

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, 18th January 2016.

Present:

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

County Borough Councillors:

H Boggis	S Evans-Fear	M Griffiths
P Jarman	(Mrs) S Jones	B Morgan
B Stephens	G P Thomas	R K Turner
L G Walker		

Co-opted Members:-

Mr J Fish – Parent Governor
Mr J Horton – Parent Governor
Mrs S Jones – Parent Governor
Mr M Cleverley – NASUWT & Teachers' Panel

Officers in Attendance:

Mr C Bradshaw – Chief Executive
Mr G Isingrini – Group Director, Community & Children's Services
Ms Esther Thomas – Temporary Director of Education
Ms A Batley - Service Director, Children's Services
Ms S Walker – Head of Achievement, Primary
Mr C Jones – Service Director, Legal & Democratic Services
Ms A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

In attendance:

County Borough Councillor M Adams – Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

In attendance for agenda item 3:

Mr Justin O'Sullivan, Head Teacher, Cardinal Newman Roman Catholic School

In attendance for agenda items 4 & 5:

Ms Hannah Woodhouse, Managing Director of the Central South Consortium

30. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors (Mrs) J Bunnage, (Mrs) J Cass, A L Davies and (Mrs) M Tegg and also from co-opted Member Mr C Jones, GMB.

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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

32. MINUTES

RESOLVED: to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 21st December 2015.

33. PRESENTATION – HEAD TEACHER, CARDINAL NEWMAN ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL

The Chair welcomed Mr O’Sullivan to the meeting who at the request of the Committee presented Members with an overview his school’s improvement journey.

With the aid of PowerPoint presentation slides Mr O’Sullivan provided Members with an overview of the issues facing the school when he took over as head teacher which included:

- Declining performance;
- Declining pupil roll;
- Polarised teaching staff; and
- Poor building conditions.

However, he also reported that he had a number of positives to work with such as a strong school ethos, it was a caring school with community support and the pupils were well behaved. The school had some very dynamic, committed leaders and some very good teachers as well as a core group of very solid teaching staff. He had the support of the Governing Body which he identified as essential, a local authority with high expectations and also the impetus of an impending Estyn inspection. Mr O’Sullivan reported that the school sat around 6th place in terms of number of pupils eligible for free school meals which should have placed the school around midway in performance within the LA in performance but instead it was around the bottom end of that table at the time

Mr O’Sullivan reported on what the priorities were for him in turning the school around and spoke on the importance of leadership not just from the head teacher. Key issues for him were teaching and learning, literacy and numeracy, breaking down silo working/ sharing good practice and addressing ‘unsatisfactory’ practice. Amongst the changes that he introduced was a focus on stretch and challenge, setting goals, a reduction in the class sizes in English and he set about addressing unsatisfactory teaching performance with the support of the Council’s Human Resources.

Mr O’Sullivan reported that he had the support of the LEA when results did not improve as anticipated in 2013 and in 2014 performance increased dramatically and was sustained through 2015 when the school had the top

GCSE results in Rhondda Cynon Taf and is categorised a green school by the Welsh Government

In conclusion he explained that results do not happen by accident, there has to be an overall vision, it involves time and energy, support from the local authority and the Central South Consortium, good leadership and accountability, sharing best practice and you must celebrate your best teachers. He warned against complacency and stressed the need to be aware of what is happening in other schools.

Following his presentation, Mr O'Sullivan responded to a wide range of questions from Members which included the need for support from pupils and parents, investing in staff and he also put forward his case that he did not think that being a Faith school put the school in a privileged position. He pointed out that the profile of the school is not much different when compared with the community schools in terms of its free school meal profile and the school relies completely on the LA school budget with no additional funds from the diocese; any additional money is raised through the governing body. Sixty percent of pupils are baptised Roman Catholic and 40% non catholic; around 40% of staff are catholic but there is no requirement for staff to be catholic other than the posts of head teacher, deputy head teacher and the head of religious education. However, staff are expected to be respectful and promote the catholic ethos.

Members congratulated Mr O'Sullivan on his achievements but also questioned the sustainability of continued improvement.

Mr O'Sullivan acknowledged that it is not easy for a relatively small school but he spoke on the relationship with his staff and the protection afforded to date to schools' budgets and the motivation of staff which he did not feel centred around financial reward but rather about feeling valued. He pointed out that when he had arrived at the school, no teacher had ever left the school for promotion. Now staff are furthering their abilities and are moving on to become heads of departments.

