

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, on Wednesday, 4<sup>h</sup> December 2013 at 5.00 pm.

**Present:**

County Borough Councillor (Mrs) S Rees – in the Chair

**County Borough Councillors:**

C Davies	A S Fox	(Mrs) S Jones
I Pearce	(Mrs) A Roberts	R W Smith
B Stephens	L G Walker	(Mrs) J S Ward
D H Williams		

**Officers:**

Mr E Williams – Group Director, Community & Children's Services  
Mr N Elliott – Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing  
Mr R Gatis – Service Director, Community Care  
Mr A Gwynn – Service Director, Children's Services  
Mr C Lee – Director of Financial Services  
Mr C B Jones – Service Director, Legal & Democratic Services  
Ms M Jones – Principal Solicitor  
Mrs A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

**31. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from the Chair, County Borough Councillor (Mrs) M E Davies and County Borough Councillors W J David, S Lloyd, (Mrs) J Rosser and D Weeks.

**32. CHAIRMAN**

In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice Chairman, County Borough Councillor (Mrs) S Rees took the Chair.

**33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**RESOLVED** to note that in accordance with the Code of Conduct, there were no declarations of personal interest relating to the agenda.

**34. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2013 be approved as a correct record subject to noting the following:

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- that County Borough Councillor (Mrs) A Roberts be removed from the list of apologies as she was in attendance;
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- that County Borough Councillor D Weeks was in attendance;
  - that an apology for absence was provided by County Borough Councillor R W Smith.

**35. CHANGE OF ORDER**

To facilitate the attendance of the Chief Executive of the Care Council in relation to Item 3 it was agreed to bring forward Item 4.

**REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

**36. GENERAL BUDGET CONSULTATION**

The Director of Financial Services provided the Committee with a presentation in relation to the General Budget Strategy consultation process which he explained would focus on the three key areas, namely, services and priorities, Council Tax levels and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. He pointed out that it did not include the separate consultation activity in respect of service change proposals. As a result of this other consultation activity he explained that the general budget consultation process would be focussed on the Scrutiny Committees, the Schools Budget Forum and the public via online/hard copy questionnaires.

The Director of Financial Services drew Members' attention to some key facts relating to the Council's Revenue spending and the key headlines relating to the Welsh Government's Provisional Settlement. He informed Members that it was expected that the details of the Welsh Government's Final Settlement would be available on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2013. He also referenced previous presentations to Council by the Group Director, Corporate Services where it was projected that the Council would need to bridge an expected funding gap of up to £19.6M in 2014/15, rising cumulatively to £70M by 2017/18. He explained key aspects of the provisional settlement including the Welsh Government direction that local authorities are to increase school budgets by 0.9% in 2014/15. He also reported on the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the implications for the residents of the County Borough.

Members were asked for their views in relation to the key issues and informed that their comments, would be used to assist Cabinet in its deliberations before making their recommendations to Council.

**RESOLVED** that the views of the Community and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee be passed on to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in consideration of the Council's Service Improvement Priorities and Budget Proposals for 2014-2015 and the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme, as follows:

## **1. Service & Improvement Priorities**

A Member commented that it was important to appreciate that the priority 'A Quality Education for All' was not just the responsibility of the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee but was a cross cutting theme and of particular importance in relation to children in care.

Another Member commented that the priority area 'Delivering within our means' was of key importance in the current climate.

## **2 Budget Consultation 2014/15 – Views on the level of support proposed by the Welsh Government for next year?**

A Member questioned whether the Welsh Government was aware that the current level of funding made the provision of services unsustainable

The Director of Financial Services informed the Committee that the Welsh Government funding given to the Council was formula based. Of particular concern to the Council was the need to be able to plan over a 2 – 3 year period. In response to a query he indicated that he was not aware of the level of Welsh Government general reserves.

A Member commented that as a result of the Welsh Government's budget being cut they had less to share out. However, she feared that in the next few years there would be nothing left to cut.

