



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, 12 February 2020 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 W Lewis (Chair)

Councillor A Calvert Councillor S Powell
Councillor M Powell Councillor M Griffiths
Councillor J Edwards

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr D Price, Representing UNISON
Mr K Wilhite, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Officers in attendance:-

Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Ms A Batley, Director of Children's Services
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Ms A Richards, Head of 21st Century Schools

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor S Evans

59 Welcome Announcement

The Chair announced to Members of the Committee that after a lot of consideration County Borough Councillor H. Boggis has stepped down a Member of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee. The Chair thanked Councillor Boggis for all her hard work and expressed that she will be missed.

The Chair extended a welcome to County Borough Councillor J Edwards who had recently been appointed to the Committee.

60 Declaration of Interest

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

61 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from County Borough Councillors S. Rees –Owen, S.Evans, J. Brencher, H. Fychan, G. Jones G. Stacey, M. Diamond, A.Davies-Jones and Co-opted Members J. Fish and R. Nicholls.

62 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 4th December 2019 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

63 Consultation Links

The Chair referenced the consultation links, which are available through the RCT Scrutiny Website. The Chair reminded Members that Information is provided in respect of relevant consultations for consideration by the committee which are circulated on a monthly basis by the Graduate Scrutiny Research Officer. It was highlighted that if Member wanted any further information to contact the Scrutiny Officers via the email address provided.

64 Welsh Government Children Looked After Reduction Expectations

The Director of Children Services explained to Members that the purpose of the report is to inform Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with and overview of the Welsh Government's Children Looked After Reduction Expectations.

The Director continued and explained that the First Minister of Wales has highlighted the increasing numbers of Looked After Children in Wales as a priority area for action. He is clear that too many children are taken away from their families into the care system in Wales. It was explained that he set out the following priority areas for reduction:

- The number of children in care;
- The number of children placed out of county;
- The number of children placed out of Wales; and
- The number of children removed from parents with a Learning Disability

The Director of Children Service highlighted that a report was submitted to Welsh Government in May 2019 that set out the children looked after data for RCT at the time and the priorities for action. It was explained that a number of the priorities depended on services and monies being made available through ICF funding.

Welsh Government came back to local authorities in July 2019 and asked each of them to make a commitment to set targets to reduce their looked after children against each priority.

In October 2019 RCT report to Welsh Government that since April 2019 the number of children looked after had increased and this is a trend that has continued during the year with the number of children looked after at present being 702.

Members acknowledged that within Rhondda Cynon Taf the overriding principle has continued to be children only become looked after at the right time and for as long as it is appropriate.

After consideration of the report Members put forward their questions and comments.

Members commented on data and the fact that within Rhondda Cynon Taf there is high percentage of deprivation which Members consider a factor in the high numbers of Children Looked After.

Members commented on the early intervention services and commented that there should not be a target set as if there is a need to place children the care system then that should be a priority not reducing the targets.

A Member asked for a breakdown of area, causes for children becoming looked after, gender percentages etc. so that the Committee could get a better picture going forward. Officers explained that the reason for majority of children that are coming in to care is neglect (physical and sexual).

A Member went on to ask if they could have examples of what the Local Authority has done to prevent children become looked after. The Director of Children's Services explained that a great deal of work had been done by the early intervention service (Resilient Families, the Edge of Care Service) working closely with psychologists, therapists, working with education. Identifying the children young early intervention is key.

Members put forward further questions and after further discussion **RESOLVED** to:

- Acknowledge the content of the report;
- Receive updating reports at future meetings.

65 Understanding the Council's 2019/20 Budget

The Head of Finance Education and Financial Reporting informed Members that the purpose of presentation was to aid the Committee's understanding of the Council's revenue and capital budgets in relation to those areas that come within the remit of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

The Head of Finance firstly provided Council wide context, then presented the Education and Inclusion Services revenue budget for 2019/20 under various headings:

- Individual Schools Budget
- Education & Inclusion Services; and;
- 21st Century Schools.

Members also received information in respect of the Community and Children's Services revenue budget 2019/20 within the remit of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

Details were provided of the relevant extracts of the Capital Programme 2019/20 -2021/22 pertinent to the responsibilities of the Committee.

Members thanked the Officer for the updating information and put forward their questions and observations.

