

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, 29th February 2016.

Present:

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

County Borough Councillors:

(Mrs) J Cass	S Evans-Fear	M Griffiths
(Mrs) S J Jones	B Morgan	B Stephens
(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 M Cleverley – NASUWT & Teachers' Panel
Mr D Price - Unison

Officers in Attendance:

Ms Esther Thomas – Temporary Director of Education
Ms G Davies – Acting Service Director for Access, Engagement and Inclusion
Ms Ceri Jones – Acting Head of Access and Inclusion
Mr Tim Britton – Head of Performance
Mr P Nicholls – Principal Solicitor, Litigation
Mr P Griffiths – Service Director, Performance & Improvement

In attendance:

County Borough Councillor R Smith – Chairman of the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

In attendance for agenda item 3:

Mrs Eleanor Jarrold , Head Teacher, Maesycoed Junior School, Pontypridd

38. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors (Mrs) H Boggis, J Bunnage, S Carter, A L Davies MBE, P Jarman, R K Turner and C Williams

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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

40. MINUTES

RESOLVED: to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 18th January 2016.

41. PRESENTATION – HEAD TEACHER, MAESYCOED PRIMARY SCHOOL

The Chair welcomed Mrs Eleanor Jarrold, Head Teacher of Maesycloed Primary School in Pontypridd to the meeting who provided Members with a detailed overview of her school's improvement journey whilst presenting a slide show depicting pictures of staff and pupils during their many activities.

Mrs Jarrold provided Committee with the following information about her school. There are:-

- 308 pupils on roll
- 11 classes in total
- 22% of pupils are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and
- 30% of pupils have additional learning needs

Since its Estyn report in 2010 which judged the school 'to be in need of significant improvement', the school has progressed and in its Estyn inspection in 2015 was judged 'good for current performance' and 'good for prospects for improvement'. The Head Teacher credited this change with effective communication amongst all staff and to developing a strong leadership team with distributed accountability across the school. The school has now been categorised as a green school within the Welsh Government categorisation process. This has resulted in the school having a very clear ethos, strong standards and good leadership at all levels. The Head Teacher elaborated on the principles of the leadership team which aims to develop accountability and monitoring across the school with all School Leaders having clear and detailed job descriptions which are reviewed regularly. This has helped all teachers feel valued and regular team meetings have further developed effective communication. The use of self evaluation processes have also contributed to the success of the school

Committee was informed that the Deputy Head Teacher of Maesycloed Primary School is a Foundation Stage teacher who has taken the lead on training for other schools in RCT as well as in schools across the Central South Consortium (and although the member of staff is leaving the school temporarily to take up post as an Acting Head Teacher in Cardiff this will have no detrimental impact upon the running of Maesycloed Primary School). The Head Teacher shared her personal vision to introduce the teaching of Mandarin to the school following her recent visit to China. It was confirmed that as the school has adopted a cross curriculum thematic approach, teaching Mandarin as a second language would tie in with a global curriculum and strengthen their existing links with the Confucius Institute, Cardiff University.

As well as the new focus on leadership, Mrs Jarrold credited the success of the school to the range of strong partnerships that exist and to the support it receives from the local community, parents, the Local Authority, the Central

South Consortium and the School Governors. She added that the Parents Forum contributes to the decision making of the school and the whole school ethos to promote tolerance and discipline. Mrs Jarrold reported that the majority of pupils arrive at the school with below average skills in literacy and numeracy for their age, however, the outcome for all learners has improved dramatically with the use of a wide range of data which is used regularly by the senior management team to enable them to monitor and support pupils to check that pupils make the required levels of progress.

The Head Teacher provided examples where strong literacy and numeracy skills have been developed by the pupils such as Key Stage Two pupils writing at length with strong presentation and hand writing skills. Examples of pupils work and text books were circulated to Committee to demonstrate the standard and variety of work undertaken by pupils at the different key stages.

Following the presentation the Chairman thanked the Head Teacher for her presentation and invited County Borough Councillor R. Smith to comment in his role as School Governor of Maesycoed Junior School. County Borough Councillor Smith paid tribute to Mrs Jarrold in developing a strong leadership role and to the commitment that the parents and pupils have demonstrated.