A Member suggested that there was a lack of proper dialogue with the public sector to establish budget requirements.

A Member asked whether it was likely that the final settlement for Rhondda Cynon Taf would be an improvement on the provisional figures.

The Director of Financial Services indicated we needed to await news of the final settlement, although he had not seen a great deal of difference between the provisional figures and the final settlement figures in the past.

## **3. Budget Consultation 2014/15 – What are your views on Council Tax levels for 2014/15?**

A Member queried the percentage of households that paid Council Tax and was informed that approximately 30% received some benefit relief. However, within this figure approximately two thirds paid nothing.

A Member pointed out that given the number of households that paid Council Tax and the low rateable value of the majority of the housing stock, an increase in Council Tax did not generate much revenue and was counter-productive if it led to an increase in arrears and collection costs.

A member suggested that there was a need to consider what the market could bare and felt that anything above 3 -3.5% would place families under too much pressure.

**4 Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme – Views on the Council’s Discretionary decisions that may be added to the National Council Tax Reduction Scheme.**

A Member commented that he would support the current arrangements continuing.

One Member commented that in his opinion any extended payments and backdating payments should stop.

However, a Member countered this argument by pointing out that this would result in arrears building up and cause more problems in the future. She also pointed out that some people had difficulty understanding the forms and needed assistance in completing them. These comments were also supported by another Member.

**5. Any other Comments?**

A Member raised concerns regarding public access to the Budget Consultation pointing out that the use of on-line only processes excluded many from contributing. Whilst there may have been paper copies of the consultation document available he questioned whether the public would have been aware of this.

A Member agreed with this comment pointing out that if Members themselves had been provided with a paper copy they could have made their constituents aware through their work with community groups.

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**37. THE WELSH GOVERNMENT’S WHITE PAPER – THE FUTURE OF REGULATION & INSPECTION OF CARE & SUPPORT IN WALES**

The Group Director, Community & Children’s Services introduced Rhian Huws-Williams, the Chief Executive of the Care Council (Wales) explaining that her attendance would provide Members with the opportunity to learn more about the work of the Care Council (Wales) and provide an opportunity to discuss the proposals contained within the Welsh Government’s White Paper – The Future of the Regulation and Inspection of Care & Support in Wales.

Ms Huws-Williams provided the Committee with an overview of the work and the future aspirations of the Care Council. She explained that as the regulatory body for social care in Wales it provided clear national standards, a clear code of practice; standards for education and training and worked closely with the Care Sector to assist in workforce planning. Since the

introduction of the Care Council, the training and retention of social workers had improved, the qualification attainment of social workers had improved and there is now better workforce planning.

With regard to the White Paper Ms Huws-Williams explained that it provided an opportunity to develop a new model which would deliver improvements across the whole of the care sector but it needed to be a model which would fit future requirements. She suggested that in the future more people would purchase their care direct and it was important that those being cared for were receiving safe and appropriate care and also that those providing the care were doing so in a safe environment. Whilst there were arguments around the cost of widening the current registration scheme it was difficult to justify why those requiring care in their own homes should not have the same safety net as those in residential accommodation. She commented that whilst the issue of cost had been raised the real costs arose from the de-registration process and she suggested that perhaps the way forward was to derive a more modern way of dealing with this.

Ms Huws-Williams explained that in her opinion there was a great deal that was of merit within the White Paper but there were also areas with which she disagreed. There was a need to use data more intelligently thereby allowing services to respond to trends.

Following her overview, Ms Huws-Williams responded to Members queries which included the funding arrangements of the Care Council and the composition of the Council's Board and a Member questioned whether there were processes in place to take on board the views of users of the service. Other areas discussed included the delivery of services in the Welsh Language which she explained could be challenge in some parts of Ceredigion and Powys, however, 'grow your own' schemes were proving to be successful.

