



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, 8 December 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 Calvert	Councillor S Evans
Councillor E Griffiths	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor S Trask	Councillor D Williams

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr J Fish

Officers in attendance:-

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
Mrs Sarah Daniel – Senior Democratic Services Officer
Andrea Richards - Service Director 21st Century Schools and Transformation
Denise Humphries - Senior 21st Century Schools Project Manager
Zoe Lancelot - Head Of Community Wellbeing and Resilience
Mandy Perry - Programme Alignment Manager

Apologies

Cllr G Stacey

1 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Code of Conduct the following declarations of Interest were received

Cllr Sam Trask - Personal Interest in item 6 as Governor of Maes Y Bryn Primary School Item 6 School Modernisation

Cllr Eleri Griffiths – Personal Interest in Item 5 as a trustee of Cylch Meithrin Evan James and family in receipt of Language support in item 8

Mr Jeff Fish Personal Interest in item 6 as Chair of Governors at Maes Y Bryn

and a Governor at Bryn Celynnog

Cllr D Williams Personal Interest Item 6 as a temporary school governor

2 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 13 October 2021 as an accurate reflection of the meeting with the inclusion of apologies being recorded for Cllr S Evans

3 Consultation Links

The Scrutiny Officer advised of the open Consultations available to members to contribute to should they wish

4 Termly School COVID-19 Update

The Director Education and Inclusion presented the [report](#) to members that provided information on the most recent changes in Education during the autumn term in response to the changing COVID-19 position.

The report provided information on the actions taken by the Council as a result of announcements made by the First Minister and the Minister for Education and Welsh Language and the associated amended Welsh Government guidance and framework for schools issued in readiness for the return to school in September.

The Chair thanked the officer for the update and asked if there were plans to close schools early for the Christmas period

The Director replied there were no current plans to close schools early and will close on the Friday 17th as planned. She added that last year schools closed early but that is not the case this year unless advised otherwise by Welsh Government

A Member asked if they could be provided with data in relation to staffing for teaching and non-teaching. She asked what is Welsh Government's plan to address the chronic staffing issues currently facing schools

The Director replied that the data provided to members in the report is extracted from SIMS data. She added that they can build a profile using data from Test, Trace and Protect who submit reports to the Authority. She added that the data therefore was not always accurate as the picture was ever changing. The Director also informed members that Covid case rates were not a direct cause for the staffing issues being encountered and these related to a combination of factors including staff being able to secure childcare for their own families. She added that this is a problem across Wales, not just within RCT. Welsh Government are monitoring this closely and she reassured members that RCT has not had to close schools as yet, due to staffing issues.

A Member stated that she did have concerns that the TTP did not work as well as planned and this could impact on the data received. She was also concerned that there was a lack of availability of education that was offered during school closures and many children are slipping behind as a result of the

pandemic. She asked if there is there a plan for them to be reaching their attainment and to catch up

The Director explained that the Director Public Health attends regular meetings regarding the pressures of the TTP. She added that schools are issuing letters to warn and inform parents where there is a positive case of Covid and the letter gives clear advice and guidance to parents. She added that the Education department are working closely with health board colleagues to identify pupils that need to self-isolate. She confirmed that the advice is clear and guidance is issued for each circumstance. She did however reassure members that for each case, it is a requirement that work should be sent home to pupils and if members were aware of a situation where this was not the case then they could raise this with her.

A member asked how schools cover absences for teachers where they are away from the classroom for their professional development.

The Director replied that many schools have a supply of teachers who are familiar with the school and pupils and they will be utilised to cover classes. She added some schools have greater flexibility than others due to RRRS funding. She added that school leaders are always mindful what courses they send their staff on as they are stretched but reassured that they want to achieve a balance so their staff continue in their professional learning and development.

A Member asked how closely the authority are monitoring remote learning. She asked if new advice, in line with guidelines will also be issued to schools and parents ahead of the new term as there did seem to be some confusion around self-isolation requirements.

The Director advised that there had been intensive work had been undertaken with regards to remote learning with parents and schools being surveyed. Discussions had been held about a hybrid/ blended approach to delivering live lessons. She added that the situation was not straight forward as live lessons could not be delivered remotely as teachers were now back in the classroom. The Director added that guidance is updated and shared with schools and parents in line with Government guidance changes.

A Member was concerned that a number of pupils had left welsh medium education during the pandemic as they were not receiving enough support during the lockdown periods.

A Member asked how the home learning provision is reviewed and stated it is important to ensure to include those children that have high absences for a variety of reasons and to ensure these are picked up by Wellbeing teams as pupils will be off for a variety of reasons and not just Covid related absences.

