



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Wednesday, 20 March 2019 at 5.00 pm at the Council Chamber, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park. Clydach Vale, Tonypany, CF40 2XX.

### **County Borough Councillors - Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-**

Councillor S. Rees-Owen (Chair)

Councillor W Lewis	Councillor S Evans
Councillor J Brencher	Councillor H Fychan
Councillor J Harries	Councillor A Calvert
Councillor S Powell	Councillor H Boggis
Councillor M Griffiths	Councillor G Jones
Councillor G Stacey	

### **Co-Opted Members in attendance:-**

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

### **Officers in attendance:-**

Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services  
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services  
Ms C Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion  
Ms A Richards, Head of 21st Century Schools  
Mrs. J Allen, Children and Young People's Service Manager  
Ms C Edwards, Head of Service Transformation And Data Systems

### **County Borough Councillors in attendance:-**

Councillor S Evans

#### **58 Declaration of Interest**

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

#### **59 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.

#### **60 Minutes**

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2019 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

## 61 Matters Arising

A Member stated that within minute No.41 there should have been reference to the comments of Committee "that they were very disappointed that the Managing Director of the Central South Consortium was not present at the committee to answer any questions that Members needed answers to.

## 62 Annual School Attendance Performance Report for Academic Year 2017/18

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing presented the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with the analysis of school attendance performance for the academic year 2017/18, together with a comparison of performance over the last three years (six year for attainment data comparisons)

It was explained that in previous years, this report has been brought to this committee in the autumn term to provide provisional figures at an earlier point in the year. However, as comparative data has not been available at this time, it was agreed to defer this report until the spring to ensure all available data was included for full completeness for Members.

Members were presented with an analysis of the primary school and secondary school attendance rates including the pupils of school age in special education provision, in RCT over the last three years and how the performance rates compare to the all Wales average. Also provided was details of the attendance gap year on year by identifying the percentage difference between the attendance rates for FSM /non-FSM pupils in RCT.

It was explained that the overall attendance rate for primary school attendance has seen a decrease of 0.4% compared to 2015/16 and over the past three years, the variance in the rate has been below that of the All Wales average, which has remained static over the three-year period at 94.9%.

In respect of the gap between FSM and non-FSM, attendance in primary school setting has narrowed over the last 3 years, which is pleasing to see.

In relation to secondary school attendance Members were informed that the overall secondary school attendance for 2017/18 is, 92.9% compared to 93.9% in 2015/16, which is a decrease of 1.0%. Over the past three years the variance in school attendance is -1.0%, which is twice the rate of decline of the All Wales average and -0.9% below the average national attendance level. The gap between attendance of FSM pupils and non-FSM pupils has widened by 0.7% since 2015/16 and is now 0.1 % wider than the Welsh average, which has increased by 0.3% since 2015/16.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing provided a summary of attendance rates of the Pupil Referral Units, attendance rates of vulnerable groups within RCT and an update of the work carried out by the Attendance and Wellbeing Team.

After considering the report, Members put forward their comments and questions to the Officers. A Member questioned if there had be any trending evidence to show the reasons for the decline in attendance of School Action and School Action+ Pupils. Officer explained that this could be due to more medical appointments and we need to look at the accuracy of the coding. We could bring

this back to a future meeting.

Another Member expressed his concerns that the sets of figures are very disappointing. In relation to closing the gap between FSM / non FSM learners the Member stated that we need to look at this part of the strategy as a priority as we seem to be failing these learners.

Members also put their views forward in respect of Fixed Penalty Notices and which will be considered as part of the forthcoming Children and Young People Scrutiny Working Group.

The Chair and Members thanked the Head of Attendance and Wellbeing for all her hard work over the last year wished her well in her new role within the Council.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to acknowledge the content of the report

### **63 Period Poverty Update - Feminine Hygiene Products in Schools**

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service provided Members with an update on the Council's progress of providing female hygiene products in schools across Rhondda, Cynon, Taf.

The Officer explained that as Members would recall the Scrutiny Working Group put forward 15 recommendations, which received cross-party support when considered by Full Council, Cabinet subsequently considered an implementation plan aimed at improving the availability of free sanitary products for female learners in schools which RCT the first Council in Wales to introduce this measure.

