

# CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms 1/2 - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

**Members Present:**

**28<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

**Chairman:** Councillor A.R.Lockyer

**Vice Chairman:** Councillor H.N.James

**Councillors:** A.Carter, Mrs.A.Chaves, M.Ellis, P.Greenaway,  
R.G.Jones, J.D.Morgan, Mrs.S.Paddison,  
M.Protheroe, A.L.Thomas and Mrs.L.G.Williams

**Invited Councillors:** D.Lewis and L.M.Purcell

**Co-opted Non Voting  
Members:** A.Hughes

**Officers In Attendance** A.Evans, N. Jarman, A.Jarrett, Mrs.C.Connelly,  
Ms.B.Evans, J.Hodges, Ms.V.Jones, Ms.A.Flynn and  
Ms.C.Gadd

**Cabinet Invitees:** Councillors P.A.Rees and P.D.Richards

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## 1. **MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following Members made declarations of interest at the commencement of the meeting:

Cllr.D.Lewis – Report of the Head of Transformation – Home to School Transport Arrangements – Welsh Medium Schools, as he is a governor of Cwmtawe School and confirmed his dispensation to speak but not vote thereon.

Cllr.L.M.Purcell - Report of the Head of Transformation – Home to School Transport Arrangements – Welsh Medium Schools, as she is a governor of Cwmtawe School

and confirmed her dispensation to speak but not vote thereon.

2. **MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 9<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2015**

Noted by the Committee, subject to the following update.

Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2014/15

Members highlighted that it had been agreed at the previous meeting that the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) would be invited to present a report on progress. Officers informed them the lead officers from Local Health Board and CAHMS had been invited to the meeting but had been unable to attend as it clashed with the Local Health Board meeting. It was noted that they had confirmed that they would be attending the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2015 Scrutiny Committee meeting.

3. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15**

Noted by the Committee.

4. **PRESENTATION BY CARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES INSPECTORATE WALES ON THE INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN NEATH PORT TALBOT**

The Committee received the report and presentation on the recent Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) inspection of Children's Services in Neath Port Talbot February 2015, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that Neath Port Talbot's Children's Services were made subject to CSSIW serious concerns protocol in November 2012. A further inspection in November 2013 resulted in the protocol remaining in place. A further inspection was undertaken in February 2015 and inspectors focussed on whether sufficient progress had been made to improve the quality and consistency of services for children and young people in need of support or protection, including those looked after and care leavers. Upon completion of the Inspection the Chief Inspector (CSSIW) took the decision to remove Neath Port Talbot's Children's Services from the Serious Concerns Protocol.

The Chief Inspectors presented the Inspection findings to the Committee and highlighted the key areas and recommendations for improvement. It was noted that there had been significant improvement to Elected Members knowledge about performance in the Service. It was highlighted that staff morale was high and there had been no recent reports of bullying or oppressive practice. It was recognised that there were areas that still required improvement, which included the voice of the child being further involved in shaping Service planning.

Members queried to what extent care plans were not being fully completed. It was explained that the files considered by the Inspectors was a small percentage of cases and the basic information was completed, however there were inconsistencies in the level of information, such as if any further support was required. It was highlighted that only signposting to services did not always provide families with enough support, as they often needed support to access those services. It was recognised that it was difficult as there was not the capacity to quality assure all elements of social work, however, further work could be carried out in this area. An example was given of a Local Authority which chooses a theme on a quarterly basis to be audited by staff within the Service, which helps to evaluate consistency in practice.

Members asked if there were examples of good practice that the Committee could use to gain more of an understanding of certain topics. It was noted that case studies can be subjective and identifying themes rather than individual outcomes would be useful. Also speaking to care leavers about their experiences could be helpful to the Committee.

