



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, 13 January 2021 at 5.00 pm.

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

Councillor S. Rees-Owen (Chair)

Councillor J Edwards	Councillor J Brencher
Councillor A Calvert	Councillor S Powell
Councillor M Powell	Councillor M Griffiths
Councillor D Owen-Jones	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor G Stacey	Councillor L De Vet
Councillor L Walker	

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr J Fish, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
Mr L Patterson, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Officers in attendance:-

Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Ms A Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services
Mr P Mee, Group Director Community & Children's Services

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor C Leyshon, Councillor L Hooper, Councillor J James and Councillor W Lewis

38 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors S Evans, H Fychan and Co-opted Member R Nicholls.

39 Declaration of Interest

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

40 Consultation Links

The Chair referenced the consultation links, which were available through the 'RCT Scrutiny website'. The Chair reminded Members that information is provided in respect of relevant consultations for consideration by the Committee,

which are circulated on a monthly basis by the Scrutiny Research Officer.

41 Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Regional Adoption Collaborative 2019/20

The Chair welcomed the Regional Adoption Manager, Vale Valley's & Cardiff Collaboration to the Committee and invited her to present the Annual Report for 2019-2020.

The Regional Adoption Manager thanked the Committee for the opportunity to present the report and explained that this was the fifth annual report and covers the period 1 April 2019 to 31st March 2020.

It was explained that the report seeks to combine the reporting requirements set out in regulation and governance arrangements for the region in one report.

The Regional Adoption Manager explained that the report has the following appendices which are as follows:

1. Key Performance data in respect of children by quarter and local authority;
2. Information in respect of adopters enquires and recruitment of adopters;
3. Information in respect of the Adoption Support ; and
4. Information in respect of Adoption Panel activity

The Officer continued to highlight that the organisational and managerial structure of the service has remained the same during this period with service delivery structured around three functional teams. The officer continued to explain that as Part of Welsh Government award of £2.3M to improve adoption services in Wales, the region received a substantial investment of which enabled the service to recruit a number of posts across the service. Members were informed of the new posts and how it enabled service improvements across the region.

The Regional Adoption Manager continued and provided Members with an overview of performance measures against each of the service functions in respect of 'Family Findings' the officer explained that this still remains a key area of activity for the region and the ability to place children effectively and promptly underpins all other activities.

It was brought to Members attention the total number of children referred for adoption totalled 143 which marks a 34% decrease on the previous year it was highlighted that this is a trend across Wales and reason for this varies and will reflect the work being undertaken by local authorities to reduce the children looked after numbers in Wales as directed by Welsh Government.

Members were also informed of the number of withdrawn referrals and it was explained that permanency plans is the main aim for children within service. It was again highlighted that 88% of the children who were withdrawn from adoption had either a positive parenting or positive connect person's assessment.

The Committee were presented with an overview of the number of Should be adopted figure along with the number of Placement Order and Adoption Orders which have been made over the last 12 month period.

An overview of the life journey work was explained to the Committee and

Members were informed how additional post would improve the overall transition experiences for children and families going forward.

The work of the adoption panel was also presented to the Committee and Members were informed of any complaints and compliments that had been received of the year.

In concluding her report the Regional Adoption Manager explained the priorities of the VVC. She explained that significant progress has been made by raising the profile of the region as a result of a consistent marketing strategy and this has produced results in attracting more enquires from prospective adopter. Other areas of positive improvements have been seen in adoption support. In respect of challenges the officer stated that in order to develop the service needs to work to ensure that enquires made to the service are converted into positive placement choices.

Finally it was highlighted that prior to the end of reporting period the impact of the pandemic and national lockdown was beginning to take effect with staff working from home and key services temporarily halted.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the report and opened up the meeting for Members questions and observations.

A Member commented that the service that is being provided is exceptional for young children to move forward in life. In relation to point 4 of the report the Member asked whether figure 143 (the number of children referred for adoption) is related to the whole region or Rhondda Cynon Taf only. Clarity was also sought in respect of 4.3 of the report as to how many children were being referred to in the 41% withdrawals.

It was explained the figure 143 was relating to the whole of the region the officer explained Appendix 1 of the report describes the referrals for the LA's per month. In respect of the withdrawal figures Officers would need to clarify the details and report back after the meeting.

A Member stated it was pleasing to hear the number of families applying for adoption has improved and asked once approved how long does the approval last. It was explained that the approval lasts for two years before being reviewed

Members put further questions to the Officer in respect of referral times, life story work along with Members concerns over the Covid 19 pandemic and the barriers the service faced and continued to face.

