



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

Minutes of the virtual Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Friday, 26 June 2020 at 3.00 pm.

County Borough Councillors - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor M Adams (Chair)

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| Councillor S Evans | Councillor J Bonetto |
| Councillor P Jarman | Councillor J Harries |
| Councillor H Boggis | Councillor J Brencher |
| Councillor E Stephens | Councillor L Walker |
| Councillor G Caple | Councillor M Griffiths |
| Councillor S Morgans | Councillor W Jones |

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr J Fish, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Cabinet Members in Attendance

Councillor A Morgan, Leader of the Council
Councillor J Rosser, Cabinet Member for Education & Inclusion Services

Other Members in attendance

Councillor S Bradwick, Chair, Public Service Delivery, Communities & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee
Councillor T Williams, Vice Chair, Public Service Delivery, Communities & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee
Councillor R Yeo, Chair, Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee
Councillor G Holmes, Vice Chair, Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee
Councillor G Thomas, Vice Chair, Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee
Councillor W Lewis, Vice Chair, Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee
Councillor G R Davies

Officers in attendance

Mr C Bradshaw, Chief Executive
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr B Davies, Director of Finance & Digital Services
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Mr G Isingrini, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Mr S Gale, Director of Prosperity & Development

52 Declaration of Interest

RESOLVED – that in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, the following declarations of interest were made:-

1. County Borough Councillor L M Adams declared the following personal

interests pertaining to Agenda Item 5 – Re-opening of Schools – “I work as a teacher in a neighbouring school and am Chair of Governors of a school in RCT”;

2. County Borough Councillor J Brencher declared the following personal interest pertaining to Agenda item 4 – Update on Covid-19 Position in Rhondda Cynon Taf “I am Director of the YMCA”.

53 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from County Borough Councillors A Cox. An apology of absence was also received from S Rees-Owen, M Powell (Chair of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee and Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committees respectively) and A Cox.

54 Minutes

RESOLVED – to approve as accurate record the minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 20th January 2020 and the 10th February, 2020 as an accurate record subject to it being noted:-

The ‘Apologies’ were inadvertently omitted from the English version of the Minutes of the 20th January 2020 and should include an apology from the following Members:-

Cllrs J Harries, G Caple and L Walker.

55 Draft Cabinet & Scrutiny Work Programmes

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications presented his report which provided members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to establish a work programme for the extended municipal year following consideration of the Cabinet work programme, the review of the extension is subject to the approval of Council.

Members were asked to consider the Cabinet work programme (which was recently agreed by Cabinet) and identify any matters they wished to consider, challenge and scrutinise over this extended period. Members were asked to be mindful that it may necessary for information and evidence to be reported in a combination of ways, both verbal and written taking into consideration that Officer time continues to be focussed upon responding to the Coronavirus pandemic.

The Service Director stated that there has been support and consensus from Group Leaders and Committee Chairs to prioritise the Overview & Scrutiny Committee as the overarching committee and that it would take a Council wide approach with an invitation extended to the Chairs and vice Chairs of the other thematic Scrutiny Committees.

The Service Director referred to one amendment to the Cabinet work programme which had been presented by the Leader at a recent Cabinet meeting, to receive an interim report in respect of flooding in Rhondda Cynon Taf in addition to statutory reporting requirements into flooding at a later date. The Service Director also reported that the Cabinet had indicated that the opportunity for Scrutiny to contribute to these discussion would be afforded.

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications provided the following responses to a number of queries raised:-

- The Flooding report to be added to the ongoing items and will be a matter for discussion between the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny and the Chair of the Cabinet, Councillor Morgan as to whether there will be scope for pre scrutiny. He reiterated that the intention to involve scrutiny in the discussions have been referenced by the Cabinet.
- The Service Director confirmed that there are joint scrutiny arrangements in place with the 10 Local Authorities to undertake scrutiny of the CCRCD which this council will now take forward over the next twelve months.
- In conclusion the Service Director reminded Committee that having a flexible work programme is crucial at this time whereby Members may receive a combination of written and verbal reports to committee and meetings may be called swiftly in order to respond to issues as they arise. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee was asked to be responsive towards the Cabinet work programme and any additional items that may be added to it. He concluded that the intent is that all Members are fully engaged in the scrutiny process and added that in the next phase of meetings being held virtually included the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

It was **RESOLVED**:-

1. To acknowledge the contents of the proposed Overview & Scrutiny Work Programme for the period June-August 2020;
2. To receive updates in respect of flooding in Rhondda Cynon Taf in addition to statutory reporting requirements into flooding;
3. To review the Recovery Plans of the Council as part of ongoing an update on the Covid-19 position in Rhondda Cynon Taf, which will be used as a basis for the forward Overview & Scrutiny work programme; and
4. That the Service Director Democratic Services & Communications reports the committee's considerations to the Cabinet and/or appropriate Cabinet Members.

