

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Minutes** of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Clydach Vale on Monday, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2016.

**Present:**

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

**County Borough Councillors:**

H Boggis	(Mrs) J Bunnage	(Mrs) J Cass
M Griffiths	P Jarman	(Mrs) S J Jones
B Morgan	B Stephens	(Mrs) M Tegg
G P Thomas	L G Walker	

**Co-opted Members:-**

Mr J Fish – Parent Governor  
Mr J Horton – Parent Governor  
Mr D Price - Unison

**Officers in Attendance:**

Mr G Isingrini – Group Director, Community & Children’s Services  
Ms G Davies – Service Director for Access, Engagement and Inclusion  
Mr C Hanagan – Service Director, Cabinet Office & Public Relations  
Ms J Allen – Attendance & Wellbeing Service Manager  
Mr P Nicholls – Principal Solicitor, Litigation  
Ms A Edwards – Scrutiny Support Officer

**In attendance:**

Mr D Marshall – CSSIW

**44. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors A L Davies MBE, S Evans-Fear and R K Turner; an co-opted Members Mr C Jones and Mrs C Jones.

**45. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, there were no personal declarations of interests made, pertaining to the agenda.

**46. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** to approve as an accurate record the minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 29<sup>th</sup> February 2016.

#### **47. AGENDA**

The Chairman advised of a change in the order of the agenda and that agenda item 6 – Youth Engagement would be brought forward.

### **REPORT OF DIRECTOR, CABINET AND PR IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR MONTAGUE**

#### **48. YOUTH ENGAGEMENT**

The Service Director, Cabinet & Public Relations reported to Members on the development of a Youth Forum as part of the Council's commitment to effective engagement with residents.

The Service Director explained that over the last 18 months to 2 years the Council had sought to develop its approach to engagement and the feedback arising from a Young People's engagement event suggested that young people wanted to be able to engage with the Council in a more structured way. The Service Director referred to the previous positions of Youth Mayor and Deputy Youth Mayor but explained that whilst these posts had provided good experience for the post holders it was considered that the new Youth Forum for Rhondda Cynon Taf would provide a more effective model of engagement with young people and also provide greater opportunities for participation.

The report and its accompanying appendix set out the proposed Youth Forum structure and its Terms of Reference and the Service Director explained that the views of scrutiny would be welcomed.

Having considered the report Members questioned how representatives would be chosen, making the point that the forum should not only be for those who are more confident in voicing their opinions, they queried the lack of input from young people in the preparation of the Terms of Reference and also asked whether those studying through the medium of welsh would be able use this language in the Forums. It was also pointed out that the meetings needed to excite the young people and it was suggested that meetings lasting 3 hours would be too long. The meetings would also need to be facilitated.

The Service Director agreed that there was a need for a mix of people to come through and pointed out that there had been a mixed spectrum at the two engagement events. He explained that simultaneous translation had been available for both and this would be the case for the forums. He explained that the Terms of Reference would be discussed with the young people and also explained that the Council would assist in the preparation of the agenda and its contents.

Members queried transport arrangements for those attending pointing out that there could be financial implications for those having to travel from the Cynon valley. They also questioned whether those children who do not attend

school would have a voice and whether there would be provision to primary age children.

The Service Director informed Members that the schools would be ensuring that the young people could attend. He agreed with the need to involve those harder to reach young people and the intention was to work with the youth clubs etc to facilitate this. He explained that there were no plans to involve primary children at this stage but that this was something that could be considered and built into the process in the future.

It was pointed out that the membership of the Forum would need time to build confidence and pointed out that a constantly changing membership could lead to instability.

The Service Director responded that there would need to be a fine balance in terms of the operation of the Forum and providing opportunities for engagement. He explained that the Forum was not intended to operate as the old Schools' Council where children were able to move up through the ranks. The new Forum was intended to be more of a consultative body.

In conclusion, the Committee welcomed the introduction of a Rhondda Cynon Taf Youth Forum and **RESOLVED** to endorse the proposals subject to Members' comments.

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

### **49. LOCAL AUTHORITY ARRANGEMENTS TO SUPPORT SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN**

The Group Director, Community & Children's Services updated Members on the progress in respect of the recommendations arising from the Wales Audit Office (WAO) report on Local Authority Arrangements to Support Safeguarding of Children 2014.

