



## **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, 23 January 2019 at 5.00 pm at the Council Chamber, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, Tonypany, CF40 2XX.

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

Councillor S. Rees-Owen (Chair)

Councillor W Lewis	Councillor S Evans
Councillor J Brencher	Councillor H Fychan
Councillor J Harries	Councillor S Powell
Councillor H Boggis	Councillor G Jones

### **Co-Opted Members in attendance:-**

Mr J Fish, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative  
Mr D Price, Representing UNISON

### **Officers in attendance:-**

Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services  
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services  
Ms C Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion  
Mr S Parry-Jones, Seren Hub Co-Ordinator  
Ms S Corcoran - Central South Consortium  
Mr T Britton (Central South Consortium)

### **County Borough Councillors in attendance:-**

Councillor S Evans

#### **38 Declaration of Interest**

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

#### **39 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for Absence was received from County Borough Councillors A. Calvert, J. Davies, M. Griffiths and G. Stacey

#### **40 SEREN Report**

The Chair welcomed the Co-ordinator of the Seren Hub for Rhondda, Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil LEAs to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee. It was explained to Members that the purpose of the report is to provide Members with an overview of the Seren Hub as it relates to students in Rhondda

Cynon Taf. The Co-ordinator of the Seren Hub explained to Members that the report contains information on the background to the Hub, its achievements during its second cycle in 2017/18 and an overview of the lessons learnt that may affect the current and subsequent cycles.

Members were informed that following the publication of the GCSE results in August 2017, the Co-ordinator was able to invite some 130 students who had gained four GCSE A\* or more to join the Hub. All RCT schools with sixth forms, Coleg y Cymoedd, and Merthyr College fielded some students.

It was explained that over fifty academic extension classes had been arranged between October 2017 and March 2018. These encompassed Chemistry, English Literature, History, Law Life Sciences, Medicine, Mathematics, Modern Languages and Physics.

It was also explained that classes were taken in some instances, by serving teachers and lecturers within the two Boroughs, or by professionals with relevant experience such as GPs and hospital Consultants. Most however were provided by lecturers and PhD students from the Universities of Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Oxford, South Wales and Swansea.

Members were informed of the advice, support and guidance given to all the pupils attending the Seren Hub provision. Students were introduced to useful bodies such as the Nuffield Trust, Further Mathematics Support Programme for Wales, Lord Edmund Davies Legal Educational Trust and so forth and were encouraged to apply for placements.

Members were presented with an overview regarding outcomes for Seren pupils along with areas for development and the continuing support for students after accessing the Hub.

The Co-ordinator explained that Welsh Government announced plans in September 2018 to extend Seren to pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4, and Hubs were invited to submit proposals. Members were informed that the Co-ordinator duly submitted a work plan and the Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Hub was awarded £55,500 to March 2020. A report on activities will be made available in a future Scrutiny Committee meeting.

In concluding his report, the Co-ordinator for the Seren Hub explained that the role is now to build upon its initial success. Many students attending leading Universities, are generous in attributing their progression to Seren's encouragement and support. There is evidence that Seren is valued by schools, colleges and parents. All schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf, no matter how challenging their intake, have seen their pupils gain places on the most competitive of degree courses; the challenge will be to maintain this momentum.

The Co-ordinator of the Seren Hub read a written submission from a pupil from Ysgol GG Rhydywaun who had attended the Seren Hub provision but was unable to attend the Scrutiny Committee meeting due to unforeseen circumstances. She expressed her thanks and appreciation. Her email stated:

"I'd like to thank the Seren Hub for all the support I have received over the past year. I truly feel that I wouldn't have been given the opportunity to study at Cambridge had it not been for the help provided by the Seren Hub. The numerous evenings I spent at Coleg y Cymoedd were useful, not only in an

academic sense, but also as a way of learning for others. I was surprised at how many other children had achieved high grades in their GCSE's and how many of them wanted to study medicine. I feel that this drove me to work harder in order to secure my place. In addition, Stephen provided us with good information about what makes a strong application (e.g. work experience and reading outside school subjects) throughout the year. The additional information provided by Johnathan Padley in his talks on personal statements and interviews was also especially good. This definitely strengthened my application and ensured that I was better prepared for my interviews.