56 Update on COVID 19 Position in Rhondda Cynon Taf

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications presented members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to scrutinise, review and challenge the high level information contained within the attached Cabinet reports, which were presented on 21st May and 25th June 2020.

He advised committee that the Leader of the Council, Councillor A Morgan would provide an update and where appropriate, members of the Senior Leadership Team would provide responses to any queries. In conclusion, the Service Director stated that it was for Members to determine on which issues they would like to receive further information and greater detail over the next three meetings.

The Leader provided an overview of events over the last three months which

began with the Council scaling back some services following lockdown, closing schools and implementing the shielding exercise to support residents with very little notice. A total of 1160 community volunteers registered with the Council at a time when council employees were self-isolating or shielding.

The Council redeployed 700 employees across other services of which 365 into the social care service to support the critical care and 200 staff supported the hubs where they provided shopping, worked alongside volunteers, collected medication for those residents shielding and dog walking. 25 staff were redeployed to the food distribution in Aberdare to provide food to those on the shielding list and to those outside of the shielding programme but in need of additional support. Working alongside the third sector and community groups has been well received by residents. In RCT approximately 10,000 residents are in the shielding programme who have been contacted and more outside the shielding programme.

The Leader stressed that in the early days of the pandemic, the worst case scenario and based on the modelling and information that was provided to the council the burial and cremation services would have been overwhelmed. In view of this, decisions were made in the interests of the communities and therefore a significant number of services were prioritised such as waste services, recycling services (both of which were operating at a maximum capacity). To ensure these priority areas were running efficiently other areas operated on a limited capacity such as cleansing and other services such as community recycling centres and the collection of bulky items ceased operating. Members were reminded that these operations were taking place shortly after Storm Dennis when staff were still dealing with the impact and aftermath of the storm damage.

A number of additional services were put in place when the county's schools closed such opening the emergency childcare hubs for critical workers and ensuring that all families entitled to Free School Meals received their back payments (now over 10,000 free school meals eligible children). The back payments not the voucher system was implemented and the Roundtree Foundation praised the Council for its swift action to ensure that payments reached all eligible families. The Federation of Small Business also commended the Council for fast tracking the grants and support to small businesses when they needed the financial support.

The Leader of the Council advised that some services such as libraries and public conveniences were initially closed in line with public access and infection control limitations. Three libraries have recently re-opened and a further three will open in due course. The Council is reviewing the re-opening of town centre toilets following the revised cleaning regimes in place. Committee was informed that there has been a huge joint effort between the Council's Education Services and Head teachers to prepare for the safe return of pupils on the 29th June. To date it was confirmed that 47,000 calls have been responded to via the Council's Contact Centre during this time.

Members were informed that supplies of PPE equipment have been available to the independent private care sector and council owned care homes in line with guidance from Public Health Wales which has been followed at all times. The Council liaised with Welsh Government to ensure direct deliveries of PPE to the independent care sector free of charge. The Leader acknowledged the difficult time experienced by care staff with a number of deaths across the care settings

although he confirmed that two thirds of nursing and residential care in the independent/ private sector and council owned care sector have not confirmed any deaths. At the height of the pandemic up to 140/150 people per day were displaying symptoms of the coronavirus in the care/residential homes but each week the numbers have reduced significantly. The Council has now installed IT equipment into all Council Care Homes to ensure families have contact with their loved ones. The Leader paid tribute to the staff working in the care homes across the County Borough.

The Council is considering lessons learned from the first phase of the Coronavirus pandemic, in line with advice from Public Health Wales and infection control teams which will prepare for the potential of a second wave over the coming months.

In conclusion, the Leader of the Council stated that the Council is considering those 'lessons learned from the first phase of the Coronavirus pandemic, together with advice from Public Health Wales and infection control teams which will prepare for the potential of a second wave over the coming months. The Council will continue to play a key role in leading on Contract Tracing across Cwm Taf Morgannwg in partnership with the local Health Board. The contribution of the Senior Leadership Team and their involvement and communication with Welsh Government which undoubtedly saved lives across the County Borough Council was praised by the Leader of the Council.

The Council's Chief Executive added that that the Council's recovery plans would be reported to Cabinet in July which could be used as a basis to supplement the Scrutiny Work Programmes.