Mr O'Sullivan also explained to Members his reasoning in developing the successful partnership with Coleg y Cymoedd reporting that it had opened up a much wider choice of subjects for sixth form pupils with there now being around 200 registered in the 6th form and they had been very successful in pupils gaining places at Oxbridge.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked Mr O'Sullivan for his attendance and very interesting presentation. The Chairman also informed the Committee that Ms Eleanor Jarrold, the head teacher of Maesycoed Primary School would be providing her perspective to Members at the February meeting of the Committee.

Following Mr O'Sullivan's departure, Members discussed the comparison between a faith school and non faith schools and it was suggested that perhaps Members should receive a presentation from a non faith secondary

school. It was commented that whilst children were not chosen on academic ability, the faith school ethos of politeness, discipline and perhaps parents that were in some cases more supportive gave them an element of advantage.

The Chairman advised on an already busy work programme and the Temporary Director of Education reported that she felt that the next presentation from the Head Teacher of Maesycoed Primary School would provide a balance.

REPORTS OF THE TEMPORARY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

34. KEY STAGE 4 EXAMINATION RESULTS AND PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL CATEGORISATION FOR 2015

Before asking the Temporary Director of Education to present her report the Chairman to the opportunity to welcome Ms Hannah Woodhouse, Managing Director of the Central South Consortium to the meeting.

The Temporary Director of Education provided the Committee with the confirmed Key Stage 4 examination results for 2015 along with the Welsh Government Primary and Secondary School Categorisation for 2015-16.

It was reported that good progress continues to be made by schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf against the key performance indicators, increasing at a faster rate than the Welsh average. However, performance across schools continues to be mixed. The report set out pupils' performance across the four key subject areas of English, Welsh, Mathematics and Science and also the gender variation of performance which identified that the boys have slightly narrowed the gap in English and Science and are performing on par with girls in Mathematics. However, a wide gap still exists with girls outperforming boys by some distance in Welsh and English. It was reported that the five secondary schools which have received financial support from the Welsh Government's Schools Challenge Cymru programme will continue to receive financial support to ensure longer term improvements in standards.

The Temporary Director of Education also reported on the primary and secondary school categorisation process and informed Members that to date, sufficient progress is being made by the vast majority of amber and red schools and the ambition is that over the next few years, the Council and the schools will work together to strive to ensure that all Rhondda Cynon Taf's schools are good schools and that no school is in the Red category.

Following presentation of the report, the Temporary Director of Education and Ms Woodhouse responded to Members' questions.

Members welcomed the improving position but questioned what strategy is in place to improve the performance of boys and also questioned how the huge changes in primary school performance would be monitored.

Ms Woodhouse explained that the underperformance of boys is an issue across the regions and that the Consortium would continue to encourage strong leadership and also support building leadership capacity and the sharing of good practice. She pointed out that Cardinal Newman school is a lead school in this respect.

With regard to the School Categorisation, Ms Woodhouse reported that moderation took place on a regional and national level. She explained that this was the second year of the process which had identified improvement on a regional basis. She reported that in the main the School Improvement Groups (SIGs) were operating well and that some additional support had been brought in from Cardiff University. The Head of Achievement, Primary reported that the Central South Consortium's website provided case studies of how the SIGs were making a difference.

The Head of Achievement, Primary reported that since production of the report it had been verified that there were now only 3 'red' primary schools. She explained that there had been a great improvement in primary school performance during the 12 months due to more sharing of good practice and schools supporting each other and this had led to the increase in 'green' schools.

Members questioned the improving picture with regard to science results compared to Mathematics and the Chief Executive explained that the science results was skewed to some extent due to the inclusion of the BTEC Science results in the performance data. He pointed out this was changing next year and it was likely that there would be a significant drop in science performance data. He explained that work is underway to support this change with the Consortium working with science teachers who are more used to teaching BTECH modules rather than GCSE. The Chief Executive also explained to Members how the examining boards control the overall pass rates in subject areas by adjusting pass marks so that the maximum number of children able to obtain A*-C grades in any one subject overall would be 65%.

RESOLVED: to accept the report and commend the progress made to date.

35. ESTYN INSPECTION REPORT OUTCOMES IN RCT SCHOOLS IN 2015

The Head of Achievement, Primary, provided the Committee with a detailed analysis of Estyn inspection outcomes that took place across all school sectors from January to December 2015. She reminded Members that the Estyn inspection cycle is more open now and that schools can no longer predict when they will be inspected. However, all schools will be inspected at least once within the 6 year period beginning 1st September 2014 and will receive 20 working days written notice.

It was reported that the local authority currently has 1 school requiring special measures, 3 schools requiring significant improvement, 2 schools subject to Estyn monitoring and 7 schools/settings subject to local authority monitoring. Whilst there are still a large number of schools placed in follow-up activity,

there are now mainly deemed to require the lighter touch of local authority monitoring which demonstrates that Estyn now has confidence in the improvement in leadership across the Authority's schools. Through the Estyn process 4 examples of best practice were also identified.

