

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, 19th October 2015.

Present:

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

County Borough Councillors:

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| H Boggis | (Mrs) J Bunnage | A L Davies MBE |
| S Evans-Fear | M Griffiths | P Jarman |
| (Mrs) S Jones | B Morgan | G P Thomas |
| L G Walker | C Williams | |

Co-Opted Members:-

Mr J Fish – Parent Governor
Mr J Horton – Parent Governor
Mr Cleverley – NASUWT & Teachers' Panel
Mr C Jones - GMB
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
Mr P Nicholls – Principal Solicitor, Litigation
Ms A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

12 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors S Carter, (Mrs) J Cass, B Stephens, (Mrs) M Tegg and R K Turner and also from co-opted Members Mrs S Jones, Parent Governor and Mrs C Jones, NUT and Teachers' Panel.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, there were no personal declarations of interests made, pertaining to the agenda.

14. MINUTES

RESOLVED: to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 19th October 2015.

For clarity, please note that Mr C Elmore is Chair of the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service Committee.

REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING

15. LEGAL AGREEMENT – CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM

Following the resolution made at the last meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 21st September 2015 (Minute No 8 refers), the Committee was presented with the Legal Agreement in place for the provision of the shared school improvement service for the Central South regions of Wales including Rhondda Cynon Taf which acts as host authority. The Legal Agreement for the Joint Education Service provides the governance framework within which the Service operates and allocates responsibility and accountability in relation to the host authority, directors of education, the Advisory Board, the Operational Group, the Central South Consortium Joint Committee and financial management. Following consideration of the legal agreement, officers responded to Members' questions.

A Member referred to the review of the apportionment costs which needed to be in place for 2016/17 and asked whether Rhondda Cynon Taf's Council or Cabinet would have any influence over any change.

The Chief Executive explained that some local authorities, especially Cardiff had seen a significant growth in pupil numbers and so the Indicator Based Assessment may change. It was also possible that rather than the number of pupils, the number of schools in an area could be used as an equitable model. He reported that Cabinet would need to agree any substantial change accordingly.

The Member also asked whether the pension arrangements for teachers seconded to the Consortium were based on the Council's local government pension scheme or whether they remained within the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

It was agreed that this information would be obtained and reported back to Members.

A Member referred to the Senior Leadership Team and questioned the secondment arrangements in place with regard to Council employees.

The Chief Executive explained that in relation to the Senior Challenge Advisors they remained employees of their respective councils but there was a service level agreement in place with the Consortium which enabled a form of shared employment.

In response to a question referring to any future local authority amalgamations, the Chief Executive explained that should there be any local government re-organisation in the future, the councils making up the joint

committee would cease to exist and it would be up to the new authorities to determine any new arrangements.

A Member referred to the Council's membership on the Governors Steering Group and was informed that each authority had one representative, Mr Fish, Parent Governor, being the representative for Rhondda Cynon Taf.

In response to a query relating to scrutiny of the Consortium, the Chief Executive reported that it had been acknowledged that there was a need for a consistent programme of scrutiny across the constituent authorities of the Consortium. It had therefore been agreed at the last meeting of the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service Committee that representatives of the Consortium should attend each education scrutiny committee around January time of each year ideally, when the published education performance data is available.

RESOLVED to acknowledge the content of the Central South Consortium Legal Agreement.

16. FOUNDATION PHASE, KEY STAGE 2 & 3 AND PROVISIONAL KEY STAGE 4 OUTCOMES FOR 2015

The Acting Director of Education & Lifelong Learning presented the Committee with a report which provided feedback on the Foundation Phase and Key stages 2 and 3, and provisional key stage 4 outcomes for 2015. It was reported that final examination information on each of the 17 secondary schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf would be presented to both the Cabinet and Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee following receipt of the final data. The Committee was informed that for the second consecutive year, education performance in Rhondda Cynon Taf had improved across the four key stages and had improved in Key Stage 2, 3 and 4 faster than the Welsh average. However, despite this improvement, there are still too many schools, when compared to similar schools across Wales that are in the third and fourth quartiles.