The Group Director explained that the Wales Audit Office report specific to Rhondda Cynon Taf had set out four recommendations and attached as an appendix to report was the progress made in respect of each.

The Group Director also explained that subsequent to the publication of the above report, the Wales Audit Office had issued a national report 'Review of Safeguarding Arrangements in Wales' which superseded the recommendations in the earlier report which had related specifically to children and in response to this the Council had undertaken a review of its safeguarding arrangements that apply to children, young people and adults at risk and a detailed report had been presented to Cabinet on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

The Committee considered the report and a Member pointed out that Councillors are not checked by the 'Disclosure and Barring Service' (DBS). He explained that this was an issue which he had raised in the past and had

been debated by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee following a Notice of Motion to Council.

The Group Director explained that there was no statutory requirement for Councillors to have a DBS check and he would not expect them to have any contact with children on their own. He also pointed out that having such a check only provided a 'point in time' assurance. However, he did appreciate the Member's view.

A Member informed the Committee of the debate which had taken place at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee when the Committee had been informed of clear criteria set down by the DBS which would not allow a blanket approach to be taken with regard to all Council Members undergoing enhanced checks. However, Members with areas of specific responsibility would be given the opportunity to undergo a check by the DBS that and the Head of Democratic Services would be assigned as one of the lead Counter Signatories for the administrations of the Disclosure and Barring Service. She pointed out that as a governor of a school she was not required to have a DBS check. However, volunteers were required to be checked and she suggested that the issue needed to be revisited.

Members further considered the report and the Group Director responded to queries in relation to awareness raising and training needs.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED**:

- (i) to acknowledge that progress made to date in respect of the recommendations arising from the Wales Audit Office report on 'Local Authority Arrangements to Support Safeguarding of Children' 2014;
- (ii) that scrutiny further considers the issue of Councillors being checked by the Disclosure and Barring Service.

**50. CWM TAF SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15**

The Group Director, Community & Children's Services presented the Committee with the annual report for 2014/15 in relation to the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children's Board. He reported that the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 will introduce a duty for all Safeguarding Boards to produce their annual reports by 31<sup>st</sup> July each year and their annual plans by 31<sup>st</sup> March each year for submission to the Welsh Government. He also pointed out that the Safeguarding Business Unit for Cwm Taf had been strengthened to help support the new requirements of the Act.

The Group Director suggested that the current annual report did not necessarily provide scrutiny with all the information that it needed to analyse progress and suggested that for the future Members may wish to have sight of the annual Business Plan.

Whilst content that progress was being made, Members felt strongly that such out of date information should not be presented in the future. The Committee also expressed its concern that the membership of the Board as set out within the report did not provide names only job titles and for accountability purposes the Committee felt that it was important that Members had access to these names.

The Group Director accepted that the information was late and explained that it had been provided for information purposes rather than scrutiny. He also reported that he would obtain the names of the Board members and circulate these to the Committee. In response to questions regarding the timeliness of information he explained that the Committee could request quarterly updates if it so wished.

A Member referred to her concern in relation to the new scrutiny arrangements whereby the quarterly performance information is considered by the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair pointed out that the Children & Young People could request information to undertake their work.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED**:

- (i) to accept the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report 2014/15;
- (ii) that in future the Committee should receive
  - the Business Plan for the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children's Board with an invitation to a Partner Member to attend;
  - quarterly progress reports from the Board.

## **51. TEAM AROUND THE FAMILY (TAF): PERFORMANCE AND DELIVERY**

The Group Director, Community & Children's Services presented Members with a report which informed them of the ongoing development and impact of Team Around the Family (TAF) which is part of the Welsh Government funded Families First programme which was first introduced in 2012.

It was explained that TAF provides families with holistic multi-agency family support, promoting resilience and the report provided an insight into how TAF has been established across the County Borough and provided data in respect of referrals, assessments and case closures.

The Group Director referred to the early intervention and prevention agenda within Children's Services which was showing early positive signs and also pointed to the need to evaluate the first 12 months of operation of the MASH. He explained that there was a need to have more clarity around the thresholds between TAF and Children's Services and some work was already being undertaken by the Head of Engagement & Participation within the Education Service.