In response to points were raised by members of the committee the Leader of the Council provided the following information:-

- A Council decision was taken before lockdown in respect of delegated functions which were delegated to the Leader, Deputy Leader and to the Senior Leadership Team. The decision making and governance of the Council has continued to operate in compliance with the Council's Constitution to discharge key decisions. This has included undertaking urgent decisions necessary to the Council's service response during this period. All of these decisions have been within the normal delegated powers of Chief Officers, and where possible taken after consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member.
- During lockdown a number of email updates have been issued directly from the Leader of the Council to all Elected Members and daily updates have been issued to all Elected Members from Democratic Services regarding actions, statements from Welsh Government. Information from Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) has also been frequent. A virtual meeting with the Leader and the Group Leaders has also been established to discuss key matters.
- The Council's Public Health and Protection team are leading on the Contract Tracing across Cwm Taf Morgannwg in partnership with the local health board, Bridgend and Merthyr Tydfil Councils and Public

Health Wales. It was confirmed that there is sufficient capacity within this team to undertake this work focussing on high risk settings such as care homes, school hubs, supported living and homeless accommodation. An agreement is currently in place with Cardiff University that a number of Graduate placements will be allocated to the Public Health & Protection team.

Following consideration of the report, it was **RESOLVED**:-

1. To acknowledge the update provided by the Leader of the Council in respect of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic to include the contents of the Cabinet reports; and
2. (As Minute No. 55 (3) refers) To agree that as part of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees Work Programme for the Municipal Year, Members will continue to receive regular progress updates on the COVID-19 position in Rhondda Cynon Taf, particularly the Council's recovery plans and service delivery response.

57 Update - Re-Opening of Schools

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services provided an oral update in respect of the re-opening of Schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf following the Welsh Government Education Minister's proposal that all schools will reopen on the 29th June, 2020.

The Director addressed the issue of the change to the extended summer term and despite the initial commitment and good will amongst staff and school leaders to extend the term by an additional week, the issues were complex in respect of staff terms and conditions and childcare challenges therefore the decision was taken to close as initially expected, on the 20th July 2020. The Director advised that schools and teams are currently busy preparing for the transfer of children across the 25 childcare hubs in school settings and the return of up to a third of all learners on any given day to schools. Staff are keen to welcome the pupils back to school.

The Director provided updates in respect of the following key areas:-

Childcare – There has been a significant growth in the number of children accessing childcare provision across the County Borough and the hub settings have increased from 12 to 25 accordingly. There are currently 720 children accessing the school-based childcare provision on a daily basis. The applications for childcare provision across the school settings resulted in 1,672 childcare applications for emergency childcare, all of which have been accepted. Childcare placements have been prioritised for vulnerable learners and essential workers. There have been 350 0-4 year olds accessing childcare on a weekly basis.

Supporting Schools –Local information reflecting Public Health Wales and Welsh Government guidance has been issued regularly to all schools in a timely manner in respect of a number of matters such as hygiene, social distancing, risk assessments and PPE. Guidance has also been shared in relation to pre-school settings, Governing Bodies, communications with parents and carers to

alleviate any concerns and posted on the Council website. In addition, information has been circulated to those distance learning and accessing learning from home.

Recovery Plans – Weekly local authority recovery plan meetings are held which involve cross directorate representation and Head Teachers to ensure timely strategies are in place and the implementation of the delivery plan is also monitored through these meetings.

School Concerns – The local authority has provided detailed guidance in respect of health and safety issues, to ensure that school arrangements are in place and risk assessments have been established and reviewed by the Council's Health and Safety Officers and signed off by Chairs of Governing Bodies. PPE, thermal devices and signs advising of appropriate hygiene and social distancing measures have been delivered to all school sites. All schools have submitted detailed plans on how they plan to integrate their learners on the 29th June to include the childcare provision which will run alongside the opening of schools to learners. Transport arrangements are also in place in line with the required social distancing requirements to be able to transport children safely to schools.

Vulnerable Learners – Vulnerable learners continue to be a priority and the Council's Inclusion Teams continue to support Schools. The Authority's four Special Schools and two Pupil Referral Units have been open as hubs throughout the lockdown period together with the necessary transport requirements to ensure the most vulnerable pupils access the provision they need. Statutory requirements around children with special educational needs have not been relaxed during this time and detailed guidance and support has been provided to the schools. All Local Authority Panels have continued to be conducted remotely and Free School Meal payments have been issued via Bacs payments together with meal provision in school settings to ensure no child is disadvantaged.

Digitally Excluded Learners Review– 2,345 digitally excluded learners have been identified across all schools and a plan is being implemented at this time to collect all devices from schools to reinstall appropriate software before re distributing them to those in need. School stocks have been replenished where necessary. By the end of this term all digitally excluded learners will have a re purposed or new device at home together with Broadband access through the distribution of a Myfi package supplying 4G access.

