

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Education and Lifelong Learning Services Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Clydach Vale on Wednesday 9th July, 2014 at 5pm.

Present:

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

County Borough Councillors:

M Adams	(Mrs) J Bunnage	(Mrs) A Calvert	J Elliott
S Evans-Fear	M Griffiths	P Jarman	R Lewis
B Morgan	G Smith	B Stephens	G Thomas
L Walker	C Williams		

Co-Opted Members:-

Mr J Horton – Parent Governor
Mr J Fish – Parent Governor
Ms S Sevany – Parent Governor
Mrs C Jones – National Union of Teachers & Teachers panel
Mr M Cleverley – NASUWT and Teachers Panel
Mr C Jones – GMB
Mr D Price - unison

Officers in Attendance:

Mr C Bradshaw - Director, Education & Lifelong Learning
Ms G Davies - Acting Service Director for Access, Engagement and Inclusion
Mr P Nicholls – Principal Solicitor, Litigation

6 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors A L Davies MBE and (Mrs) S Jones.

7 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, County Borough Councillor B Morgan made a personal declaration of interest pertaining to agenda item 3.

8 MINUTES

RESOLVED: - to approve as accurate records the minutes of the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committees on the 11th June, 2014.

(**Note:** The following lost amendment was moved by County Borough Councillor P.Jarman:

Minutes 5c &d should be amended to read:-

c) That if adopted by Cabinet the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee receives updates on the issuing of FPNs on a quarterly basis.

d.) That if adopted by Cabinet the impact of the implementation of the FPNs be reviewed on an annual basis and the outcomes of the review to be reported to the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee.)

9 EDUCATION OUTCOMES OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC)

The Chairman advised the Committee that the cabinet Member for Children's Social Services and Equalities welcomed the Committee's feedback on the following item, and it was advised that the Committee's feedback would be provided to the Corporate Parenting Board meeting on the 18th July.

The Acting Service Director for Access, Engagement and Inclusion provided members with an overview of the report which provided the Committee with an update on the education outcomes of Looked After Children (LAC) in Rhondda Cynon Taf during the academic year 2012/13. Members were advised that LAC were at a higher risk of poorer educational outcomes in comparison to their peers outside of the looked after system, due to a potential number of factors. The officer also provided the Committee with a brief outline of the Ymbarel system and the LAC education team who work to try to reduce the risk of poorer educational outcomes and to enhance the capacity of RCT schools to meet the needs of children who are looked after effectively.

Through the use of performance indicator information the report illustrated the performance of the service, as well as providing details on the compilation and distribution of Personal Educational Plans, a statutory requirement for all LAC aged 5-16 years which plays an integral part of a child's care plan. Attendance and exclusion information was also provided within the report.

The Acting Service Director for Access, Engagement and Inclusion also provided an overview of the support services available for LAC including behaviour support referrals, the letterbox club, literacy support and the Committee were advised of the improvements in KS4 outcomes for LAC, which the officer suggested illustrated positive response to the input. However, the Committee were advised of a number of areas for development which had been identified by the service.

The Chairman thanked the officer for the presentation and welcomed member's questions on the report.

One member of the Committee spoke of her disappointment with both the lack of detail contained within the report, in particular the detail surrounding the attainment of GCSEs and the Authority's overall outcomes for LAC, commenting on the low aspirations for such children. The Acting Service

Director advised of the reporting mechanisms in place for measuring LAC performance and commented on the percentages within each cohort of children needing special education needs. The Officer confirmed that the Authority were not complacent with the matter and were aware that a lot of improvement was needed. The Officer commented that although the overall outcomes for performance for LAC rested with the schools, the Authority provided the schools with the support to equip them to achieve positive outcomes for each child. In respect of the GCSEs the Service Director confirmed that the reporting measurement was in respect of 2 GCSEs within the grade range of A*-G and advised that improvements had been noted in this area. Members were made aware the PI target was being changed to the Level 2 threshold of 5 A* - G grades at GCSE or equivalent for 2013/14, which would be reported to Members in the Autumn. The Service Director for Access, Engagement and inclusion commented on the commitment by the service to improve outcomes for LAC, although commented on the challenges in the area in respect of attachment issues, special educational needs and disabilities, which all needed to be taken into account.