The Group Director provided clarity in response to Members' queries in respect of the data and suggested that the topic might lend itself to a small sub group of Members undertaking a detailed investigation.

A Member questioned whether there was a risk to TAF given that Families First funding was due to end in 2017.

The Group Director acknowledged that there was a risk but pointed out that failure to provide support at the early stages would lead to further pressures on the Council.

A Member asked whether those families who decide that they don't want intervention are monitored.

The Group Director reported that he would check on the process and report back.

Members welcomed the report and **RESOLVED** to receive further updates at the appropriate time.

## **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING**

### **52. ANNUAL SCHOOL ATTENDANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2014/15**

The Attendance & Wellbeing Service Manager provided Members with a report which analysed school attendance performance for the academic year 2014/15 and a comparison of performance over the last three years. She explained to Members that data for 2014/15 was only published in January 2016.

Members were informed that continued good progress had been made by primary and secondary schools in 2014/15 in improving attendance and the report provided data showing the impact of improved school attendance on attainment. The report also set out the number of warnings issued to parents for non attendance and the number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued during the academic year 2014/15.

A co-opted Member referred to the number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued during the year and questioned whether they were all legally issued. He also questioned the correlation between attendance and performance. Whilst he accepted it to a certain degree he pointed out that there many more influencing factors, most importantly the work carried out in the classroom and he did not agree with the direct correlation put forward.

The Attendance & Wellbeing Service Manager reported that she believed that the Fixed Penalty Notices issued were lawful and pointed out that head teachers continue to maintain an element of discretion in line with Ministerial guidance.

The Principal Solicitor, Litigation, advised that all the Fixed Penalty Notices issued were lawful. He reported that following the issuing of the letter from the Minister for Education and Skills to all Head Teachers, the responsible Director had sent an e-mail to all head teachers requesting that they support the Authority's firm approach to holidays in term time but also pointing out that they do have discretion in such matters.

With regard to the link with attainment, the Attendance & Wellbeing Manager explained that there is a cause and effect and that unless a child is in school they cannot learn. However, she accepted that there are other influences.

The Service Director, for Access, Inclusion and Engagement added that good outcomes are linked to a range of elements and the service is striving to break the cycle of low aspirations.

A co-opted Member questioned whether the operation of the FPN is cost neutral and whether in the case of primary schools, attendance is likely to hit an artificial ceiling.

The Attendance & Wellbeing Manager reported that to date the service had managed to absorb the work associated with the FPN process into its current capacity. This is now being reviewed and the money collected to date will be used to fund the process going forward. In relation to Primary School Attendance she explained that there had been a significant increase in 2013/14 when the Attendance & Wellbeing service had become fully operational. She agreed that progress could become static and pointed out that the Authority, given its demographics is doing well but explained that there will be a need to adopt a different way of looking at attendance in order to continue to make improvements.

The Service Director for Access, Inclusion and Engagement added that the data sets for next year would be critical in deciding what could be done next.

A Member questioned the target setting process for attendance and the Service Director for Access, Inclusion and Engagement explained that they tried to set realistic but aspirational targets for each school setting.

A Member questioned the pressure placed on Head Teachers with regard to the introduction of the Zero Tolerance approach to absenteeism and the advice that was originally being given to head teachers and governing bodies.

Another Member, whilst agreeing that a direct correlation between the improved attendance and performance could not be proved was encouraged that the report attempted to show an analysis of what is happening and welcomed the report.

Further discussion took place with Members pointing out the pressure on head teachers and also pointing out that many parents were not in a position

to either afford or be able to take holidays during school holidays and that Fixed Penalty Notices should be used as a last resort.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked officers for the report which she commented provided a great deal of information and welcomed the improvement in attendance figures and the Committee **RESOLVED** to accept the report.

## **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

### **53. PREPARATION FOR THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16**

The Committee was provided with proposals for the composition of the draft Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report for 2015/16 for consideration.

The Chairman thanked Mr Horton, Parent Governor whose term of office was coming to an end for his contribution to the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee and the former Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman also paid tribute to the Scrutiny Support Officer who would be retiring shortly.

**RESOLVED** to endorse the proposed content of the draft Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report.

(Mrs) C Leyshon  
Chairman

The meeting closed at 6.50 pm.