In a concluding statement, the pupil for Rhydywaun thanked the Seren Hub for the support provided.

The Chair thanked the officers for their hard work and opened the meeting up for Members' questions.

A Member commented on the report and was pleased to see that numbers had increased year on year. The Member enquired whether it was a personal choice for students to apply to be involved in the Hub and what the selection process was for Key Stage 3 and 4 groups of students.

Officers explained that all Hubs provide agreed standards for selecting pupils. In respect of the work plan being submitted, a Member commented that it would be beneficial to see the plan before the next meeting in 12 months, so that Members have a better understanding of what is proposed.

Members asked whether Seren members continue to liaise with their Seren link when they get to the University of their choice, and whether there is any data regarding dropout rates.

In response, the Officer explained that it is pleasing to note that there have been no Seren students dropping out of University to date. It was explained that sixth form heads get information generally but there is no data recorded.

Members asked what was being done to encourage pupils who attended leading Universities to come back to Wales. It was felt that we needed to encourage our more able students back to the area. Members gave examples of various professions such as GPs. It was explained that students who go away to University do come back bringing a great deal of knowledge and skills with them.

After further consideration, Members agree to:

- Acknowledge the information contained within the report.
- Receive the work plan in respect of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 before the next meeting.

## **41 Central South Consortium Report in respect of RCT**

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services introduced the Senior Challenge Adviser – Primary Schools, the Senior Challenge Adviser Secondary School and the Senior Leadership Welsh Language Standards & Policy Officer for the Central South Consortium to Members of the Children and Young People

Scrutiny Committee.

The Senior Challenge Officer explained that they will take Members through the report in detail and will be happy to answer any questions.

It was explained that the Scrutiny Committees in each of the five authorities invite the Senior Challenge Adviser for the authority to report on performance of the schools within their authority and the contribution of the consortium at any stage during the year. The annual report from the consortium relating to progress in the previous academic year and priorities for the year ahead.

The Challenge Advisers explained that the Central South Consortium Business Plan for April 2017 to March 2018 has five priorities:

- Improving outcomes for vulnerable learners through partnership working
- Developing School to school working to deliver curriculum reform
- Developing leadership, governance and workforce reform
- Rapid and sustainable intervention
- Developing effectiveness and efficiency in Central South Consortium.

Members were presented with outcomes against targets and previous outcomes for Rhondda Cynon Taf. It was explained that targets met or exceeded are highlighted in green. Outcomes that have improved from the previous academic year are highlighted in yellow.

The Senior Challenge adviser informed Member of the Welsh Government Key Changes to Key Stage 4 performance measures in 2016-17, which affects any possible comparisons that may be made against previous data.

Members were informed of the changes to Key Stage 4 performance measure going forward and officer reinforced that caution should be used with comparing 2017-2018 outcomes with previous years.

Both Senior Challenge Advisers informed Members that Teacher Assessments can be used for information purposes, but not for school accountability purposes below national level. All Wales Core Data Sets (performance) will no longer be provided by WG for the Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. It was explained that there will be no change to the collection processes and schools will still have to report data to Welsh Government.

In respect RCT schools, Members were informed of performance data for the various Key Stages. In respect of the performance in the Foundation Phase Indicator, 81.28% achieved expected outcomes which is below the national average of 82.58%. Performance is slightly below that of the national average in three areas of learning but above in the remaining areas. It was explained that the 2017/18 reception cohort were the first children to be formally assessed against the revised statutory Foundation Phase Framework and comparisons of Foundation Phase outcomes with previous years should therefore be avoided as they are not measured on a comparable basis.