When asked whether she felt that the registration of workers had improved the quality of service delivery in Wales Ms Huws-Williams explained that it was known that staff turnover and the reliance on agency workers had been reduced and there was better on the job training and identification of training needs, all of which should lead to improved services. With regard to changes in the workforce she pointed to the increased professionalism and pride which care workers felt as a result of the training and qualifications which they had gained. The profile of the workforce had risen and whereas in the past she would have been directed to managers she was now speaking to Directors with regard to training and development issues. With regard to the proposal to merge the Care Council (Wales) with the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales she held some reservations as her view was that both organisation performed different functions.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked Rhian Huws-Williams for her attendance and informative discussion.

**RESOLVED:** to note the proposals contained within the White Paper in conjunction with the information received.

**38. EXCEPTION REPORT – COUNCIL PERFORMANCE REPORT – 30<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2013 (QUARTER 2)**

The Director of Financial Services presented Members with the Exception Report which outlined the financial and performance management information for the Community & Children's Services Group for the period to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013. Members were asked to consider the key issues extracted from the main report that had been presented to the Cabinet Performance and Resources Committee on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2013 and the two priority areas within the remit of the Committee ie Children & Family Centred Services and Maintaining People's Independence.

With regard to the Disabled Facilities Grant a Member asked whether the Council provided the contractor. It was explained that a preferred list was used that had been subject to tender under the Council Contact Procedures rule..

A Member welcomed the positive sickness absence trend.

A Member questioned the criteria for Flying Start pointing out the difficulties of the current system which was dependent on families living within an eligible area rather than need. This was causing conflict in some communities when for example families living at one end of a street might be eligible but those living a short distance away were not because they had a different post code.

The Group Director, Community & Children's Services informed the Committee that he was aware that the current procedure was causing a problem in some communities but that the operation of Flying Start was determined by the Welsh Government and traditionally there had been very little room for flexibility. He explained that he would look into the matter to see if anything could be done but did not wish to raise expectations.

A Member referred to an arrangement with the independent sector to develop the residential capacity within the county borough for children and the Service Director, Children's Services explained that this provision, if taken forward would allow those who wished to remain within Rhondda Cynon Taf the opportunity to do so. This had a number of benefits, namely, it made it easier for the children to remain in contact with their family if appropriate and also reduced the on-costs to the Council.

A Member referred to the very large increase in the number of referrals received by Children's Services and asked whether a reason had been identified, possibly as a result of Welfare Reform. The Service Director, Children's Services explained that it was very difficult to know precisely what was causing the rise and that the reasons for family breakdown were often complex. The Group Director added that poverty did generate additional pressures for families and pointed out that the full impact of Welfare Reform

was still to come. He explained that a big challenge for the Council was the number of large sibling groups in the area.

A Member stressed the importance of the link with Education and commented that in her experience if the elder siblings attended school the young children would also engage. The Service Director, Children's Services confirmed that the service worked closely with the Education Service and attendance was monitored. The Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing also pointed to the Team Around the Family (TAF) programme which was based on early intervention with families provided with support outside of the statutory provisions.

**RESOLVED:** to note the content of the report.

## **REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

### **39. SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2012/13**

The Group Director, Community & Children's Services presented Members with a report which provided an overview of the operation and effectiveness of the statutory social services representations and complaints procedure between 1 April 2012 and 31 March 2013 and stressed the importance of listening and learning from these complaints.

A Member asked whether there was sufficient advocacy support for children in care. The Group Director explained that advocacy support was very well promoted in residential establishments but that this might not be the case for all those in foster care. The Service Director, Children's Services explained that the cases of all children in care were regularly reviewed by Independent Reviewing Officers who were trained to identify any concerns. The Group Director suggested that it might be helpful to receive a report in respect of advocacy arrangements.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) to note the content of the Annual Representations and Complaints Report, and the work undertaken by the Social Services Complaints Unit.
- (ii) That a report in respect of children's access to advocacy services be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

(Mrs) M E Davies  
Chairman

The meeting closed at 7.05 pm.

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