Officer explained that the pandemic had an initial impact as staff were working from home and key services had temporarily halted. The officer ensued and explained that service quickly adapted to the challenges and this enabled the key functions of the service to continue.

After further discussion Members thanked the officers for a very informative report and **RESOLVED** to :

- Acknowledge the content of the report;
- Receive a report at a future meeting;
- Provide Members with a breakdown of the number of adoption withdrawals.

42 Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report

The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member for Children's Services to the Committee and asked her to kindly present the Annual Corporate Parenting Board Report for 2019-20.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services explained that it was felt that it would be beneficial for the Children and Young People Scrutiny to have sight of the report, in order to further aid transparency and continue the good synergy between Scrutiny and the Board.

The Cabinet Member continued to explain that on the 30th July 2020 the Corporate Parenting Board approved the Annual Report for 2019-20 Municipal year.

Members were informed that due to the COVID-19 pandemic a number of scheduled meetings of the Board were cancelled during the year and a number of reports detailed within its work programme were postponed to the following Municipal Year. At this point the Cabinet Member thanked the whole Service for the work that had been carried out throughout these unprecedented times.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services highlighted a vast range of reports the Board had considered some of which are as follows:

- Overview of the Community Wellbeing and Resilience Service;
- CIW Inspection ;
- Miskin Annual Report;
- Bright Spots Survey Findings and many more.

Members acknowledged the key elements the Board had agreed to focus on for the next Municipal year. The Cabinet Member invited the Director of Children's Services to provide Members with further detail in respect of the work carried out by the Service and highlighted the continuing work the service will deliver to ensure the needs of the children and young people are met in the Looked After System.

Members thanked the Cabinet Member for the report and put forward their questions and observations.

A Member asked if the Committee could receive more information in relation to the 16+ age group and especially the care leaver, could data be provided on a breakdown of areas to young people in this area

Officers replied accommodation 16+ for young people bring back a report, exist

from carer remaining in when I'm ready placements. Priority in to this area housing colleagues happy to meet and take this forward at a pace.

Another Member of the Committee commented on the distribution of the Pupil Development Grant and brought Officers attention to the heading which needed to be changed to from Pupil Deprivation Grant to Development Grant for clarity. It was agreed that this would be amended within the report before it being presented to Cabinet.

In respect of the Bright Spots Survey a Member asked how the service was dealing with the recommendations that were set out in the improvement plans and commented that it would be good to have this information at a later date.

In response the Director of Children's Services explained that in respect of the Bright Spots Survey findings, a meeting takes place every other month and this is addressed in a Quality Assurance report is taken forward.

Members wanted to congratulate for the YEPS service for the hard work the service has provided during the pandemic especially the street work.

Another Member asked for a report on where YEPS service is at present and how it has been affective during lockdown and also what plans are there for young people and the service coming out of lockdown how we manage their anxiety.

The Chair brought the Group Director into conversation to give view and explain how he thought this could be brought back to the Committee The Group Director explained that as thing start to improve a report could be brought back in respect of the recovery around Children's Services.

The Cabinet Member highlighted that the work that has been carried out by the YEPS Service.

After further discussion Members RESOLVED to

- Acknowledge the work carried out by the Corporate Parenting Board;
- Amended the context of the Report to read (Pupil Development Grant);and
- Receive a Report at a future Meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in respect of the Recovery plan and lessons learned during the Covid -19 Pandemic.

43 Kinship Care (N.O.M)

The Chair informed Members that the purpose of the report brought before them and explained that at Council on the 29th July 2020 it was agreed that the following Notice of Motion would be referred to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee for further consideration, the Chair continued and welcomed both County Borough Councillors James and Hooper to the Committee as Mover and Seconder of the Motion and explained that they would be given the opportunity to address the officers at the end of the debate. The Chair invited the Director of Children's Services to present the report.

It was explained that the Notice of Motion stated that;

“It is estimated that there are 200, 00 children being brought up by family members or friends in the United Kingdom in what is termed ‘Kinship Care’. These kinship carers have stepped in to care for children whose parents are unable to look after them and keep their families together, and it presents three times the number of children on the national foster care system – and is a growing figure. Kinship care is one of the main ways to provide a sense of security, continuity and belonging for children who cannot live with their parents and provides high levels of stability and enduring support well into adulthood. However, the support that is offered to kinship carers throughout the country lacks consistency, and carers often feel isolated, abandoned and ‘hung out to dry’. This is in marked contrast to support that foster carers and adoptive parents can receive.