The Officer explained that at Key Stage 2, the proportion of pupils aged between 7 and 11 years old achieving at least the expected level (Level 4 or above) for the Core Subjects Indicator has decreased by 0.76 percentage points from

90.03% to 89.27% and is slightly below the national average.

In respect of Key Stage 3 in RCT, it is pleasing to see that the proportion of pupils aged between 11 and 14 years old achieving at least the expected level (Level 5 or more) for the Core Subject Indicator has increased by 0.47 percentage points from 87.4% to 87.87%, which is slightly below the National Average.

With regards to Key Stage 4, due to curriculum and performance measure changes the outcomes from this year's GCSEs results can only be compared to those last year, particularly in mathematics and Welsh / English. Provisional results show that performance in the Level 2+ (5 GCSE's A\* - C including Mathematics and English or Welsh) and Level 2 thresholds (5 GCSE's A\* -C) are higher than 2016-17 and are closer to the National average. Performance in the Level 1 threshold (5 GCSEs A –G) is equivalent to 2016-17 performance and is above the national average.

Members were informed of the challenge and support provided by the Consortium on behalf of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council. In addition, information was provided in respect of the additional support requested through the Local Authority Annex to Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Members considered pupils' performance, which had be highlighted in the graphs within the report. After concluding the report, the Chair thanked officers and welcomed Members' questions.

A Member asked what opportunities and support would be given to staff to deal with the changes to the curriculum. It was explained that all schools have a self-evaluation plan and that staff needs are considered within the context of this plan. CSC colleagues are working with pioneer schools to support other schools and readiness tools are being developed to help with this. Governors have similar concerns.

In respect of PSE lessons, a Member raised concerns that the lessons are delivered differently across schools and felt that there should be more uniformity.

A Member highlighted that the report of the CSC is an important one and that the gap between vulnerable learners still needs to be addressed. The Member felt strongly that as a Scrutiny Committee this has been a priority and we are failing these pupils as the gap has increased. In response, officers explained that closing the gap is a huge priority and professionals are working with schools and communities to address this.

In respect of ALN Act, a Member questioned what work has been done across CSC. It was explained that this a high priority for the Consortium and within the CSC ALN Transformation Plan every school will have training. The implications to schools are currently being addressed across the region.

It was explained that the new Code of Practice for ALN is currently under consultation and the Transformational Lead in Central South Consortium is keen to run a workshop to discuss the topic.

Members continued to question officers on topic such as leadership and Welsh provision regarding the Welsh Government's target of a million Welsh speakers. The officer explained that as Welsh Policy Officer he is directly accountable for

raising awareness and developing enough staff to help learners on their language journey. We are working to ensure pupils and staff have the opportunity to enjoy speaking Welsh in and outside the classroom. Senior Challenge Advisors will support the staff to ensure this work is undertaken.

In respect of the wellbeing support for staff, Members asked if there was enough being done by the consortium to look after their wellbeing with the changes that are going on. Members were informed that there are some informal discussion going on across the Country. Occupational Health Service support is provided where appropriate.

After further discussion, Members RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the Content of the Report
- Receive a updating report at a future Meeting

## **42 Key Stage 4 & 5 Outcome Data and Categorisation**

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services presented Members with the final confirmation of Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 examination results for 2017-18 and the Welsh Government Primary and Secondary School Categorisation for 2018-19.

Members were informed that Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 outcomes are externally verified through the GCSE and GCE Advanced Level examinations, which are undertaken at the end of the respective Key Stages.

It was explained that the local authority analyses examination outcomes for each school and compares schools performance against other secondary schools in the County Borough and Rhondda Cynon Taf's performance is also measured against other authorities within the Central South Consortium.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that when reviewing the comparative data it is important for Members to take into account the socio-economic factors across the 22 Welsh local authorities and whilst poverty and deprivation are not excuses for educational underperformance they are factors that influence educational outcomes.

