

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale. on Wednesday 26th September 2018 at 5 p.m.

PRESENT

County Borough Councillor W. Lewis – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors

H. Boggis	J. Davies	L. Hooper
J. Brencher	H. Fychan	S. Powell
A. Calvert	M. Griffiths	G. Stacey

Non – Committee Members in attendance

County Borough Councillor S. Evans – Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny

Co-opted Members

Mr J. Fish – Voting Elected Parent/ Governor Representative
D. Price – Representing UNISON

Officers in Attendance

Ms G Davies – Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Mr S. Gealy – Service Manager Welsh Language Services
Mr P. Nicholls – Head of Legal – Litigation, Planning & Environment,
Community and Children’s Services
Ms J. Allen – Head of Attendance and Wellbeing

19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from: County Borough Councillors S. Evans, J. Harries, G. Jones, W. Lewis, M. Powell and Co-Opted Members Mr S. Emanuel and Mr C. Jones.

Apology was also received from Cabinet Member County Borough Councillor G. Hopkins Chair of the Welsh Language Steering Group

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED – that in accordance with Members Code of Conduct, there were no personal interests made at the meeting pertaining to the agenda.

21. MINUTES

RESOLVED – To approve as an accurate record the Minutes of the 18th July 2018.

22. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF THE AGENDA

The Committee agreed that the agenda would be considered out of sequence and as detailed in the minutes set out hereunder.

23. PROPOSED SCHOOL ATTENDANCE STRATEGY FOR 2018- 2021

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing presented the report to Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee explaining that the purpose of the report is to provide Members with the full Draft School Attendance Strategy 2018 - 2021, including the action plan aimed at raising awareness of good school attendance and improving the current rates across Rhondda, Cynon and Taf.

Members were informed of the attendance figures for years 2015/16 and 2017/18 which evidence the need for a revision of the School Attendance Strategy to address the key issues contributing to the reduced attendance rates.

It was explained to the Committee that the Strategy will further strengthen the focus on intervention, support and awareness raising of the wider school population either prior to referral or in addition to the support being provided to the pupils open to the Attendance and Wellbeing Service.

Members were presented with the six key priorities of the school attendance strategy which are:

- Improve pupil, parent, public and school awareness of school attendance issues by developing a whole authority approach to promoting and improving attendance;
- Review, evaluate and further develop the use of data, its analysis and the reporting mechanisms to inform service improvements both at local authority and school level;
- To further develop a robust and sustainable challenge and support system for improving school attendance, linking with other key priorities that impact on and are impacted by absenteeism;
- To develop an efficient and self-sustainable mechanism for sharing good practice and information on a timely basis that can be accessed independently by schools at any time;
- To review, evaluate and re-launch key initiatives and interventions to support good attendance and tackle absenteeism;
- Further develop partnership working to ensure the key objective of improving school attendance is embedded across internal and external agencies.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing guided Members through the key points and provided them with the progress that has been made against the action plan to date. After concluding her report the Head of Attendance and Wellbeing took questions from Members.

A Member asked Officers for clarification in respect of the different attendance data in the report that has been brought to this Committee and the data that had been provided to the Finance and Performance on the 24th September 2018. Officers explained that they would look into the discrepancy and get back to Members with the correct information.

Members scrutinised the report in great detail and put forward many questions and observations. Members raised concerns in respect of in respect of priority 5 of the Attendance Strategy with regards to Truancy Watch and Truancy Free Zones.

A Member wanted clarity on how the Truancy Watch would work, it was explained this would be set up in conjunction with the local PCSOs for regular patrols following a registration period in the local towns.

In respect of the Truancy Free Zone Members had a number of concerns, it was felt that this initiative needed to be looked at in more detail as it was felt that Local Authority settings (e.g. libraries) and local businesses could be considered as safe areas for pupils. There were concerns that the label of Truancy Free Zone could push some pupils out of safe zones. It was felt that as a service there needed to be a drive to address the reasons why these learners are not in school

and to support them to re-engage. Officers explained that the initiative isn't to push the pupils out of safe areas but to try and understand why and to support them back in to education.

In respect of the PCSO involvement a number of Members felt that the Officers are stretched to capacity and this could add more pressure on the service. The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing explained that great work has been done with the South Wales Police and the British Transport Police within their regional operations.