Members highlighted that the report indicated that out of those families that were referred to the Team Around the Family (TAF) fewer than 50% of the families went on to take up a service. They asked if this was a reflection on the way the service was marketed or was it due to services not meeting needs. The Inspectors informed them that they thought it was due to engagement and the level of support families received in accessing services. It was noted that short term interventions, for example for 6 weeks, could assist with providing practical support to families before statutory intervention was required. This intervention did not need to be carried out by a qualified Social Worker. However, it was noted that the balance had to be established to ensure that parents were enabled and did not become dependent on Social Services.

The Committee was pleased that staff morale was high and asked if there was any further support Members could offer staff. It was highlighted that staff felt listened to and had the opportunity to give their views and the Practice Improvement Group was identified as a good example of this

working well. The value of the Improvement Member Panel was also recognised and an example of good practice that could be used by other Local Authorities. The Inspectors commented that the Panel reporting back to the Committee had also been useful in providing Members with feedback from Social Work teams.

Members queried whether it would be useful for them to receive information from any completed feedback forms from children and young people who had been involved in the system. They were informed that there were different ways of hearing feedback, such as talking to groups and attending activity days and it was noted that it was a difficult area for most Local Authorities to address. Members asked who was the newly appointed Participation and Engagement Officer in Children's Services and they were informed it was Andrew Harris.

Members noted that the Welsh Government initiative for student Social Workers to work with families to provide them with experience of supporting families and it was asked if this still takes place. It was confirmed that this still happened and the Council had put a lot of work into supporting social workers in their first year in practice. It was highlighted that it was positive that Neath Port Talbot "grows its own".

Members recognised the work and resources that had been put into the services and the commitment to the improvement journey and it was highlighted that it was not the end of the journey. The Chair thanked Officers, Inspectors, partner organisations and Members for their contribution.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

## 5. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

### Cabinet Board Proposals

#### 5.1 Western Bay Adoption Financial Support Policy

Members received the Adoption Financial Support Policy developed in line with the establishment of the Western Bay Adoption Service, as detailed within the circulated report.

The Committee was informed that the Financial Support Policy would be consistent across the region but would allow for each Local

Authority adoption agency to retain accountability and control of their budget. Each Local Authority currently had different arrangements in place and this Policy would allow for consistency. The allowances set out in the Policy were based on the Welsh Government guidelines for the base rate.

Members highlighted that there was a difference in payments across the areas. Officers informed them that Bridgend was already applying the new rates and the adoption of the Policy would bring the other areas into line with this. However, it was noted that there was no intention to change the existing arrangements with current adopters.

Members asked if the changes to payments would be likely to impact on the number of families coming forward as potential adopters or for Local Authorities to lose out to Independent Agencies. Officers informed Members that this had not been the case in Bridgend, which was were already applying the Policy. However, it was noted that the intention of the changes to the Adoption Service was to improve the adoption process and if it was seen to have a detrimental effect then it would be brought back to the Committee for changes to be made. There would also be further analysis by the National Adoption Service to provide more alignment across Wales.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

## 5.2 Children and Young People Services – Development Plan

Members received the Children and Young People Services Development Plan 2015/16, as detailed within the circulate report.

The Committee was informed that following the Inspection by Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) in February 2015, 15 recommendations had been made. The Children and Young People Services had formulated an action plan outlining how these recommendations would be addressed. It was highlighted that there was some cross over with the Strategic Improvement Plan, which had previously been considered by the Committee. It was agreed that progress against the action plan would be reported back to Members in six months.

Members queried the Compliance Statement attached to the report in that it indicated a positive impact on crime and disorder; however, there was no evidence to suggest this in the report. Officers explained

that it was not explicitly mentioned, but there were actions being undertaken that would have a positive impact by reducing the number of young people coming into the Youth Justice System. It was recognised that such information needed to be evidenced in the reports.