At Council Members RESOLVED that:

This Council recognises the invaluable work that kinship carers do for their loved ones, often under the most trying of situations, and is committed to providing the help, engagement and support that they need. This Council requests that a report be considered by the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to look into the role of kinship care in the County Borough and to work closely with grandparents plus to identify ways in which it can meet the needs of kinship carers and those in kinship care.”

The Director went to explain that the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014 sets out regulation that the local authority need to follow to ensure there is safe arrangements in place for a child.

It was explained that there are many ways a family member may become a carer for a child or young person some of which are:

- Special guardianship orders;
- Child arrangement orders; or
- Through approval as a kinship carer.

It was explained that the Children’s Services need to carry out intensive assessments and provide support for each child who is placed on any of these Orders.

The Director continued to explain that the Service has extended the range of support opportunities to family and friends’ carers over recent year to mirror those received by mainstream foster carers however it was explained that this has been slower in 2020/21 due to the impact of the pandemic. Members were provided with a list of what was available. Members were pleased to see that Children’s Services remains committed to developing packages of support to family and friend carers during 2021/2022

The Director highlighted the definition of a kinship carer and explained that the Service Manager Children Looked After Services has developed links with Grandparents Plus who has recently established their organisation in Wales for the first time.

The Director highlighted that newly appointed regional officer from Grandparents Plus has been invited to attend meetings with Children’s Services and carers to ensure these is more collaborative working.

Members were also provided with data relating to the number child who were in receipt of kinship Foster carer and Special Guardianship Orders.

In concluding her report the Director of Children's Services informed the Committee of the next step and opened up the floor for observations and questions.

Members put various questions in respect of kinship care one of which related to how relative carers manage the needs of the child and the needs of the parent and what was the difficulties and how was this being managed to ensure the child's safety.

In response the Director explained that safely managing contact with the birth parent was one of the main concerns of the carers the Director explained that there is a great deal of support available to carers to ensure the contact is as smooth as possible, it was also highlighted that training is available but offer the relatives do not identify them as carers and tend not to take up the offer however the ones that do find it very beneficial. Members were informed that the children have allocated social workers and keep in touch with the child, young person on a regular basis. If standards of care dropping despite support officer explained that sometime we have to move the children on to a safer environment but this is very few and far between.

A Member thanked the officer for the report and went on to stated that he was struggling to fund assurance in the motion and needed to establish whether the points within the Notice of Motion were found and thereby needed to be reacted to or not found

The Director explained that there had been no recent complaints or representation for kinship carer's regarding support for carers and this is considered as part quality assurance panel. The Director continued and stressed that when business less critical we will carry out a survey of our kinship carers to assess if there are any issues that need to be addressed and we can bring the findings back at to a future meeting.

The Chair welcomed County Borough Councillor J James the Mover of the Motion and County Borough L Hooper the Seconder of the Motion to put forward their questions and observations. The Members welcomed the opportunity to address the Committee in terms of context to the motion, he explained that from his understanding the issues of support payments for kinship carers was less than that for foster carers or adoptive parents.

The Member hoped that the authority would work with grandparents plus to address any issues going forward, it was asked if this work would be considered over a long term than a one of meeting.

In response to the questions the Director explained that any kinship carer that had been approved by the Local Authority would have the same right to any mainstream carer with regards to support such as social work support, the same support as any other Looked After Child, schools etc.

Another Member went on to state that there are many informal arrangements that go on between families such as grandparents, aunts & uncles taking on the parental role when it is not safe to stay in their family home. The Member felt that this would be a very interesting piece of work to carry out which could inform these carers that there is money available for them to support their families.

The Chair went on to ask Councillors Hooper if he has any questions for the officers. The Member stated that he felt there should have been a survey taken to see what concerns were out in the community and positive news grandparents plus has set up an office. Clearly it's a growing issue and this needs to be looked either as a whole committee or working group.

The Director of Children's Services wanted to clarify on the definition with regards to Kinship Care which is very different to informal care arrangements

After great discussion Members RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the content of the report;
- Receive results of any survey carried out with kinship carers at a later date.
- Invite the Mover and Seconder of the notice of motion back to the Committee when considering an future report.

44 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair thanked Members and Officer for their contribution to the Committee and clarified that the next meeting would take place on the 27th January 2021 to consider the Education aspect of the Committee.

This meeting closed at 7.20 pm

**CLLR S REES-OWEN
CHAIR.**