A Member of the Committee asked the officer a question in respect of how much involvement the school governors have had in preparation of the strategy as reading the report there doesn't seem to any information. The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing explained that governor involvement would be considered where appropriate and will be included in the plan moving forward.

Members required information on how much involvement the schools and young people had when developing the initiatives. The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing indicated that there has been involvement with schools and the feedback has been incorporated in the plan.

Members also put questions forward relating to the way schools code non-attendance in certain circumstances. For example, when adverse weather conditions were a factor, girls missing school due to their menstrual cycle, pupils suffering with chronic illness etc. It was queried how are these are factored in to datasets when recording absences. The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing explained that coding for attendance is controlled by all Wales codes provided by Welsh Government.

A Member commented that attendance is important however felt that many parents take children out of school for various appointments at the end of the day and this could also be detrimental to the pupils' learning. It was felt the letter being sent out to parents should be strengthened to alter parents to the problem.

After further consideration of the report Members **RESOLVED** to:

- Acknowledge the information contained within the report
- Provide Members with the correct information regarding the difference in attendance data.
- To involve School Governors in future discussions
- To create a template policy
- That comments will be fed back into the final report for Cabinet.
- To look more in depth at the Truancy Watch and Truancy Free Zones initiatives.

24. SRUTINY ENGAGEMENT IN THE 21ST CENTUARY SCHOOLS MODERNISATION

The Director of Communications and Interim Head of Democratic Services presented the report in relation to Scrutiny Engagement in the 21st Century Schools Modernisation Proposal.

It was explained that the purpose of the report is to outline opportunities for the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to engage in a review of the current 21st Century Schools Programme Band A projects to identify : How well did it perform ?; How do we know?; and how do we learn lessons and improve the programme for Band B?. It was highlighted to Members this will include the role of Scrutiny in scrutinising the development and delivery of Band B projects.

The Director of Communications and Interim Head of Democratic Service explained as part of the regular engagement meetings which have been established between the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Members, the Chair of Children and Young People had requested that the Scrutiny Committee is part of the school reorganisation consultation process. This would provide an opportunity for Scrutiny Committee to comment upon specific future proposals which would also be considered by the Cabinet under the Welsh Government School Organisation Code.

Members were also informed that due to the prescriptive nature of the Welsh Government Schools Organisation Code, it would not be appropriate for Scrutiny to be engaged in the detail of specific proposals before the Executive have considered whether or not to proceed with the prescribed statutory consultation processes.

It was highlighted that the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee has subsequently identified the opportunity for scrutiny of the 21st Century Programme in November as part of its work programme. It was suggested that this meeting could provide the opportunity to begin the review of the Band A projects and to potentially identify any lessons learnt.

Members were taken through the proposal and put forward questions to the Director of Communications and Interim Head of Democratic Services. A Member asked what is being put forward for considered at a community level as there is a lot details that could be discussed within communities to help in the process. It was emphasised that everybody needs to be involved and the consultation process will be a way of taking a wider view of Scrutiny, alongside the schools and wider stakeholder feedback such as Governors, community members etc. Members asked about the way forward and how Scrutiny can play an important part going forward. It was

explained that Scrutiny Committee will contribute to the consultation feedback provided for Cabinet.

Members consider the report and proposals and as a Scrutiny Committee

RESOLVED:

- To agree to consider and comment upon specific school organisation proposals, which are consulted upon in accordance with the Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2018) in future work programmes
- Agree to a future report being presented to Scrutiny that reviews the current 21st Century Schools Band A Programme.
- That Scrutiny visits a number of new schools and identifies how we can further improve Band B, which will include the opportunity to discuss the Programme with school staff and pupils.

25. WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN (WESP) UPDATE OF PROGRESS REPORT

The Service Manager Welsh Language Services presented the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan Update of Progress.

The Service Manager Welsh Language Services explained that the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan includes seven outcomes setting out how local authorities will be expected to improve Welsh Medium and Welsh language education in the area. Priorities include:

Outcome 1: More seven year old children being taught through the medium of Welsh

Outcome 2: More learners continuing to improve their language skills on transfer from primary school to secondary school

Outcome 3: More 14- 16year old students studying for qualifications through the medium of Welsh

Outcome 4: More 16 – 19 year old students studying through the medium of Welsh in schools, colleges and work based learning.