Members noted that it would be useful for the new appraisal system to be referred to throughout the action plan rather than just training in some sections. The Committee also highlighted that the annual complaints report was reported to the Social Care, Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Board and Members of this Committee had been invited to attend for this item. In addition it had been agreed, when the last annual report had been considered, that complaints reports specifically in relation to Children's Services would be reported more regularly to this Committee. Officers agreed that these amendments would be made to the action plan.

Members asked if in light of the recent Inspection report, the eight key priority indicators remained the right areas for the focus of the Committee. Officers informed Members that they would present a report to a future meeting on potential revised priorities for the Committee to consider.

Members asked how the Service encouraged children to participate. Officers highlighted that Social Workers worked with children on an individual basis and would advocate for them and they had access to an independent advocacy service. It was noted that the Service needed to encourage more children to attend their reviews.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

### 5.3 Fostering Inspection Report

It was noted that this was a favourable report for the Council.

### 5.4 Family Support Strategy

Members received the report which outlined the Family Support Strategy including the commissioning of support services to meet need, as detailed within the circulated report.

The Committee was informed that the Family Support Strategy and external commissioning would be based on safely reducing the number of children in care by improving outcomes. Priority and focus would be on services that promote and maintain children and young people, who are at risk of entering the Looked After Children system, in their families and home communities. A number of services had already been commissioned and procured by the Think Families Partnership and would be monitored by the Common Commissioning Unit. Following approval of the Strategy a further full and comprehensive tendering and procurement exercise would be undertaken leading to awarding a new set of contracts between September 2015 and April 2016.

Members noted that the Strategy referred to support for young carers and highlighted that at the Social Care, Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2015, the Carers Strategy had been approved. However, an additional recommendation was submitted and approved by Cabinet Board, that a separate Young Carers Strategy be developed and include the voice of children and young people. Officers confirmed that this Strategy was being developed and would be brought to the Committee for consideration in due course.

Members asked when the remodelling of the contracts with DEWIS would be presented to the Committee. Officers provided Members with an update in that the contracts were being reviewed and that a pilot scheme would be undertaken, before the contracts went out for tendering, to ensure the right service specifications were included. This exercise would be completed by the end of the financial year, however, an interim specification report would be brought to the Committee.

Members noted that the wording around the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) in the report should be changed from “will not have an adverse impact” to “will have a positive impact” to accurately reflect the information in the EIA.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

## 5.5 Homes to School Transport Arrangements – Welsh Medium Schools

Members received the report to seek approval to consult on access arrangements to Welsh Medium Schools, as detailed within the circulated report.

The Committee was informed that in September 2014 a report had been presented to the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Board on the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2014-17. The adoption of the WESP was approved, however it was requested that further consideration be given to the access arrangements and brought back for Members' consideration. It was noted that there had been some correspondence regarding this matter from Members and parents.

The main documents that influenced the arrangements were highlighted and these included the Learner Travel Measure 2008, Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009 and the Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance 2014. It was noted that there was a lot of information in the documentation that was open to interpretation and there was some ambiguity, such as what was classed as the nearest suitable provision. There was also some contradictory information in the documentation. Officers required further guidance from Legal Services on what was contained in the statutory guidance. The Local Authority had a legal duty to promote access to Welsh medium education, and the Home to School Transport Policy references this legal duty and sets a broad framework for its efficient and effective delivery. Officers were proposing to consult on access arrangements to Welsh medium schools. There was some discussion regarding the interpretation of the Measure and the guidance. Officers recognised that it was a complex matter and they must ensure their arrangements were in line with the Measure, take account of statutory guidance and capture the views of the communities it affects.

Members provided local examples of where access arrangements had been an issue and the problems that had occurred. There had been a lack of communication in some instances and a cost to parents to send their children to the school of their choice with little difference in distance to travel. Some Members expressed concerns about the management of current transport arrangements within schools and communities. Officers informed them that it was the parents responsibility under the statutory provisions to contact their Local Authority about the nearest suitable school. However, it was good practice for the Service to communicate with parents and this was generally undertaken.