Members commented on the need for a future report identifying the issues and challenges as outlined by the Service Director, with LAC achieving positive educational outcomes. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning commented on the challenging and aspirational targets that the Authority set for schools for pupil achievement and also reiterated the reasons why such targets were not met. The Committee were advised of the links between Free School Meals and LAC and spoke of suggested data that should be presented to the Committee at a future meeting, commenting that raw data could be misleading.

Another member spoke of the important role of each and every elected member and their role as a corporate parent and their responsibility for the education and welfare for the Authority's LAC. The member proceeded to comment on the report and portrayal of information through percentage figures only, and the potential misleading of information, with the Director advising that this was due to the way the PI information was reported. The member also agreed with previous member comments on the lack of ambition for LAC but also commented that the achievement of 2 GCSEs for a LAC could be determined as a successful outcome when taking into consideration the numerous other factors that could impact such achievement. The Member continued by commenting on her concerns with the growth in the area and need for further investment in the area.

The Acting Service Director was queried as to how the downwards trend was being addressed and was queried whether learning support assistance would also be provided to KS3 as well as KS4. The Committee were advised that the data captured assisted the service in allocating resources and the deployment of support assistants in the best areas going forward. The Acting Service Director commented upon the intentions to focus more on outcomes, literacy and numeracy and the Committee were also advised of the importance of the Personal Education plans

In respect of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) prepared within 20 days, members raised concerns in relation to the Authority hitting only 63.3% against a target of 80%, when PEPs were a statutory requirement for all LACs aged 15-16years. A query was also raised in respect of out of county placements and the capturing of information. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning advised that the Authority were reliant on schools to collate the information.

Members noted the consistency of good attendance with LAC although queried why LAC were not achieving higher end attainment, following previously reported correlation between attendance and attainment. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning agreed that attendance was critical to attainment but again reiterated the other factors that often needed to be taken into consideration with LAC in relation to educational outcomes.

The Acting Service Director for Access, Engagement and Inclusion was queried on whether the service had sufficient resources to provide the support needed. Members of the Committee were advised of the team structure, and the access to other support streams which the officer commented was fortunate compared to other neighbouring authorities.

Members again reiterated their comments that the report presented an overview of the area and needed a further breakdown of information to see the value added that the service provides. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning advised members that he was happy to provide such information and commented on the later agenda item in respect of the Committees work programme and suggested a potential establishment of a scrutiny working group, to look at educational outcomes for LAC in more detail, suggesting areas such as grants available, staffing levels, training, rates of progress, barriers to be taken into consideration, out of county placements, and comparative information. The Director also advised that some of the information needed would need to be requested from schools.

One member queried the placement of LACs, questioning whether schools offering a better range of vocational courses would be better suited to some children rather than academic subjects. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning commented that numerous factors were considered when placing a LAC within a school, with the ultimate factor being what is best for the child. The Director commented on striking a balance between the schools curriculum and providing the child with continuity, friendship and social care by potentially keeping a child within the same school.

Officers were queried as to the engagement with children following the changes to service provision within the Youth Service. The Committee were advised that the youth service was being remodelled and partnership working by the Youth service was a key factor that would assist with such engagement. The officers spoke of the work undertaken with schools to track data and it was commented that every school was on board with the new model of delivery of the youth service with the Acting Service Director adding that the service would continue to provide the best with the reduced

resources. The Acting Service Director also spoke of the early engagement and vulnerability profiling undertaken to help identify children earlier, and the priority given to LAC within the remodelled Youth service. The Committee were advised that the system had more full time youth workers in the system, which would assist in raising the quality.

One member spoke of the positive detail within the report and commented that due to the complex and varying factors that affected each LAC, a 'one size fits all' approach was not achievable. The Member continued to query officers on the representatives attending statutory reviews and the officers confirmed that an educational representative was always present.

The Committee **RESOLVED**:-

- a. To note the contents of the report
- b. To create a scrutiny working group to scrutinise the educational Outcomes of Looked after Children.
- c. To provide the Corporate Parenting Board with feedback from the Committees discussions and the resolution in respect of the creation of a working group.

10 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PERFORMAMNCE IN RCT FOR THE PERIOD TO WHITSUN IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2013-2014.

