools receive extra funding to carry out their duties or if this carried out using the existing schools budget, and is the school curriculum fit for purpose to achieve the benchmarks set out in the report. He also asked, when considering Brexit and labour market information should we be teaching modern foreign languages

in primary and secondary schools as they may not have an opportunity to utilise these skills in the future.

The Gatsby Project Manager responded that schools don't receive additional funding and we need to ensure a sustainable model ensure success of the Gatsby benchmarks. She advised the schools that were having the greatest success with the benchmark profiles were the schools that already had many of the priorities that feature in the self-evaluation plans for developing their curriculum. In terms of the curriculum, she added that we were in a great position in developing the new curriculum and we were ensuring that benchmark four (linking curriculum learning to careers) is interwoven and interlinked and works in partnership with schools in RCT, colleges and careers wales to ensure pupils have a clear transition.

The Director of Education advised that it is important that children are prepared for the best pathway that reflects their skills – whether this is training, employment, apprenticeships or further education it was important it is right for them and they feel supported to make the right choices in the future. She added that learners need to be prepared for the world of work and for jobs that don't exist yet . Schools are supported to offer more bespoke pathways for learners who don't engage with the more traditional curriculum offer.

A Member asked if the outcomes were broken down into gender demographics. Will these be presented to members.

The Gatsby Project Manager responded that they are measured and when this item is reported back we can include this in the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Item to be reported back to Committee in the Autumn of 2022 to include detailed information on outcomes, included gender demographics.
- A letter of congratulations to be sent to Hayley Jacobs and Bryn Celynnog

16 Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Report

The Service Director Children's Services presented the report to members to update them in relation to progress with action plans associated with Inspection of the Disabled Children's Service and Focused Activity in the 16+ Service.

The Service Director also referred members to the appendices in the report which provided members with a "RAG" Status against the action plan that detailed areas that were doing well and areas that needed development, which the service area were committed to seeing through

A Member referred to the ALN programme and asked what the integration provision for disabled children and what schools provide looks like, particularly for those children that are disabled that may attend a mainstream school.

The Service Manager Disabled Children responded that social workers within the disabled children's service worked closely alongside education colleagues in both special and mainstream schools. Moving forward with new act, the same officers are undertaking training and working alongside colleagues to take up the implementation of the IDPs and have already been part of some pilot programmes.

The Service Manager Disabled Children added that some pilot programmes had

also been undertaken in a special school in Ysgol Hen Felin to look how officers and social workers were also involved in the implementation. She advised members that the Authority are not taking the disabled children's service up to age 25, this was based on research from IPC and was also in line with the Additional Learning Needs act. She added however, that they were working much more closely with 18-25 year olds who are looked after, in partnership with adult services to build on the transition protocol.

A Member referred to the improvement plan where the RAG status for managers was indicating a red status in relation to considering reviewing capacity allocation and team development that had been halted due to vacancies. She asked if members could be provided an update on that.

The Service Director Children's Services replied that recruitment had taken place and the service continued to manage throughout the very difficult pandemic period. Now that staff had been inducted and settled into their roles the development workshop will take place in November 2021 as they considered it important that new staff had the opportunity to take part.

A Member asked what provisional care/ support is given in the Borough for young people up to the age of 25 who develop a disability in later childhood, and in particular from blindness. He asked if there was any specific support in RCT for them. He asked this as there was a child in his ward who could not access braille books from their local library but instead got them from the RNIB

The Service Manager Disabled Services advised that a family member or a professional can make a referral to the Disabled Children's Service team at any point and through that process a comprehensive assessment is undertaken to ascertain any additional needs and what specific support can be offered by the disabled children's service. She added that there is also a sensory team that operates that can support with specific issues. She advised the member that she would clarify about the specific availability of braille and would send him the information requested including detailed information of the sensory team.

A Member referred to the areas that had been identified in the report, specifically "increased focus on family strength and the identification of personal outcomes" and asked what improvement methods had been identified. And also she asked how the service ensures that the voice of the child is heard and acted upon.

The Service Manager Disabled Children replied that the voice of the child can never be complete as an action as this would continually be developed by improving the communication skills of their staff. She added that they also picked up that advocacy wasn't routinely offered but this has now been addressed and the service can demonstrate that this is now offered to all children and young people that are referred to their service.

In addition Members were informed that an extensive Makaton programme had been rolled out and pictorial software had been invested in to translate any information into a visual language for young people. She added that the enablement team now started in a position with visuals, such as plans, assessments and practices for their families, which empowers and enables our children and young people to be more independent.

A Member referred to housing associations and recent discussions whereby housing would be built with disabled families and their specific needs in mind and asked if this was an area where the disabled children's service could work with the housing associations to provide them with advice on what considerations should be made when building these properties.