Members had concerns about the consultation. It was felt that it was not clear on what the consultation proposals were. Members asked what difference the consultation would make, if both secondary and primary schools would be involved and exactly what the consultation



would cover. Officers informed them that as explained there was a significant amount of interpretation in the guidance and they wanted to test it against the views of communities. It was noted that the main impact would be on Welsh medium primary schools and therefore they would be the main focus of the consultation. Members highlighted that there was a wider impact with communities and they should also be consulted. It was felt that the consultation proposals should be clearer and it should outline precisely what was going to be included in the consultation. Members referred to a previous consultation exercise – the home to school transport consultation 2013 and informed the Officers that they would be in favour of a similar style consultation.

Members highlighted that the WESP had been approved and not having appropriate access arrangements could have an impact on its success. It was noted that the WESP was a separate document, however, there were certain outcomes and objectives to be met that would be impacted by the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary education and they were interrelated and not interdependent.

Members asked if the distance to travel had an impact on transfer rates from Welsh medium primary to Welsh medium secondary schools. Officers informed them that this did not seem to be a significant factor. There were some Welsh medium primary schools that had lower transfer rates than others and the reasons for this were not clear as there could be several factors. It was highlighted that the proportion of time pupils spent being transported from home to school also needed to be considered.

Members commented that there was no mention of the financial consequences of the different options and they would like to have this information. They would also like to see an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) at this stage, which includes who should be consulted. An updated EIA could then be submitted following the consultation to demonstrate the changes made.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the recommendation be not supported and that the Cabinet Board be asked to consider the following recommendation:

“That a further comprehensive report be submitted to the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Board which should include an initial Equality Impact Assessment, financial implications, legal implications and a robust terms of reference and

proposals for consultation, using the home to school transport consultation January 2013 document as a template.”

5.6 Governance Arrangements for the New Primary School Replacing Central Infants and Central Junior Schools

Members received the following verbal amendment to the Compliance Statement contained in the circulated report:

In regards to Community Plan Impacts and Other Impacts these should read no impacts.

In regards to the consultation the report was amended to ‘Central Primary School’ instead of ‘Ysgol Newydd Dyffryn Clydach’.

5.7 Governance Arrangements for the New Primary School Replacing Neath Abbey Infants and Mynachlognedd Junior Schools

Members received the following verbal amendment to the Compliance Statement contained in the circulated report:

In regards to Community Plan Impacts and Other Impacts these should read no impacts.

5.8 Families First Progress and Budget Report 2014/15

Members received the report on the position of the Families First Programme Budget for 2014/15, as detailed within the circulated report.

The Committee was provided with an update on progress and informed that the Programme was focussed on early intervention and prevention. The budget from the Programme for 2014/15 had been utilised to finance the delivery of the action plan which was approved by Welsh Government. The Service was involved in learning sets with other Local Authorities to identify good practice and learn from each other.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

## 5.9 Flying Start Programme Progress and Budget Report

Members received the report on the progress of the Flying Start programme and budget, as detailed within the circulated report.

The Committee was informed of that Flying Start was currently in the second phase of the programme and the Service was operating slightly over the target number but the teams and budget were coping. It was identified that the biggest resource commitment was in childcare settings and there was good attendance as families valued the provision.

Members felt that it was an excellent programme, however, it was noted that some families who would benefit from the services were unable to access them due to only certain areas being eligible. It was recognised that this had been fed back to the Welsh Government. Officers highlighted that the programme did target 25% of 0 to 3 year olds and there were some outreach services available.

It was noted that there was no fixed Flying Start centre and the provision was spread out amongst childcare providers across the County Borough.

Members highlighted that there was an issue with accessing speech and language services and asked if there was any scope for other areas to make use of the speech and language skills. Officers confirmed that there was training available and that if it was of significant benefit for someone to attend such training then the request would be considered by the Service.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

**CHAIRMAN**