Members considered the report and discussed the use of free school meal entitlement as a factor in measuring a school's performance.

Ms Woodhouse agreed that whilst it is not a perfect measure it is one way of measuring deprivation and it provides a way of measuring schools across Wales with similar issues.

Following consideration it was **RESOLVED**:

- (i) to receive termly progress updates on schools in follow-up and/or categorised by the Consortium as needing high levels of support;
- (ii) to receive future reports on inspection outcomes in September to reflect the outcomes during the academic year.

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

36. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

For some time, scrutiny Members have expressed concern regarding what appeared to be the Council's consistently poor performance in relation to a suite of performance indicators relating to children looked after and children on the child protection register. The CSSIW have also raised the issue of the Council's use of "unqualified workers" in comparison to other local authorities. Whilst they have not suggested that the Council's way of managing its child care caseloads is inappropriate they have highlighted that Rhondda Cynon Taf's position differs from other authorities in Wales and in their 2014/15 Annual Evaluation report point out that "While virtually all (95%) looked after children in Wales have a qualified social worker, 63% of looked after children in Rhondda Cynon Taff do so".

This issue was discussed at the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 16th November 2015 following a referral from the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee and Members agreed that the Committee should review the issue in more detail.

As a result, the Service Director, Children's Services reported to Members on the effect of the service using non social work qualified staff on a number of Welsh Government Performance Indicators. Her detailed report explained the use of non-social work qualified but nonetheless appropriately qualified and experienced staff in undertaking required duties. The Service Director reported on the introduction of these Assessor Care Manager (ACM) posts and their duties with details of the job description and person specification attached as an appendix to the report. She also provided data on the allocation of cases over the last 5 years and performance trends. Her report

also set out how a number of these ACM posts have been converted to social work posts in recent years and explained that vacant posts are reviewed before filling vacancies.

The Service Director reported that the cases allocated to the ACMs as well as those allocated to social work staff are monitored regularly through monthly supervision and in respect of child protection cases through the Cwm Taff Safeguarding Board via the annual report process. She emphasised that in RCT Looked After Children are allocated to appropriately qualified and experienced workers and those that are not qualified social workers are allocated the those looked after children who are in long term stable placements and where the risk has been assessed as being very low.

The Service Director, Children & Young People reported that whilst the focus is on reducing the numbers of individuals requiring crisis intervention, the reliance on the role of the ACM will, for the foreseeable future, remain and is greatly valued within the service. However, the use of ACM staff will continue to be monitored in the light of service remodelling and the performance indicators set by the Welsh Government and the new requirements within the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 ie either a registered social worker/social care professional holding a professional qualification or a person holding a social care qualification having to be responsible for preparing and revising a care and support plan.

Members asked whether the outcomes for children allocated to ACMs were different to those allocated to social workers and also questioned how any risk was managed. They also asked whether there is a Welsh standard in relation to the numbers of social workers an Authority should employ based on caseload.

The Service Director reported that interestingly, sometimes the ACMs had better outcomes possibly because of the stability of this staff group as they tended to stay with the Council for longer. There again it could be because their cases hold a lower level of risk.

The Service Director also reported that there is regular supervision in place for everyone including the team managers which will look at the effectiveness of a care plan. She also explained that risk is shared rather than falling to one person and if necessary supervision meetings are held weekly rather than monthly. The robustness of the supervision process is tested at least once a year through an audit of supervision meetings.

The Service Director reported that there is no Welsh standard in relation to the number of social workers which a Council should have to cater for its childcare caseload. She explained that because the Council uses its staff in a slightly different way to other Councils the inspectorate has drawn attention to this issue. However, they have not declared it to be wrong.

Having considered the report and responses from the officers the Committee **RESOLVED** that it was satisfied that the current use of Assessor Care

Managers as set out within the report did not raise any specific areas of concern.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

37. DEVELOPING SCRUTINY OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES FUNCTIONS

The Chairman reported on the outcome of the Member workshop held on 5th January and the proposal that the Committee should receive more detailed information in relation to the four key areas for Children's Services, namely, early intervention & prevention; looked after children; safeguarding and workforce. She explained that the Members who had attended the workshop had acknowledged the workload of the Committee and suggested that the membership should form small groups to each receive a more detailed information on the four themes with a view to reporting back to the Committee on areas to progress.

RESOLVED: that the Committee forms small groups of interested Members, each group to meet on an informal basis to gain a better understanding of the four key areas for Children's Services as detailed above. When ready, these groups will report back to the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to inform the Committee's work programme.

(Mrs) C Leyshon
Chairman

The meeting closed at 7.38 pm.