

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, on Wednesday, 2nd July 2014 at 5.00 pm.

Present:

County Borough Councillor (Mrs) M E Davies – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors:

W J David	A S Fox	(Mrs) S Jones
I Pearce	(Mrs) S Rees	(Mrs) A Roberts
R W Smith	L G Walker	(Mrs) J S Ward

Officers:

Mr N Elliott – Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing
Mr R Gatis – Service Director, Community Care
Mr A Gwynn – Service Director, Children's Services
Ms A Batley – Head of Prevention and Acting Head of Adoption and Fostering
Mr C B Jones – Service Director, Legal and Democratic Services
Mrs A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

Cabinet Members:

County Borough Councillor M Forey – Cabinet Member for Partnerships & Adults' Social Services
County Borough Councillor G Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Children's Social Services and Equalities

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors C Davies, S Lloyd, (Mrs) J Rosser, B Stephens, D Weeks and D H Weeks.

An apology for absence was also received from Ms Denise Moultrie of the CSSIW who had been invited to attend in relation to the Agenda Item 5 – Preparation of the Committee's Work Programme for 2014/15.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were received in relation to the agenda:

- (i) County Borough Councillor (Mrs) S Jones – in relation to agenda item 3, The Cwm Taf Information & Consultation Strategy – "I am a director and trustee of Cwm Taf Crossroads which receives funding from the Authority.

- (ii) County Borough Councillor M Forey – in relation to agenda item 3, The Cwm Taf Information & Consultation Strategy – “I sit on the Local Health Board”.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Community and Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee held on 8th April 2014.

4. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed both Cabinet Members to the meeting and Councillor Hopkins spoke on his new role as cabinet member for Children’s Services and Equality and the importance he placed on scrutiny in helping the Council deliver the best possible services to vulnerable children in such a challenging environment.

REPORTS OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY & CHILDREN’S SERVICES

5. SUPPORT TO CARERS

The Service Director, Community Care presented Members with the Cwm Taf Information and Consultation Strategy Annual Report for 2013-14 which provided an overview of the work undertaken to date to support carers of all ages in response to the requirements of the Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure. He also explained that in recognition of the importance of informal carers, the Council had appointed a champion for Carers at Cabinet level, namely Councillor Forey.

Councillor Forey spoke on the importance of identifying carers in order to give them a ‘voice’ and reported on the positive work which had been undertaken during the year to identify and support carers.

Members questioned both the Service Director and Councillor Forey in respect of the progress made in relation to the strategy during 2013-14, in particular, the composition of the operational steering group, the future development of the strategy once the 3 year funding from the Welsh Government ends and the delay in the production of the joint Cwm Taf Young Carers Guide.

The Service Director explained that the Steering Group included representatives from Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil Councils, the Local Health Board, the 3rd Sector, the Carers Measure Co-ordinators and also included Councillor Forey. He suggested that the Committee might wish to invite Ms J Komor of Cwm Taf University Health Board, who is lead officer for the implementation of the Carers’ Measure to a future meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Forey explained that the Welsh Government funding allowed the appointment of 3 part time co-ordinators, ie one for each partner organisation.

However, this funding was time limited and it was unknown at the moment whether the Welsh Government would provide any additional resources at the end of the 3 year period. However, representations would be made to the Deputy Minister for Social Services in respect of this issue as well as seeking continued support from the Health Board.

Both the Service Director and the Cabinet Member agreed that there was a need to progress the joint Cwm Taf Young Carers Guide and this would be completed following the return from maternity leave of the key officer.

In addition, the Service Director and Cabinet Member responded to queries relating to the assessment process for carers and the signposting to relevant services.

In conclusion, the Chairman enquired as to the level of take-up of the Carers' Emergency Card and the Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing reported that the figures would be obtained and reported back.

RESOLVED:

- (i) to note the annual report on the Cwm Taf Carers Information and Consultation Strategy;
- (ii) to note the wider work which is being undertaken to support carers of all ages;
- (iii) that Ms Jayne Komor of the Cwm Taf University Health Board be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the Cwm Taf Carers' Strategy.

6. PRESENT NUMBERS OF FOSTER CARERS AND DEREGISTRATION REASONS

The Service Director, Children's Services updated Members with regard to the current number of foster carers registered with Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, including kinship carers and also provided figures in relation to the number of de-registrations which had taken place during 2013/14 and provided an overview of the reasons.

The Committee questioned officers in relation to the de-registration process, focusing on communication between parties during what could be a long process and in particular the relationship between the department and carers who may have won an appeal against de-registration. Members referred to the latest CSSIW inspection report of the fostering service which whilst a positive report, had highlighted the need for improved support for foster carers.

Officers reported on the process which would be followed explaining that each situation would be different depending on the initial reason for de-registration. The Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing explained that

the Council's de-registration process was compliant with Welsh Government guidelines.

Members were also assured that those children placed through independent foster agencies were subject to the same standards and checks as those placed with Council foster carers. Officers explained that the Council now had a duty to ask family members if they were able to care for children and as a result there had been a large increase in kinship carers and it was explained that the standards were slightly different for kinship carers. The Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing added that what was of paramount importance was the safety and wellbeing of the child and if there were any concerns the Council had a duty to act. Officers also explained that foster carers with independent agencies were still required to be approved by the local authority foster panel.

With reference to the CSSIW inspection report a Member requested that the scrutiny committee have sight of the action plan which is being developed to deal with the required areas of improvement highlighted through the CSSIW's inspection of the fostering service. He also suggested that it in recognition of the important role undertaken by foster carers that it might be helpful if Members of the committee had the opportunity to meet with some foster carers.

The Service Director, Children's Services reported that the foster carers generally welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss their role and explained that there was regular foster care events held which might afford an opportunity and this would be explored.

RESOLVED:

- (i) to note the content of the report;
- (ii) to receive the Foster Care action plan developed following the CSSIW inspection to a future meeting of the Committee;
- (iii) that arrangements be made to provide an opportunity for Members of the Committee to meet with Foster Carers.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

7. PREPARATION OF A WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Service Director, Legal and Democratic Services presented the Committee with a report which set out the issues for consideration when preparing a work programme for the Committee.

Members discussed the report and its proposals and were informed that the Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing reported that it was likely that a report would need to be considered during the coming months

with regard to scrutiny arrangements in relation to the new regional adoption agency and its delivery of services.

RESOLVED:

- (i) to note the content of the report;
- (ii) to agree the draft work programme as set out at appendix 1, subject to the additional items requested during the meeting; and that arrangements be made in due course, for the proposed Member visits at a suitable times during the year;
- (iii) that the revised work programme be presented to the next scheduled meeting of the Committee.

(Mrs) M E Davies
Chairman

The meeting closed at 6.32 pm.