Mrs Jarrold responded to a wide range of questions from Members of the Committee which included how the school makes effective use of its Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) by promoting literacy skills and use of a programme of intervention ('DRWS') and by using the grant to subsidise school trips which provide pupils with a wealth and breadth of different experiences. Mrs Jarrold also confirmed that although the school's role within its school improvement group (SIG) is an important one, the main focus remains on the pupil's development.

Mrs Jarrold described the journey which the school has undertaken from being categorised as a red school to a green school as one that has involved being able to accept any help and support on offer and not being afraid to ask for any resources which would help raise the standards of the school. She added that it is not easy to maintain the standard required to remain a green category school but credited the progress to their substantive leadership team. Mrs Jarrold further explained that the cross Curriculum Thematic Approach which has been adopted by the school, although not a new approach is one that stimulates the pupils whilst retaining the structure of the numeracy and literacy framework and she provided some examples of this.

Mrs Jarrold praised the support of her school governors which she considers a crucial role in the shift to being categorised as a green school. She pointed out that the relationship between the school and the governors is one of a 'critical friend' which involves communicating information regularly. In conclusion Mrs Jarrold commented that her school is a happy and welcoming school.

42. PRE SCRUTINY OF THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

The Service Director Performance & Improvement presented his report in relation to the Council's proposed approach for the pre-scrutiny of progress against the Council's 2015/16 priorities and the 2016/17 actions to deliver the priorities as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan.

The Service Director Performance & Improvement reported that further to the Wales Audit Office recommendations that all local authorities put in place arrangements for pre scrutiny of key issues, the Council has pre-scrutinised a number of key documents in recent months such as the draft Corporate Plan and draft Leisure Strategy. However, it is recognised that there are opportunities for further improvements to be made and it is recommended that the practice of pre-scrutiny continues for the Council's corporate performance reporting and planning.

The Service Director Performance & Improvement explained that Members of the Council's Scrutiny Committees would be asked to form a view on the assessment of the six priorities agreed for 2015/16 and to form a view on the priorities for the year ahead. The proposed approach was explained which would see three Scrutiny Working Groups established, the membership of which would comprise of Members from existing Scrutiny Committees. It was recommended that each Scrutiny Working Group would meet on two occasions: firstly to consider 2015/16 progress and secondly to consider actions to deliver 2016/17 priorities. The Service Director Performance & Improvement added that the outcomes from each Scrutiny Working Group would be used to inform the compilation of a user friendly draft Corporate Performance Report for 2016/17 and reported to the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee for review, and following this, a final draft version would be presented to Full Council in June 2016.

Following presentation of the report the Service Director Performance & Improvement responded to a number of concerns from Members which included the potential for the working groups to become a 'talking shop' when faced with an uncertain financial future or be a superficial process. Members queried whether there should have been an earlier opportunity for pre scrutiny to take place to make the process more meaningful, for example, from September 2015, and whether the proposed timetable is adequate.

The Service Director Performance & Improvement welcomed the comments and feedback from Members and indicated the approach would provide further opportunities to integrate the scrutiny process with the Council's performance planning and reporting arrangements. He also explained that the process would provide Members of the Scrutiny Committees with the opportunity to assess the progress the Council made during 2015/16 and as such it was necessary for the exercise to be undertaken toward the end of the financial year i.e. at the point when a meaningful picture of performance for the year became available. The Service Director went on to indicate that the timetable is one that is considered challenging but achievable, and should

Members require additional Scrutiny Working Group meetings be arranged to enable areas to be looked at in more detail, officers will incorporate these into the timetable.

