

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Clydach Vale on Monday, 21st September 2015 at 5pm.

Present:

County Borough Councillor (Mrs) C Leyshon – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors:

H Boggis	(Mrs) J Bunnage	S Carter
S Evans-Fear	M Griffiths	P Jarman
B Morgan	(Mrs) S Jones	(Mrs) M Tegg
G P Thomas	L G Walker	

Co-Opted Members:-

Mr J Fish – Parent Governor
Mr J Horton – Parent Governor
Mrs S Jones – Parent Governor
Mr D Price – Unison

Officers in Attendance:

Mr C. Bradshaw – Chief Executive
Mr G Isingrini – Group Director, Community & Children's Services
Ms E Thomas – Temporary Director of Education & Lifelong Learning
Ms A Batley - Acting Service Director, Children's Services
Mr P Griffiths – Service Director, Performance & Improvement
Ms G Davies – Acting Service Director for Access, Engagement and Inclusion
Ms S Walker – Head of Achievement (Primary)
Mr P Nicholls – Principal Solicitor, Litigation
Ms A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

In Attendance for Agenda Item 3

County Borough Councillor C Elmore – Chair of the Central South Consortium
Ms H Woodhouse – Managing Director of the Central South Consortium

5 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors (Mrs) J Cass, A L Davies, B Stephens and C Williams and also from co-opted Members Mr M. Cleverley – NASUWT and Teachers Panel and Mrs C Jones, NUT and Teachers' Panel.

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, there were no personal declarations of interests made, pertaining to the agenda at this juncture of the meeting.
Please see Minute No 11.

7. MINUTES

RESOLVED: to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 13th July 2015, subject to noting that the Resolution at Minute 3 (iii) should refer to the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee and not the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee.

With reference to page 4 of the minutes, a co-opted Member questioned how he and his colleagues would be able to hold the Council to account given that the performance monitoring information would now be presented to the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee. He had noted that the most recent performance information was shortly to be reported to the Cabinet and would then be reported to the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee on 7th October 2015. He questioned how this process would interface with the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

The Service Director, Performance & Improvement reported that at the Council's AGM in May, revised arrangements had been agreed that assigned responsibility to the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee for the scrutiny of the Council's financial and operational performance and as such the Committee receive quarterly Performance Reports following their presentation to Cabinet. The Service Director indicated that the membership of the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee includes the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the individual scrutiny committees, whose role will be to report key matters, as identified within Performance Reports, back to their committees for further review. The Service Director went on to indicate that high priority areas that play a major part in the quality of life for Children and Young People, for example, school attainment, school attendance and safeguarding, will be integral items on the work programme for the committee to scrutinise and hold the Council to account on. The Service Director added that the arrangements are new and will require a period of time to 'bed in' which will include opportunity for Members to feedback their views on what is working well and not so well.

A Member added her concern to those expressed explaining that it was important that the Education Co-opted Members had access to the information they needed to carry out their role and suggested that the process described would be unwieldy.

CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM

8. CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO RAISING STANDARDS IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF SCHOOLS

The Chair welcomed Councillor Elmore and Ms Woodhouse, (Chair and Managing Director of the Central South Consortium respectively), to the meeting for the purpose of informing Members of the contribution of the Central South Consortium to raising standards in schools across Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Ms Woodhouse thanked the Committee for the invitation to speak to Members and explained that whilst the Central South Consortium (CSC) had been formed in 2012, it was not in its current form and following a period of transition a significant re-structure had taken place in 2013/14. She reported that the Consortium provides a school improvement service to 400 schools across 5 local authorities, namely Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Vale of Glamorgan and explained that the Consortium's business plan was attached to the agenda report for Members' information. She explained that governance of the Consortium was led by the CSC Joint Education Service Committee which comprised of the Cabinet Members and Directors with responsibility for Education of the constituent authorities. The Joint Committee was chaired by Councillor Elmore of the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

Ms Woodhouse provided a brief overview of the work of the Consortium and the Central South Wales Challenge and reported specifically on how the Consortium provides support to schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf. She pointed out that outcomes are showing a significant accelerated improvement across all key stages in every authority within the Consortium and that is reflected in results in Rhondda Cynon Taf schools.

Following the presentation of the report Councillor Elmore spoke in relation to his role as Chair of the Joint Committee. Members were invited to ask questions.

Ms Woodhouse and Councillor Elmore responded to Members' questions, providing information with regard to the cross Consortium working which is ongoing to quality control teacher assessments at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. Ms Woodhouse provided information of the work of the school improvement group and the challenge to improve leadership. Ms Woodhouse also informed Members of the work undertaken to quality assure systems and processes within the Consortium and also outlined the innovative programme that the Consortium is delivering to all newly qualified teachers across the region including RCT.

In relation to the 'churn' of Challenge Advisers Ms Woodhouse explained that the nature of the job was such that challenge advisers needed recent experience of leading a successful school but at the same time they would not

wish to be away from schools for too long a period as this could compromise their own professional development

Given that the Pupil Deprivation Grant is now administered through the Central South Consortium, a Member made the request that all such money should be passed on to the schools and not kept centrally for any purpose. It was also suggested that should the aims of the Central South Consortium be met then in effect this would result in the demise of the Consortium.

