



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, 16 October 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)

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| Councillor W Lewis | Councillor H Fychan |
| Councillor A Calvert | Councillor S Powell |
| Councillor M Powell | Councillor M Griffiths |
| Councillor G Jones | Councillor G Stacey |

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
Mr D Williams, Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor S Evans and Councillor E Griffiths

26 Declaration of Interest

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

27 Welcome & Announcements

The Chair welcomed Ms J Edwards from the Estyn Inspectorate to the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

Members of the Committee sends their best wishes to County Borough Councillor J Bencher and wished her a speedy recovery after injuring her leg.

28 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors H. Boggis, J. Brencher, S. Evans, A. Davies-Jones, M. Diamond and Co-Opted Members K. Wilhite and R. Nicholls

29 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 11th September 2019 as an accurate reflection of the meeting subject to the following amendments.

30 Matters Arising

Minutes No: 12. – Report from CSC

- (1) A Members requested the comment that was made by the Officer from CSC indicating that the request for a report had been received on short notice.
- (2) A Member asked that the comment from a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny committee be recorded as so not from the Children & Young People Scrutiny committee as suggested.

31 School Attendance Strategy 2018 -21

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service explained that, as Members would recall that at the Meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held in September 2018 Members were presented with the draft School Attendance Strategy.

The Officer explain that the purpose of the today's report is to provide Members with an update on the implementation of the School Attendance Strategy 2018-2021 including the action plan to raise the awareness of good school attendance and improve the current attendance rates across Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Services provided Members with the key priorities and actions taken in the first year.

He explained that the strategy focuses on six key priorities, which if achieved effectively, should have a positive impact on school attendance across the County Borough. The identified priorities focused on

- Improve pupil, parent, public and school awareness of school attendance issue by developing a whole authority approach to promoting and improving attendance;
- Review, evaluate and further develop the use of data, its analysis and the reporting mechanisms to inform service improvement at both local authority and school level.
- To further develop a robust and sustainable challenge and support system for improving school attendance, linking with other key priorities that impact on and are impacted by absenteeism;
- To develop an efficient and self –sustainable mechanism for sharing good practice and information on a timely basis that can be accessed independently by school at any time;
- To review, evaluate and re-launch key initiatives and interventions to support good attendance and tackle absenteeism;
- Further, develop partnership working to ensure the key objective of improving school attendance is embedded across internal and external agencies.

In order to ensure effective monitoring and reviewing of the strategy, Members

were presented with four key performance indicators that underpin the strategy.

It was explained that the first two indicators surrounding secondary and primary school attendance against target. Secondary school attendance (including special schools) dropped from 92.9% in 2017/18 to 92.8 % in 2018/19 falling well short of the ambitious target of 94.3%. Primary school attendance increase from 94.2% to 94.3% in the same period but also fell below the RCT wide target of 95.1%. He continued to explain that although it is disappointing that secondary attendance has decreased, the rate of the decline has reduced and we have seen improvements at primary levels although not too the high standards we set our targets against.

In respect of performance indicators, surrounding the FSM gaps in both phases Members were informed that in 2018/19 we achieved a 2.3% gap at primary level which was equal to that set in 2017/18 and at secondary level the gap was reduced from 2017/18 figures of 5.2% to 4.8 % in 2018/19. The officer continued by highlighting the fact that all Wales data has yet to be released and for comparative purposes in 2017/18 the all Wales average was 3.0% at primary level and 5.1% at secondary level.

In concluding his report the Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service explained that in the first year of the Strategy, a number of areas have been addressed, partnership working strengthened and interventions effectively implemented.

The six priority areas must be achieved if the strategy is to be effective and achieve maximum results. Where actions that underpin these priority areas have not proven as successful as hoped, new actions have been embedded in this year.

The officer highlighted that improvement of school attendance does not rest with one service or organisation, and efforts to ensure a multi – partnership approach is essential to achieving success.

The Chair thanked officer for the report and opened up the meeting for Members questions and comments.

Members raised concerns over the drop in school attendance figures and felt that schools are not meeting their targets. Members questioned what return the authority was getting on the investment that had already been put in place. It was also asked what are the ultimate goals (resources, time, and money). Officers explained with regards to investment attendance is a priority for the Local Authority and that AWS involvement is shown to help improve attendance for the majority of pupils they work with. The AWS is support for schools and incorporates the support with school improvement service.

A Member commented on the role of school governors and felt more training and increased activity for governor support within school improvement plans. The training programme need to increase.

Officers explained that governors play a vital role, engagement of governing bodies is a challenge, we are considering speed training and exploring E – Learning to strengthen the service with RCT. Primary SLA with governor support to reinforce the expectations on governors.

A Member raised a concern with regards to the pilot scheme within the Library Service and felt that this was targeting pupils in safe places, the Member felt that we need to look at what other services are available and the Member felt we need to use libraries in a more supportive way.

Officers explained that the library service was there to keep a record of pupils that were in attendance so the AWS could work with them, it was not to turn them away.

Members also had reservation with regards to the rewards for attendance and felt that this could have a detrimental effect. Members felt pupils would feel that they were letting their class mates down and this could have a knock on effect on the pupil's wellbeing. The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service explained that authority schemes this year were aimed on a termly basis at those above 97% attendance or those who have overcome difficulties to attend.

Members also commented on other aspects of school attendance and pupils taking time off at the end of one week beginning of another (Caravan club), adverse weather conditions and other issues.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service explained that the FPN tool can be used to address the issue of the (caravan club) and work with families going forward.

With regards to the situation regarding the weather officers explained that safeguarding grounds need to be considered. Speak to the service, governor support. Members felt that there should not be any penalty on schools due to the weather being out of control.

A Member asked if it is possible to change the way we look at pupils taking time away from school. The Member stated that peoples working lives have changed and there may be times during the year that we could be flexible with pupil's attendance and if this was implemented this could increase attendance.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained that term dates are set as a region a few years in advance. The Member commented of a trial in Swansea where they closed a school for a week which resulted in an increase in attendance. Other Members were in agreement that may be something the Local Authority may wish to consider.

The Chair commented that it would help to see some evidence of this at a future meeting.

A non-committee Member asked if the voice of the pupils had been considered when developing the strategy and have they been asked why they are not attending.

Officers replied that this is one area we are looking to explore further, and it was acknowledged that learner voice is important.

Members felt that more collaborative working with in services is needed, multi agencies working .

The Chair highlighted that the committee had considered the report over the last few years and felt that it was time to take action. High level termly data would be helpful to the committee and the information be presented more frequently.

After further consideration and intense discussion Members RESOLVED to:

- Receive a high level of termly data
- Receive a wider picture of attendance going forward
- Research how other authorities are improving their school attendance
- Consider carrying out a piece of work in respect of attendance in RCT.

32 URGENT BUSINESS

This meeting closed at 7.00 pm

**CLLR S REES-OWEN
CHAIR.**