Outcome 5: More learners with higher skills in Welsh

Outcome 6: Welsh –medium provision for learners Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

Outcome 7: Workforce planning and Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

The Service Manager Welsh Language Services highlighted to Members that as Members recall at the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on the 1st May 2018, Members resolved to:

- receive an update against the WESP action plan,
- receive comparative data from other Authorities across Wales,
- receive an update from the Strategic Working Group informing Members of their progress

The Officer explained that the Pupil Level Annual School Census (January 2018) suggested that the percentage of pupils taught through the Medium of Welsh at primary level has not increased during the past academic year. There has also been a marginal decrease in the percentage of learners taught in Welsh Medium secondary schools. Members were also informed dual medium settings and provisional data for 2018 relating to the numbers of pupils taught Welsh in the Central South Consortium (CSC) highlights a slight increase in the number of pupils taught in Welsh as a first language across CSC. However, a slight reduction in numbers was evident in Rhondda Cynon Taf when comparing 2017 and 2018 datasets.

In conclusion, the Service Manager Welsh Language Services along with the Director of Education and Inclusion Services, informed Members that Rhondda Cynon Taf remains committed to supporting growth in Welsh medium education in line with Cymraeg 2050 : a million speakers' ambition. It was explained that the WESP brings together many different components of local Welsh medium strategic planning and highlights the different roles that key partners need to play to support the development of the Welsh medium education and Welsh language education in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Officers explained that the Welsh Standards and Education sit outside each other and it was explained that the policy is set by Welsh Government.

Members thanked the Officers for bringing an update to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and put forward a number of questions and concern in respect of the policy and the action plan.

A Member raised a concern over Outcome 1 and the targets achieved in 16/17 and 17/18. It was queried how standards would be improved in our schools. It was explained that strategic developments and investment within schools were being taken forward.

It was queried what was being done in respect of the promotion of the Welsh language and encouraging parents to choose Welsh medium education. Officers explained that providing frontline staff with training on the benefits of being bilingual and providing positive messages for parents was important. It was explained that investment had been made to promote the benefits but ultimately it was up to parents to choose their preferred medium of schooling for their children.

A Member asked what was being done to promote the growth of Welsh Language within pre- school provision and whether the targets needed to change. Officers explained that there are planned investments over the next few years in to preschool

provision and the targets are ambitious and have been approved by Welsh Government.

In respect of the after school provision and partnership working, Members wanted clarity on what is being taken forward to increase participation. The Youth Engagement and Participation Service Manager explained where the service is at in respect of their involvement in promoting the Welsh language against the action plan. With regards to Menter Iaith and Urdd Members, it was queried how much input these services have had when coordinating and monitoring six former and college students activities through the medium of Welsh. It was explained that both offer provision for post 16 young people. In terms of promoting 16+ community based social events the services utilise each other's social media platforms and the Wicid website to promote the opportunities for young people.

After further discussion and deliberation Members **RESOLVED to:**

- Acknowledge the contents of the report
- Receive further comparative data from other Authorities across Wales in a 12 months
- Receive an update in respect of the action plan
- Receive an Annual Report from the Steering Group updating Members on their progress.

26. FOUNDATION PHASE, KEY STAGE 2 & 3 AND PROVISIONAL KEY STAGE 4 OUTCOME FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2017-18

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services provided Members with the initial feedback on Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2 & 3, and Provisional Key Stage 4 outcomes for the academic year 2017-18. It was explained that outcomes for Foundation Phase have dipped during 2017/18 in Rhondda Cynon Taf; however this decline was also reflected in national datasets.

In Key Stage 2 outcomes showed a marginal decline during 2017/18 but the core subject indicator outcomes were at the second highest level since 2013, which suggested that performance remains strong at 89.24%. At Key Stage 3, progress was made on most indicators but these were in the main below the Welsh average. Nevertheless, data suggests that steady progress has been maintained on most Key Stage 3 performance measurers.

Members were informed that the Key Stage 4 data provided is provisional and that the final data will be provided after December.

Members considered the report in great detail and put forward their questions to the Director of Education and Inclusion Services. After further discussion Members **RESOLVED to:**

- Acknowledge the information contained within the Report:

- Review the level of support needed for schools during academic year 2018-19 at a future meeting.
- Receive detailed school by school information in relation to Key Stage 4 data once verified by Welsh Government.

Meeting Closed at 7:40pm

Cllr S. Rees Owen

(Chair)