Councillor Elmore responded that even if all the Consortium's goals in terms of the self improvement of schools were achieved there would still be a role for the Consortium acting as a co-ordinating body to drive improvement across the region and pool resources.

Ms Woodhouse also assured the Committee that schools receive 100% of the Pupil Deprivation Grant and this level of delegation will continue.

The Chief Executive informed the Committee that a report in respect of the Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2, 3 & provisional 4 outcomes for 2015 was being considered by Cabinet on 24th September 2015 and this evidenced Rhondda Cynon Taf's improvement albeit from a low base. He suggested that many local authorities would welcome the level of improvement by schools in RCT and added that the Central South Consortium was the fastest improving of the Welsh consortia.

In response to questions relating to the budget of the Central South Consortium the Committee was informed that details of the budget went before the Joint Committee and were public documents. Ms Woodhouse also explained that the constituent authorities' contributions were proportional to the size of each Authority, and as such Rhondda Cynon Taf pays 28% of the total. She also confirmed that any staff costs as a result of the restructuring of the Consortium had been borne by the Consortium's own budget.

Following consideration of the report and full discussion it was **RESOLVED**: that the governance agreement signed by all 5 authorities should be brought back to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

9. DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15

The Scrutiny Committee was provided with the Director of Social Services Annual Report for 2014/15, which provides a summary of the work and achievements of the last 12 months. The report was provided for information purposes to inform the production of the Committee's work programme.

The Group Director, Community Services reported that production of the report is a statutory duty and that the draft report had been circulated to staff and stakeholders for comment. However, very few responses had been received and the Group Director pointed out that for the future there was a

need to try and do more with regard to public engagement, especially in light of the requirements of the new Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act.

The Group Director commented that the Council's Social Services provides generally good services to local communities but acknowledged that there was more work to do in particular in terms of capacity building, leadership, resilience and also in respect of performance management. He spoke in relation to the need to remodel Children's Services in order to meet future challenges but also pointed to the achievements during 2014/15.

The Group Director highlighted the success of the Council's Adoption Service and explained that performance could not be allowed to slip with the introduction of the Regional Adoption Service. He also highlighted the success in increasing the number of Special Guardianship Orders being implemented which helped children and young people to be cared for by family members.

Both the Group Director and the Acting Service Director for Children & Young People responded to Members' questions in relation to the challenges facing the service. The Acting Service Director, Children & Young People explained that the commissioning mix was a key element given the Council's high number of looked after children and she also referred to the importance of succession planning and ensuring that staff had the skills to carry out their roles effectively.

The Acting Service Director, Children & Young People also reported on the work being undertaken in conjunction with the Education Service in relation to Personal Education Plans. The temporary Director of Education & Lifelong Learning emphasised the work which was being undertaken with schools to not only increase the timeliness of the plans but to ensure that the plans themselves were of good quality.

A Member also highlighted the importance of identifying those children with special educational needs at an early age and officers confirmed that this issue was identified in the Welsh Government's Children's Strategy to support children who are looked after.

REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

10. PROPOSED SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee was reminded that at the last meeting held on 13th July 2015, Members had identified several issues for potential scrutiny. It was explained that following the 13th July meeting, a series of questions had been applied to these topics and further discussion had taken place between the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee and officers, the results of which was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Chair explained that it was proposed to move toward developing a two year programme of work as it was apparent that the Committee would not be able to fulfil all that it wished to achieve by April/May 2016. She asked Members to consider the information set out at Appendix 1 and provide their comments in relation to those areas of work they wished to pursue.

Following consideration of Appendix 1, Members proposed a number of topics for potential scrutiny. A co-opted Member suggested that those members not present be given an opportunity to contribute.

The Service Director, Performance & Improvement explained that officers would begin work on developing more detailed scoping of the chosen topics and that a draft timetable of work would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (i). that the following issues be shortlisted for inclusion on the Committee's Work Programme;
 - Governor Support
 - Safeguarding
 - Early Intervention & Protection/TAF
 - Educational Outcomes for Vulnerable Groups of Children
 - Additional Learning Needs Fund
 - Special Educational Needs
- (ii) Further work in relation to developing draft scopes and timescales to be undertaken for determination at the next meeting of the Committee.

11. REPORTS OF THE TWO SCRUTINY WORKING GROUPS IN RELATION TO LOOKED AFTER CHILDRE (Educational Attainment and Placement Costs)

(Note: County Borough Councillor B Morgan declared a personal interest in relation to this item –“Looked After Children Interest”.)

The Committee was informed that during 2014, the former Community & Children's Services and Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committees each agreed to form a working group in respect of issues relating to Looked After Children. The Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee was concerned at the rising numbers and cost of Looked After Children placements whilst the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee was anxious to improve the education attainment of those children 'looked after'.

The work of these two scrutiny groups had now concluded and the Committee was asked to consider the final reports of the two scrutiny working groups and endorse the findings and recommendations.

Those Members of the working groups present spoke in relation to how interesting they had found the experience and thanked those officers supporting the process for their support.

Following consideration of the reports it was **RESOLVED:**

- (i) to endorse the findings and recommendations of both scrutiny reports in relation to Looked After Children;
- (ii) that both reports be passed to the Executive with the request that they act upon the recommendations.

(Mrs) C Leyshon
Chairman

The meeting closed at 7.25 pm.