The Acting Service Director for Access, Engagement and Inclusion provided the Committee with an analysis of school attendance performance for the first two and a half terms of 2013/14, to the end of May 2014, which monitored progress of the schools attendance for both primary and secondary schools and the pupil referral unit.

The Committee were advised that in respect of the overall Primary school level of attendance this accumulated to 94.70% compared to 93.56% for the previous year and it was confirmed that at present the primary school performance stood at 0.50% above the Council's ambitious local authority target.

Details of the secondary School performance was outlined, with members being advised that the level of attendance in this area stood at 93.18%, which accumulated to 0.18% above the Council's ambitious Local Authority target. The Acting Service Director for Access, Engagement & Inclusion proceeded to advise of the pupil referral unit attendance and the improvement noted of 5.46% in comparison to the same period last year. The officers commented on the pleasing increasing, especially when often these pupils face multiple barriers to school attendance.

The Committee were also informed of the ongoing work of the Council's Attendance & Wellbeing Service and it was confirmed that the service would continue to review the attendance data with head teachers to ensure attendance remains a priority for all schools and is given a very high profile with both pupils and parents.

One Member of the Committee commented on the positive report and the improvements noted with attendance. The Member drew out from the report the 792 referrals to the Attendance and Well Being service and the 475 successful outcomes resulting from these referrals with improved attendance. The member questioned whether in future it would be the intention to issue fixed penalty notices to the remaining 317 referrals. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning advised of the range of factors that would be taken into consideration and advised that the remaining 317 pupil referrals were the open referrals at a point in time and were still being supported by Attendance and Well Being staff.

The Prosecution of 54 parents for non attendance of their children was highlighted by a member of the Committee and the officers were questioned as to whether there was evidence to illustrate whether this measure had had a positive effect on the pupils attendance. The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning advised that the evidence could be provided and again reiterated that prosecution was a last resource, following an array of other interventions.

Following the discussions on the report the Committee **RESOLVED** to note the report.

11 FEEDBACK ON ESTYN'S INTERIM FOLLOW UP ON THE PREVIOUS INSPECTION ON THE QUALITY OF LOCAL AUTHORITY EDUCATION SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning referred Members to page 45 of the report which provided Members with the second feedback letter from Estyn in respect of their monitoring of the Council's progress in improving its Education Services for Children and Young People.

The Director commented that the second letter from Estyn was positive and recognised that the Council had made a concerted effort to address the issues raised. The Director continued by adding that there was still considerable work to be completed to ensure that the Council, working with schools, continues to improve pupil attendance and effectively use data to raise educational standards across the county Borough.

Members of the Committee commented on the positive response and one member commented on the positive reference to the work of the scrutiny working group and the implementation of the group's recommendations.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the report.

12 LOCAL AUTHORITY EDUCATION SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 2014 SELF EVALUATION REPORT.

The Committee were provided with the Councils draft Education Services for Children & Young People 2014 Self Evaluation, which informs the Council's Education Services Action Plans and is used by Estyn in challenging and

monitoring the performance of the council improving educational outcomes. The Director also commented that the document may also be useful to Members when informing their work programme. The Committee were advised that the self evaluation had been presented to the cabinet on the 13th May, 2014.

The Director, Education & Lifelong Learning was queried on the report in respect of nursery provision and the Director advised that the self assessment was a reflective report on the performance and results prior to March and assessing how the service had progressed since 2012. He confirmed that there were no assumptions within the report regarding nursery provision and added that the self assessment was a reflection to inform future planning.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the report.

13 PREPARATION OF A WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR 2014/15.

The Principal Solicitor, Litigation provided the Committee with an overview of the report which advised members of issues for consideration when preparing a work programme and reminded members of their earlier resolution to form a working group to consider Educational outcomes for Looked After children, which needed to be taken into consideration when looking at the draft programme.

Members commented in agreement with the proposed plan with further suggestions for the programme including the inclusion of Additional Learning Needs provision in conjunction with disability services within RCT and post 18 education provision.

Following discussions the Committee **RESOLVED**:

- (i) to note the content of the report;
- (ii) to agree the draft work programme as set out at appendix 1, subject to the additional items requested during the meeting;
- (iii) that the revised work programme be presented to the next scheduled meeting of the Committee.

(Mrs) C Leyshon
Chairman

The meeting closed at 6.50pm

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