Members would also recall that in April 2019 Cabinet gave its final approval, which saw a six-month trial commencing in the autumn term.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing explained to Members that two survey had been carried out recently with schools as an initial review of the new scheme, one with pupils and one with staff. It was explained that based on the responses from the schools and the progress against the recommendations the scheme appears to be well implemented across most schools and the vast majority of responses seem to be that of a positive one.

Members were presented with an update in respect of the progress against the recommendations and put forward their observations and question.

One Member commented that there are many positive aspects however, from the surveys that were undertaken there seemed to be few responses. The Member also raised some concerns in relation to some of the comment in the report.

In respect of the products available, a Member asked for clarification with regards to the standard of these products. It was explained that all products are of a high standard and female pupils seem to be happy with what is available. The Member also queried why in some the responses it stated that the bins were full as this was a concern. Officer explained that this issue would be taken up with schools as it is their responsibility to ensure appropriate collections are undertaken.

Members also commented on recommendation 2 “ To develop resources and raise awareness across all schools in RCT of menstrual issues to all learners, staff, parents and carers.” Members wanted to know if this is being done within our schools as it was one of the main topics of conversation with Members and pupils who came from various schools to participate in the working group. Officers explained that all schools cover PSE and it is hoped that this will develop more in the future.

Members felt that needed to be a consistent message in schools across the County Borough however felt that this was not being achieved and more work is needed. A suggestion was to engage the Central South Consortium in working with schools to take this forward.

Members felt that the hard work of the pupils within RCT who participate in this piece of work should have recognition for their hard work and dedication.

After many more questions and observation Members **RESOLVED**:

- To acknowledge the report
- That the Working Group reconvene in October to review the way forward.

## **64 School Admissions Process Report**

The Head of Service Transformation presented members with a summary of the annual School Admissions process. Members were reminded that in March 2018 the Committee were presented with a detailed report explaining the admissions process. The officer explained that this report provides Members with an update on developments in the last 12 months and planned developments for the next round of admissions.

Members were also reminded that the entry of children to community schools is controlled and administrated by Rhondda Cynon Taf Council and in case of voluntary –aided (church) schools, these are administrated the Governing body of the individual church school and within Rhondda Cynon Taf there are currently 8 voluntary aided (church) schools.

The Head of Service Transformation updated Members in respect of applications for academic year 2018/19 where the Authority processed 9315 applications of which 76% were applied for on-line. Members were also presented with a breakdown summary of the applications received.

Members were pleased to see that of the 7964 applications made for nursery, reception, junior and year 6 98.95% were offered their first preference and the remaining 84 their second choice.

Members were also presented with information in relation to admissions for the year 2019/2020. In respect of the all through schools Members were informed that children already attending an all through school, do not need to apply for a secondary school, unless the wish to attend a different secondary school. Children will still have to apply for a pre-nursery, nursery and reception place at the relevant time. Members were given information in relation to timetabling for

2019/20, waiting lists, admissions at other times, Welsh Medium Transfers and special educational needs.

Members were presented with information in respect of the Fair Access Protocol and explained the process to assist placement and admission of the most vulnerable pupils in the Council to ensure that they are offered suitable school places promptly. It was explained that since April 2018, there has been 24 FAPPs, 47 children have been brought forward to discuss, and placements made.

After scrutinising the report in detail Members put forward their questions and observation to the Officers. A Member queried the figure relating to Welsh Medium transfer; it was asked whether there were more detail in relation to why the children had moved schools and if the move was to an English speaking school. The Member highlighted the work that was being carried out in Cardiff with Immersion Centre and asked if there had been any consideration to do similar within Rhondda Cynon Taf. The Officers explained that there are many reasons for the child moving schools and we work with parents for the best interest of the child.

Members were pleased to see that in 98.95% of cases pupils were allocated their first preference. Members will continue to monitor the process at future meetings and thanked the officer for the report.

The committee RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the information contained within the report
- Receive data in respect of the reasons why there is an in year move from Welsh to English Medium.

## **65 School Organisation Proposals - Outcomes and the Revised Code.**

The Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools presented the Committee with the report in respect of the School Organisation Proposals – The Process and Outcomes.

It was explained that the report is to raise Members awareness of the updated processes required to be undertaken to make any regulated alterations to the provision, or character of a school and to provide an update on the continuation of the work to deliver the Council's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and Education Programme.