The Director reassured that there is lots of work from the absence teams being carried out and pupils who are away from school for long periods of time are monitored as to the reasons for the prolonged absence. If it's long term then there is an expectation that schools will send work home for individual pupils.

RESOLVED: 1. Members noted the report

2. Members asked to receive an update on the Welsh Medium Schools in the new municipal year.

5 Draft Welsh in Education Strategic Plan - Pre Scrutiny

The Director Education and Inclusion presented the [report](#) to members to provide them with an overview of the Council's Draft Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) following the recent public consultation. The outcome of this consultation and the proposed WESP will be presented to the Cabinet meeting on the 13th December 2021

The Chair thanked officers for the comprehensive report and commented that there were aspirational targets to achieve which will require a joined up approach to ensure they are achieved.

A Member referred to comments from the Welsh Language Commissioner regarding the promotion of a 5 year strategy to promote the Welsh Language and asked for clarification on this.

The Director of Education and Inclusion clarified that he was asking for an alignment between the WESP and the Authorities Welsh Language Promotion Strategy. The Chair commented that Scrutiny would also like to see this alignment and as the document is a 10 year strategy that annual reporting is provided to Scrutiny.

A Member asked for comment on the percentage of responses received that indicated that provision of Welsh Medium Education should be local to them.

The Director Education and Inclusion replied that they ensure provision is mapped and planned throughout the County Borough to meet demand whilst considering the uptake and also surplus places in neighbouring schools

A Member asked about additional provision for children with additional needs and stated it would be useful to see the data associated with this to understand the requirements. She commented that some baseline data would be useful to populate this document and for annual reporting so members can see what the planned growth is. The Director Education and Inclusion replied that this data can be included within the annual delivery plan reporting and they would also look to include a data pack

RESOLVED: Members recommended that the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee receive an annual report on the WESP

6 School Modernisation - Band B Programme

The Service Director 21st Century Schools And Transformation presented the [report](#) to members to provide an update on the Council's revised 21st Century Schools Strategic Outline Programme (SOP), recently approved in principle by the Welsh Government.

Members were updated on the investment secured through the 21st Century Schools and Colleges Programme to improve the quality of the education provision and learning environments for all learners throughout Rhondda Cynon Taf.

A Member asked how secure the finance was under the new MIM model.

The Service Director responded that MIM is a revenue funding stream with

£20bn funding secured. She added she was not concerned about securing the funding and they were on good track with a number of business cases going forward.

A Member asked what criteria is used for a school to be determined of urgent need of replacement as some that she had considered to be in urgent need, particularly Pontygwaith were not on the list in the report. She urged that this be reconsidered should funding become available

The Service Director replied that Welsh Government had provided CO2 monitors to schools to monitor air quality and ventilation. She added that some Victorian schools were better than others as they had big open rooms and high ceilings. She added that funding is continually reviewed in line with the Funding coming forward, we do need to look at service asset management plan and build it in to the future.

A Member asked how the Authority are ensuring we can facilitate remote hybrid learning as this situation was here to stay and we need to ensure we have the technology and infrastructure in place to facilitate the requirement.

The Service Director acknowledged this this has been a challenge. She confirmed that they have improved internet broadband in schools with additional boosters and as part of the Councils Capital Programme they had been investing in classroom upgrades.

A member referred to the Community facilities within schools and asked how the Authority measures the requirement for the facilities and how they are staffed and accessed.

The Service Director replied that work has been undertaken over the last few years to provide 4g pitches for pupils with use being made available in the evening for the community to use. She added that they work closely with leisure colleagues to ensure the facilities are managed efficiently.

RESOLVED: Members noted the contents of the report

7 Draft Strategic Education Plan for 2021 - 2024

The Director Education and Inclusion presented the [report](#) to members to provide them with an overview of the Education and Inclusion Services Draft Strategic Plan for 2021- 2024. Members heard that the plan has been the focus of a consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and the outcome of the consultation, and the revised plan will be presented to the Cabinet meeting on the 13th of December 2021.

A Member referred to the 130 Children and Young People that took part in a number of engagement sessions across various school settings and asked if there was opportunity for officers to speak to other Children and Young People who may not be in full time education to ensure their voices are also heard.

The Director Education and Inclusion acknowledged that more was needed to improve the aspect of the learner voice and they are aware they need to ensure they reach out more directly to them. She reassured members that there would be a much stronger focus on this going forward to ensure full representation is captured.

A Member supported the comment from the Director and suggested they could reach out to the Governing bodies to support in the engagement of all pupils as he felt they were key in the delivery of this plan.