At Key Stage 4 Members were reminded of the changes that were introduced in 2017. Members were presented with the Key Stage 4 data, which showed that Level 1 outcomes were above the regional and national averages during 2017/18 and there has been some evidence of progress on level 2 and Level 2+ Key Stage 4 Outcome measures, which is very encouraging. In respect of A\* - C outcomes in English and Maths show improvement in this academic year. However Science outcomes would benefit from further improvement for Key Stage 4.

In respect of performance measures for Key Stage 4 it was explained that schools in the main have improved performance and all schools will continue to

work with the local authority and the Consortium to understand their respective performance and take the necessary steps to improve on future Key Stage 4 results. Members were presented with an overview of further future changes.

In respect of Key Stage 5 Members were informed that outcomes have remained relatively stable during 2017/18 with 96.2% achieving Level 3 threshold. In line with the national averages, girls continue to outperform boys on the wider point score measure but significant improvements in the wider point score was evident for all Rhondda Cynon Taf learners, including both boys and girls. Girls performance on this measure significantly exceeds that of the boys in Key Stage 5, finally within Key stage 5 the percentage of learners achieving 3A\* -A and 3A\* -C has improved significantly during this academic year.

Finally, Members were given the outcomes of the national categorisation for both primary and secondary schools.

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

A Member raised concerns in respect of Key Stage 4 Level 2 plus (A\* to C) in English. The Member asked what we got wrong, as we are nowhere where we were in 2016 when we were on par. Officers explained that we have recovered slightly, however inconsistencies relating to early entries had impacted on the outcomes in some schools. It was acknowledged that there was still work to be done. In respect of the dip since 2016, the data at that point included English literature as well as English language and changes in the performance measures have been introduced. The officers explained that the gains this year have been positive.

Members continued to scrutinise the report and RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the information contained within the report
- Acknowledge the actions taken to date and the future planned intervention of the Director of Education and Inclusion Services in partnership with Central Services and Central South Consortium to support schools currently categorised as amber and red.

## **43 EOTAS/ PRU Update Report**

The Head of Inclusion Services presented the Report in respect of outcomes for children accessing education other than at school (EOTAS) in Rhondda Cynon Taf during the academic year 2017/18 to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

It was explained that Section 19(1) of the Education Act 1996 (as amended by section 47 of the Education Act 1997) specifies that each local authority has to make arrangements for the provision of suitable education other than at school for those children of compulsory school age who, by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, may not for any period receive suitable education unless such arrangements are made for them.

Members were informed that in Rhondda Cynon Taf the EOTAS provision is

usually provided by means of a placement in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), or through access to group or individual tuition. The Head Inclusion Services informed Members that there is one primary and one secondary PRU. It was explained that primary PRU provision is located in the Tai Education Centre, which relocated to the old Ysgol yr Eos site in Penygraig. The Secondary PRU provision is Ty Gwyn, which is situated in Aberdare.

Members were informed that a significant amount of refurbishment in order to create an educational environment better equipped to meet the needs of a diverse range of learners through an improved curriculum offer.

Members were presented with outcome data for each Key Stage in table form and after in depth scrutiny **RESOLVED** to

- Acknowledge the information contained within the report.
- Receive an updating report at a future meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

#### **44 Urgent Business**

The Chair explained to Members of the Committee that Co-Opted Voting Member Mr J Fish wished to make his concerns known to the Committee regarding Welsh Government's decision in respect of the Autism Bill that had not been passed today. He stated;

“That today's vote isn't about whether the Bill in its current form will become law, it's about agreeing the general principles to enable further scrutiny to take place. Should the General principles not be agreed today, the Bill will fall and Members will have no further opportunity to shape the way autism services are developed in Wales. Agreeing the general principles will enable Members to table and debate the amendments they would like to see in the Bill. This is the only way of ensuring that Members are at the forefront of shaping the future development of the autism services. There will be no further opportunity should the Bill fail today.

**This meeting closed at Time Not  
Specified**

**CLLR S REES-OWEN  
CHAIR.**