Members acknowledged that overall the report was a positive one. However, concerns were raised that the same progress had not been made in relation to those children eligible for free school meals and officers were challenged with regard to what measures for improvement were in place and the impact of projects such as Flying Start and the Pupil Deprivation Grant. It was also noted that the Welsh Medium Schools were showing stronger performance in a number of areas.

The Chief Executive reported that a small number of schools through tracking and intervention had bucked the trend but also explained that the Council did have a large number of pupils eligible for free school meals. He informed the Committee of the introduction of the South Wales Valleys Community Project which is covering the areas of Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil as well as Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen and which will focus on the achievements of those children eligible for free school meals and added that this would be a

way of learning and sharing information. In relation to the Pupil Deprivation Grant, he reported that it is being well used but that there is a need to undertake further analysis to determine the most effective uses of the grant. However, he emphasised that the Authority has high expectations for all its children but that there are factors that need to be overcome.

With reference to the Foundation Phase data, a Member referred to the inconsistencies in assessments reported at 3.3 of the document. She also suggested that it appeared that those pupils using Welsh as their first language were bucking the overall performance trend. With regard to the Key Stage 4 data she felt that there appeared to be a weakness with regard to Mathematics and asked whether there was a strategy in place to improve performance in this area. With regard to the statement made at 7.3 of the report in relation to improving educational standards she felt that in addition to head teachers and the Consortium, that the Government should also be included.

With regard to moderation, the Acting Director of Education explained that there is a programme of work taking place across the Consortia as well as visits being made to schools. She suggested that further information could be brought back to the Committee in relation to this issue.

The Acting Director of Education agreed that there had been a marked improvement in relation to Welsh as a first language and explained that a change in leadership may have contributed to this.

The Chief Executive also pointed out that the Welsh medium schools tended to have fewer children eligible for Free School Meals. With regard to performance in relation to Mathematics, he drew Members attention to the data set out at 5.4 which tracked the progress of a cohort of pupils and pointed that there had been a 10% improvement in mathematics which was pleasing. However, he acknowledged that there is a need to address the gender imbalance.

A co-opted Member suggested that there was a need for an additional set of information to highlight for example how many at Key Stage 3 level 4 are going on to make 2 levels of progress.

The Acting Director of Education & Lifelong Learning reported that she would expect schools to undertake that level of forensic analysis but agreed that the information was something that could be brought to the Committee.

A Member asked if everything was being done to identify those entitled to free school meals. The Chief Executive explained that the Revenues and Benefits team did a great deal of work to ensure that families were aware of their entitlements and encouraged to take them up but this could not be forced. However, for education purposes, figures were based on eligibility and not take-up.

A Member asked whether any comparison had been undertaken between English and Welsh medium pupils receiving free school meals to understand whether there were any other factors affecting performance.

The Chief Executive explained that performance was mixed across both. He reported that more detailed information would be available shortly which would provide more detailed comparison across categories of schools. He pointed out that free school meals is only a proxy indicator and there are other factors that can cause underperformance. However, it has been the case that as a group, those pupils receiving free school meals have underperformed.

The Acting Director for Education and Lifelong Learning highlighted the importance of working in partnership with Children's Services Early Intervention Services as often educational performance is linked to family circumstance.

A co-opted Member asked whether more could be done through schools, such as providing access to the internet for homework. He referred to the London Challenge where pupils went from no homework to an enormous amount. He suggested that resources needed to be placed where they could really make a difference.

The Chief Executive reported that many schools did already provide classes after school with some teachers giving their time freely. Intensive revision classes at lunchtimes are also provided in some schools. However, whilst there are a variety of initiatives being undertaken there is no consistency across schools.

The Chair asked whether the Committee could be informed of what the better performing schools are doing.

The Chief Executive suggested that an invitation could be made to the head teachers of the highest performing schools to speak to the committee on how they transformed their schools.

A Member asked whether vocational or non vocational qualifications are treated equally.