A Member commented that it would be good to understand more about the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People and in particular how they feel about the pandemic and how this has affected them. She added that it would be useful to see the data on Learner Evaluation included in the strategy.

The Director of Education and Inclusion replied that this can be included in section 10 of the strategy. This will include stakeholder feedback so success can be clearly demonstrated.

Another member also commented that the voice of the Learner was important and asked if this could be incorporated into everyday learning, perhaps built into the curriculum or through school council channels rather than selecting specific schools to take part in stakeholder feedback. She added that an information session for Governors on the Strategy would also be beneficial so they are aware of their role in driving the strategy forward

The Director Education and Inclusion responded that they were keen to engage with more schools and also do this on a face to face basis going forward, rather than virtually and have those discussions with Children and Young People in person. She added that they would also take back the comments regarding the engagement with the Governing Body as they were keen to utilise those vital skills and resources that they provide.

A member asked if Trade Unions were also involved in the process as she was aware that often information was not always passed down from Senior Leadership Teams to all teachers and staff and some did not have access to consultation documents.

The Director responded that timescales were difficult however, Trade Unions, parents and PTAs were involved in the consultation process and going forward she would ensure that Governing Bodies, Trade Unions parents and PTA had access to the information to allow them to contribute.

RESOLVED: Following Members consideration of the feedback obtained from the stakeholder consultation in respect of the Education and inclusion Services Draft Strategic Education Plan for 2021-2024, the Scrutiny Committee provided feedback and noted the report

8 Early Years Transformation Programme

Head Of Community Wellbeing And Resilience presented the [report](#) to members to brief them on the progress made across the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region towards the delivery of an integrated early years system as part of the Welsh Government's Early Years Transformation Programme and the transformation of Early Years services in RCT.

A Member thanked officers for the report and stated the progress is a huge testament to the teams involved. He asked about the sustainability for further funding and what rationale is in place to award cases with limited finances.

The Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience advised that funding is on an annual basis. She added that they were also in receipt of child development funding from Welsh Government with a possibility of other funding in the future. She reassured that they have been listened to and there will be longer term funding allocation in 12 months.

A Member asked if the Committee can do anything more to raise this with Welsh Government officers as 1 in 4 in receipt of Free School Meals was a huge amount of vulnerable children.

The Chair asked that members put their concerns in an email to her and she will raise this directly with the Cabinet Member.

The Group Director Community and Children's Services asked that members do not lose sight of the progress being made. He added that they will pilot a different approach to move to a more needs based assessment. He understood member's frustrations but reassured there is a willingness of change of pace and the Cabinet member is supportive of this. He also reassured that they were making regular representations to Welsh Government.

RESOLVED: Members to contact the Chair to make representations to the Cabinet Member

9 Regional Adoption Collaboration Annual Report for Scrutiny Committees

The Regional Adoption Manager presented the report to Members to provide the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee with an update against progress of the Regional Adoption Collaborative. The report is required to be brought before Scrutiny as part of the governance arrangements outlined in Regulation 22 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007 and section 15(c) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Regulations) (Wales) Directions 2015.

The Service Director Children's Services added that that it was pleasing to see some of the highlights reflected in the report on the past year, including the number of referrals being picked up and the report provided assurances around delays. The Director also commented on some of the challenges around post adoption support and ensuring access to the right support is available to families. Another challenge she added has been around difficulties attracting experienced qualified social workers, which has now been given additional resources.

A Member queried the post adoptive services and asked if there was an increase in demand from the lockdown period as children were spending a lot of time from home and away from their usual education settings.

The Regional Adoption Manager replied that the pandemic and subsequent lockdown is a feature, but the referrals have continued beyond the lockdown so this is only part of the picture as the children being supported have a range of complex needs and its within their right to come back and seek support.

A Member commented that as he has a background in family law as a magistrate he sees a lot of the reasons for adoptions and this report warms the heart. He was particularly impressed at the aspirations for zero placements which he thought spoke volumes of the excellent work of the adoption teams.

A Member asked if there is there any way we can support families to faster access to education psychologists to support in transition process too

The Regional Adoption Manager replied that as part of the assessment that is undertaken they do liaise with schools as part of the assessment, as do Adoption UK. Education workers are also aware of the huge issue of raising awareness in school settings ad they are working collaboratively to support pupils in the transition process.

RESOLVED: 1. To note the contents of the report
2. Agreed to receive an Annual Update

10 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair thanked all members and officers for their attendance and contributions to the meeting.

11 Urgent Business

The Chair announced that Rachel Nicholls, Co-opted Member had stood down from her role and thanked her for her attendance and contributions at previous meetings and wished her well for the future.

**CLLR S REES-OWEN
CHAIR.**