In her report, the Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools gave an update on the current school organisation consultations. Members were also presented with School Organisation Code – 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Members were informed that the new code was issued in November 2018. It was explained that there are few amendments between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. The fundamental processes within both codes are the same with the exception that the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Code permits electronic copies of the statutory documentation to be disseminated to statutory

consultees.

Members attention was brought to the Council's ambitious school modernisation programme which will continue with projects identified as part of the Band B Strategic Outline Programme (SOP), which will run between 2019-2024/26. The Council has secured an approval in principle from the Welsh Governments 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and education Programme for a funding envelope totalling £168m. These projects will build upon the success of the Band A investment and will enable delivery of the Band B investment priorities.

Members thanked the Head of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools for a very informative report and put forward their questions. A Member wanted clarification in respect of sixth form data within the new 3 – 19 Tonyrefail Community Schools and any data for the two new through 3 – 16 schools in Porth and Nant Gwyn Community School. Officers explained that there is no data to compare with at present as the schools have only been up and running for a term, however detailed information is being collated and will be presented to the Committee after a full twelve months. Even though it is early days, Officers explained that excellent progress is being made and the schools are well organised and undertaking some 'step changes' in the delivery of education in these communities.

After further discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to:

- Acknowledge the content of the Report
- Receive further information and reports at the appropriate time in collaboration with the Welsh Government's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and Education Programme.

## **66 Annual School Exclusion Performance Report for the Academic Year 2017/18**

The Head of Inclusion Services presented the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with an analysis of school exclusion performance for academic year 2017/18 and a comparison of performance over the last five years where appropriate.

Members were given an overview of the policies and procedures that are put in place to promote good behaviour and prevent poor behaviour. It was explained that a school's behaviour and attendance policy should be seen as an integral part of its curriculum, as all schools teach values as well as skills and knowledge.

The Head of Inclusion Services gave her observations under the following headings:

- Summary of Exclusions;
- National Benchmarking Data;
- Local Context: Analysis of Permanent Exclusion
- Local Context: Analysis of Fixed Term Exclusions of More than 5 Days
- Analysis of Fixed Term Exclusions 5 Days or Less
- Analysis of Primary Fixed Term Exclusions
- Analysis of Secondary School Fixed Term Exclusions
- Exclusion Rates of Vulnerable Groups in Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Addressing Rising Data Trends

Members acknowledge that the data suggests there has been a significant

decrease in the number of permanent exclusions, however there has been an increase recently in both fixed term exclusions and the number of days lost within RCT schools. This was of great concern to Members and it is a situation that needs addressing. The Officers explained that where there are particular concerns regarding high levels of exclusions, schools will continue to be requested to attend a support and challenge meeting with the Head of Inclusion Services and Head of School Achievement(Secondary). It was also explained that if there is limited progress schools are now requested to meet with Director of Education and Inclusion Services.

Members continued to scrutinise that report and put forward their questions to the officers present.

Members requested that information relating to the effectiveness of the FAP be brought back to Committee after the Summer Term.

A Member asked the Officer what was the outcome of the Restorative Approaches in Schools (RAIS) that had been piloted within schools in RCT. It was explained that RAIS pilot had been evaluated and the success in the pilot schools was variable. Evaluation had demonstrated that it had proven most successful where there was a strong leadership base in the pilot school. Officers explained that Restorative Approaches will continue to be one of a number of strategies that will form part of the Local Authority's approach to address exclusions.

A Member raised concerns in relation to the data relating to pupils at School Action + . Officers explained that the Senior Educational Psychologist for Wellbeing will present a Wellbeing in Education Strategy for implementation from the Summer Term 2019 which aims to take a strategic and multi –agency approach to addressing the underlying causes for pupils' social and behavioural difficulties and improving their wellbeing.

Other Members raised concerns in respect individual schools exclusion rates; Officers explained that the Local Authority are working to develop stronger leadership within schools, which will help going forward.

After further discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to:

- Acknowledge the content of the report
- Receive a report on the Wellbeing in Education Plan

## 67 URGENT BUSINESS

This meeting closed at 7.45 pm

CLLR S REES-OWEN  
CHAIR.