The Chief Executive reported that provided they reached the Level 2 threshold they would be treated equally.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the Committee be provided with more detailed school by school information on receipt of the final data from the Welsh Government;
- (ii) that a report in relation to the work being carried out by the joint education consortia in respect of moderation of teacher assessments be provided to a future meeting of the Committee;

- (iii) that two representative head teachers (one secondary school and one primary school) be invited to attend a future meeting(s) of the Committee to provide an insight into how they transformed their schools.

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

17, SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL REPRESENTATIONS & COMPLAINTS REPORT 14/15

The Committee was presented with the Social Services Annual Representations and Complaints report for 2014/15 which provided information on the background of the Social Services statutory complaints procedure, information on lessons learnt from complaints and performance data for Adults and Children's Social Services together with achievements for 2014/15 and future developments.

A Member commented that he had always found the Complaints unit to be helpful and efficient.

RESOLVED: to accept the report.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

18. PROPOSED SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

At the last meeting of the Committee held on 21st September 2015, Members agreed a number of topic areas for potential inclusion on the Committee's Work Programme. As a result, Members were provided with draft scopes for some of the agreed areas for Members' consideration at Appendix 1 to the report; and attached at Appendix 2 was a proposed programme of work.

The Chair informed the Committee that there would need to be some changes to the work programme in relation to the timing of reports and that two referrals had been from the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee and she asked the Service Director, Performance and Improvement to explain further.

The Service Director, Performance and Improvement informed the Committee that at the last meeting of the Finance & Performance Committee, Members had considered quarter 1 performance and had agreed to refer areas of underperformance to the appropriate scrutiny committee. He explained that in relation to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee there were two issues, firstly, the percentage of schools inspected by Estyn that were graded as at least 'Good' for leadership on a 3 year rolling basis and secondly, the percentage of initial assessments where there is evidence that the child was seen by a social worker. He explained that with regard to the Estyn Inspection results, he pointed out that the targets were ambitious and due to the 3 year rolling programme, some data went as far back as 2012. He

suggested that the Committee may wish to take view on this information was currently being reported.

The Acting Director of Education and Lifelong Learning explained that she made no apology for being ambitious but suggested that there is a need to consider and improve on how this information is being portrayed.

The Group Director, Community & Children's Services reported that he would welcome scrutiny's independence in considering the issues regarding the performance indicator in relation to children being seen by a social worker. He explained that it was an area which the CSSIW always carefully considered and whilst he felt that they were content with the work being carried out by the Authority he was aware that seen in the context of cross Wales performance he appreciated the need for review.

In considering the draft work programme, a Member reminded the Committee of her concerns in relation to how scrutiny of performance is now being carried out and she felt that the referrals from the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee were adding to an already heavy workload. Further concern was raised by a Member in relation to the progress being made by the Committee given the intent at the start of the Municipal Year.

Members considered the draft scoping of work in respect of School Governor Support and queried how this piece of work was set out within the work programme.

The Chairman asked Mr Fish (Co-opted member), as a member of the Central South Consortium's Governors Steering Group whether he would be prepared to contribute to the proposed Governor Support item at the next meeting. He advised the Committee that the Consortium is itself undertaking work in relation to this topic and suggested that care would need to be taken to ensure that there is no duplication of effort.

The Chair suggested that potentially the Committee could undertake work in relation to the recruitment and retention of school governors.

Following discussion it was agreed that an information report be brought to the next meeting of the Committee on 16th November. The Chairman advised the Committee that subject to Members being minded to proceed with this work by way of a working group she would like the first meeting to be held without delay and asked those Members interested in the topic to note that the first meeting would take place during the following week (ie week commencing 23rd November). She also suggested that Members may wish to meet outside the Committee setting to share ideas for progressing the work of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the basis of the work programme be agreed as that set out at Appendix 2 of the report, subject to noting that there will be some changes to timescales and the addition of the referred items from the Finance & Performance Committee;
- (ii) that the work programme be amended as necessary during the year to reflect the demands of the work.

(Mrs) C Leyshon
Chairman

The meeting closed at 6.35 pm.