The Service Manager Disabled Children stated that there is a paediatric occupational therapy team that work closely with housing colleagues and Trivallis that advise on specific needs of their families. She added that early discussions were also undertaken when there was an opportunity for any new build properties as there were a number of families on the waiting list for specialist housing with specific needs. She confirmed that any specialist advice that was required, the occupational therapists could advise.

A Member asked if it was usual practice that new staff receive training on children's rights and disability rights.

The Service Manager Children's Services replied that training on children's rights are in the training calendar for all children services staff. She added that they have also held training on disability rights and safeguarding disabled children though these were not in the rolling annual calendar.

A Member referred to Post 16 on the Improvement Plan and asked what support they are provided as some children will move from a mainstream school into a special school setting. She added she would be interested to hear what support was also in place for children with hidden disabilities such as poor mental health, anxiety and autism.

The Service Director Children's Services advised that they had recently reviewed and updated the transition policy. She advised that they had increased their work around housing to increase the availability of support in supported accommodation and they were also working closely with colleagues in the Health Board around Mental Health and Wellbeing. She added that other areas of development around Looked After Young People was now in place and they have commissioned an emotional wellbeing and therapeutic services team to support them through their journey.

The Service Manager Disabled Children added that children are ideally brought into transition process from the age of 14 to give plenty of time to work with the family and partners to ensure a long and smooth transition period. She further added that children with complex needs were supported with additional planning to support them at their own pace.

The Director of Education added that for learners with transitional period is an integral part of preparing them for their next phase in education. In some of the Special Schools, there is provision on college sites to enable the young people to become acclimatised in a new environment. She reassured members that even if learners do not meet the requirements to access the services in the disabled children's team, there are still requirements on the schools to work in partnership with the Authority to mitigate all risks and still ensure there is a robust transition plan in place for that learner.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Members noted the contents of the report and recommended that all members receive further information from the sensory team on their availability of services.

17 Kinship Care (Notice of Motion)

The Chairperson welcomed Lucy Peake, the Chief Executive of Kinship to the meeting who accepted the invitation to attend to support officers and contribute to the item.

The Service Director Children's Services presented the report to Members which was in response to a Notice of Motion from Council on the 13th January 2021. The report detailed information received from a consultation exercise with connected person (kinship) foster carers to find out their thoughts and feelings in relation to the assessment and support provide by the service and to identify where improvements could be made.

The report also detailed the work of the Authority in collaboration with Kinship, formally called Grandparents Plus.

The Chairperson asked for more information on the working relationship with Kinship colleagues and asked if this was being developed.

The Director for Children's Services advised that after the Committee previously considered this item, she asked her teams to develop those pathways with Kinship colleagues to ensure carers can access support that is available to them. She added that she was really pleased that a number of carers had praised the support that was available to them.

The Regional Development Manager advised that the response from the survey was positive with nearly 60% of Kinship carers responding to the survey. The survey respondents gave some good, honest feedback which will be used to develop the service, he added that most of the responses were positive.

The Chief Executive of Kinship commented that the Development Manager at Kinship for South Wales has advised of positive working relationships with various teams in RCT such as therapeutic family services, Looked After Children's Service, schools and Educational Psychologists which, in turn gives Kinship carers trust in Kinship as a charity. She added that as an organisation they could see the commitment from RCT in supporting Kinship carers. She concluded that the outcomes for children were improved for children due to the continuity of carers and being able to stay within their family network, than they would be if they stayed within the foster care system, she hoped that they can continue to work together to build on the positive outcomes.

The Chairperson thanked the officers for their contributions and for Lucy Peake, Chief Executive of Kinship for attending the meeting.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee then considered their formal response to the Notice of Motion and recommended to Cabinet the following:

To endorse the three steps set out in the report to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in February 2021 which were:

- To continue to develop and improve the support services available to Kinship foster carers
- To continue to implement the Code of Practice for special guardians and improve the support available
- To continue to collaborate with organisations to improve support to friends and family carers across RCTCBC

Members also recommended to Cabinet the following areas for development which were set out in the report to members which were:

- A 'rushed' Assessment process
- Staff turnover and absence

- Timely information sharing
- A potentially 'intimidating' Panel experience
- Peer Support
- Specific Support Groups

18 Information Reports

Members were advised of the reports that were for reported for information and were reminded if they had any queries in relation to them that they should contact the Scrutiny mailbox.

19 Chair's Review and Close

The Chairperson thanked all for attending the meeting and looked forward to the Committee being able to meet on a hybrid basis in the future.

20 Urgent Business

None

**CLLR S REES-OWEN
CHAIR.**