Members commented on various aspects of the information presented. Members welcomed the increase in the schools budget however requested further clarification. The Head of Finance Education and Financial Reporting explained that the 8.5% increase related to the total schools budget. It was explained that the increase is intended to cover all inflationary pressures such as pay, pension cost, energy costs etc.

With regards to pressures on funding within schools, a Member commented that there seems to be lack of funding for schools with high numbers of children looked after and children with behavioural needs and asked if there was any linkage between education and children's services. Officers explained that the grant PDG CLA is available for children looked after and that there are examples of excellent practice in schools supporting children with behaviour issues.

A Member wanted clarity on the cost of ALN which is not consistent across all schools. It was explained that funding for non-statutory support is distributed on a Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) model as consulted on in 2019. Support for learners with a statutory statement is funded according to the required support agreed by a panel. Also it is assumed that 5% of school funding is notionally allocated to support ALN. Members put forward further questions in respect of 21st Century Schools etc.

A Member asked officers a question regarding free school meal pupils and wanted to clarify whether foster carers receive the entitlement for the child when that child comes into care.

Officers explained that birth parents are entitled to claim free school meals and this applies if their children are in foster care. Therefore children will be provided with a free school meal if this applies. It was explained that social workers actively encourage parents to sign the relevant forms to enable this. However this does not apply to out of county placements.

With regards to the Capital programme a Member asked if the budget allocated for the modernisation of accommodation included Children's Service Buildings as he felt some of the buildings are not fit for purpose. It was explained that £50,000 is allocated for such building works.

The Member continued to ask what risk assessments had been carried out on Children's Service Building to ensure staff safety following a specific incident. The Director of Children Services explained that full risk assessments had been carried out and would provide the Member with further information after the meeting.

Another Member noted that the budget for supply costs can be challenging.

Members continued to scrutinise the information before them and **RESOLVED** to acknowledge the Council's Revenue Budget 2019/2020

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services explained to Members that the purpose of the report was to consider the decision of the Central South Consortium Joint Committee to continue to deliver shared educational advisory services in partnership with the other four councils in the region for at least the next three years.

The Officer explained Welsh Government is making significant changes to the delivery of education in Wales during a period of unprecedented public sector financial austerity. In the autumn of 2018, the five Education Cabinet Members of Central South Education Joint Committee decided to undertake an independent review of the Consortium to see if it was fit for purpose and finally viable for the foreseeable future.

It was explained the ISOS Partnership was commissioned to undertake the review. A report from the Lead Chief Executive of the Consortium (in discussion with the other four council chief executives) was presented to the Joint Committee on the 19th December where it was resolved to approve the recommendations 2.1 to 2.3 as set out in appendix 1 of the report.

It was explained that if the five Council Cabinets confirm their continued support for the delivery of the shared educational advisory services, the Directors of Education and Acting Managing Director of the Consortium will present to the Joint Committee:

- Plans remodel the current Consortium as advised by ISOS;
- Three year budget proposals for consideration by the five councils;
- Opportunities to ensure that the vast majority of grant funding continue to go directly to schools, but that the relevant overheads of delivering WG Curriculum support are appropriately financially supported by the WG grants.

It was highlighted that if a Council wishes to withdraw from the Central South Consortium the legal agreement states:

“Any Party proposing to withdraw from this Agreement must notify each of the other Parties by giving not less than 2 year notice in writing of its intention to withdraw expiring on 31st March in any year” Therefore the earliest any council could withdraw from the agreement is March 2022.

After consideration of the report Members put forward their questions and observations to the Officer.

A Member wanted some clarity on the proportion of how much Local Authorities contribute to CSC. It was explained that each authority pays a different proportion which is calculated by the size of the authority.

Another commented that it would be of no benefit to the authority to change the current model due to the timescales set out in the report.

After further discussion Members **RESOLVED**:

- Acknowledge the outcomes of the recent ISOS review of the Central South Consortium;
- To acknowledge the commitment of support from the Central South Consortium.

The Chair advised Members that there was no urgent business at this evening's meeting.

68 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair thanked Members and Officers for their contributions to the Meeting and provided them with a brief summary of items for the next agenda.

This meeting closed at 6.30 pm

**CLLR W. LEWS
CHAIR.**