Next Steps – Pupils will experience up to three visits to school and this will be balanced with distance learning. There will be a focus on compensatory learning for those most vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils. Potential funding streams will be made available to enhance the work with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in schools.

Joint Working – All staff, school leaders and Head Teachers have demonstrated a real commitment and worked extended hours, weekends, Bank Holidays and holiday periods without complaint to ensure provision is in place for vulnerable learners and a real partnership approach has been in place throughout.

The Cabinet Member for Education & Inclusion Services concurred with and echoed the sentiments of the Director in her overview. The Cabinet Member extended her thanks to those teachers and staff, particularly the Council staff from the Education & Inclusion team, who assisted staff in setting up the hubs,

supported vulnerable learners, assisted with FSM payments and are now supporting those digitally excluded learners.

The Cabinet Member for Education & Inclusion Services referred to the forthcoming reopening of schools which will give children an opportunity to return to and experience a school setting and catch up with their friends and teachers. In conclusion, the Cabinet Member once again thanked school and council staff for their dedication and commitment.

The Director of Education & Inclusion Services responded to a series of questions which were raised by the Committee, some of which are set out below:-

Nursery Provision - The Director of Education & Inclusion Services confirmed that all pre-school children are included in the childcare provision and the 0-4years childcare offer is also available with a range of childminders and childcare. In September there will be plans to integrate nursery aged children but the priority for the initial 3 weeks is to ensure that statutory school aged learners and post 16 learners have the opportunity to return to school. Due to the constraints in place it was considered appropriate to concentrate on statutory school aged children at this time and all children will have the opportunity to engage in distance learning. Vulnerable learners' guidance has been circulated and they have been prioritised.

The PPE guidance – Has been issued to the hubs regularly and has been updated as and when appropriate and includes detailed information on risk assessments and what level of PPE is required in different circumstances. Additional guidance has also been issued where there have been specific concerns.

Additional Learning Needs - The current Additional Learning Needs guidance document is in the process of being translated for immediate circulation. In the meantime, a large volume of information has been provided including modifications to policy documents such as healthcare guidance to schools for the most vulnerable children and what schools need to do regarding statutory requirements around statements and annual reviews.

School arrangements for July - In line with Welsh Government guidance, there will be 8 pupils to a class in Primary Schools with the overall caveat that the 2 metre social distancing requirement is in place. Schools have received a lot of information to advise them accordingly. Pupils will remain within their respective bubbles. To accommodate the social distancing requirements, all 21st Century Schools have ample space within corridors and classrooms and for those more challenged schools footage has been circulated with advice on issues such as how to manage one way traffic.

Engagement levels in the hub provision –The vulnerable guidance has been issued and in certain situations and where necessary the Attendance & Wellbeing Service may intervene from a wellbeing perspective. A protocol is in place and has been agreed between Education and Children Services to address disengagement with families.

Digitally Excluded Learners - All schools that have given up their devices to those digitally excluded learners will receive a replacement device before the end of term. ICT is supporting the process of repurposing the devices, uploading

the appropriate software and re distributing them to schools. The priority is reissuing devices to schools and learners and to date 852 learners have received a device.

Distribution of the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) – The PDG is distributed to schools based on need and allocation is undertaken on this basis. Currently, avenues are being explored as to whether additional resources are required as a compensatory element during this time.

Supporting school staff – The Council’s Human Resources has been proactive and has disseminated information across all schools to staff around wellbeing. Psychology services are also providing remote training so staff can prepare for children returning to school but the service is also available for employees to access should they need to do so.

Children looked after – It was stressed that Welsh Government has advocated that children who can’t be safely cared for at home, those children looked after, those on the child protection register, young carers and those with additional learning needs have been prioritised throughout. Amongst those high priority groups, a number have been further identified and targeted for childcare and support.

It was **RESOLVED** to acknowledge the information within the presentation delivered by the Director of Education & Inclusion Services and the responses provided to the queries raised.

58 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee thanked Members for their attendance at the virtual meeting and for their discussions and recommendations to be taken forward as follows:-

- To receive updates in respect of flooding in Rhondda Cynon Taf in addition to statutory reporting requirements into flooding; and
- To receive an update on the Covid-19 position in Rhondda Cynon Taf in respect of the recovery plans which will be used as a basis for the forward Overview & Scrutiny work programme

In respect of the flooding update, the Chair acknowledged the request by some members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee that Welsh Water and Natural Resources Wales as well as local members from the affected wards to be invited when the matter is reported.

This meeting closed at 5.40 pm

**Cllr M Adams
Chairman**