Following discussion and consideration of the report it was **RESOLVED:-**

1. To endorse a way forward to enable pre scrutiny of the Council's 2015/16 priorities and 2016/17 priority actions to begin in March 2016 subject to the comments made; and
2. That the following Elected Members will become members of the Scrutiny Working Groups as follows:-

Councillor M Griffiths (Scrutiny Working Group 3)
Councillor B Stephens (Any one of the three Scrutiny Working Groups)
Councillor B Morgan (Scrutiny Working Group 1)
Councillor (Mrs) S Jones (Any one of the three Scrutiny Working Groups)
Councillor S Evans-Fear (Scrutiny Working Group 2)
Councillor (Mrs) M Tegg (Scrutiny Working group 3 (or any other))
Councillor (Mrs) J Cass (Scrutiny Working Group 3)
Mr J Fish (Co-opted Member) (Scrutiny Working Group 2 or 3)

43. SCHOOL EXCLUSION DATA FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2014/15

The Acting Head of Access and Inclusion presented her report which provided Members with an analysis of school exclusion data for the academic year 2014/15 compared to 2013/14. Members were presented with background information which provided some context to the school exclusion process and provided details of alternative solutions available to schools.

A number of tables were produced which demonstrated the permanent and fixed term exclusions for the academic years 2013/14 and 2014/15 as well as those permanent exclusions within the individual schools across the County Borough. Committee was informed of the small increase in the number of permanent exclusions over 2013/14-2014/15 and the primary reasons for this type of exclusion were given and added that there has been an increase in the number of more serious incidents.

Committee was referred to a table which set out the secondary schools that have excluded pupils on a fixed term basis and the number of days lost due to those exclusions in 2013/14 compared to 2014/15 and likewise details of the Primary School exclusions were presented. The Acting Head of Access and Inclusion reminded Committee that for those schools who have seen an increasing trend in the number of exclusions there are many interventions in place and the Local Authority continues to work closely with schools and partners to address issues relating to exclusion. Two further more detailed tables which set out the average length of the exclusion for each primary school and secondary school with the added detail of the exclusion rates per 1000 pupils which allows for comparisons to be undertaken were provided.

In conclusion the Acting Head of Access and Inclusion confirmed that the number of fixed term exclusions has risen by 7.75% and number of days lost due to exclusion has increased by 5.75% and permanent exclusions have risen by 17.6%. However further more recent datasets have produced a more encouraging picture which demonstrates that there have been decreases on all three measures. Details of the support available to schools and the work ongoing within the Access and Inclusion Service to improve the standard in the schools and to assist schools with the management of exclusions and permanent exclusions was explained.

The Officer responded to a number of queries relating to the report including how the data is presented. One Member asked whether the school exclusion data should mirror that on the Stats Wales Website to assist Members analyse the information. Another formed a view that the data alone does not provide the whole picture in terms of whether some schools are managing bad behaviour better than others or whether some schools more tolerant towards bad behaviour and that further background information to accompany the data would be useful. The Temporary Director of Education confirmed that different approaches towards school exclusion are adopted with some schools looking to keep pupils on site.

One member of the committee praised the work undertaken as part of the Restorative Approaches in Schools (RAIS) pilot in one of the Local Authority schools which had seen improved results and a change in the mindset of teachers and pupils. A query was raised in relation to the Additional Needs Fund (ANF) and whether the options paper had yet been shared with schools. The Acting Service Director for Access, Engagement and Inclusion confirmed that other secondary schools have also seen an improvement as a result of the RAIS pilot scheme. She added that the impact is far reaching and the next stage is to train peer mediators. The Acting Service Director also referred to the ANF which will be now be going directly to the school as the cluster phased approach has been disregarded but confirmed that an email would shortly be sent to all schools informing them of the changes to the process. Clarification was sought in respect of the names of the other schools currently involved in the RAIS project.

A point was raised by one Member in respect of interpreting the data, whether it tells us whether ten children have been excluded ten times or whether ten children have been excluded once. The Acting Head of Access and Inclusion commented that the five year report includes that level of detail which can be provided if Members consider this useful.

Following consideration of the report it was **RESOLVED:-**

1. To note the information within the report; and
2. That the next report in respect of the School Exclusion Data includes data in relation to repeat exclusions and national benchmarking that can be extracted from five year report; and

3. That further incident and background information is incorporated into the School Exclusion Data report in order to provide some context to the information.

(Mrs) C Leyshon
Chairman

The meeting closed at 7.35 pm.

