

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 9<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2017

REFERENCE FROM HEALTHY LIVING AND SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE: 22 NOVEMBER 2016

“548 CHILDREN’S COMMISSIONER FOR WALES - INTRODUCTION (DSS) -

The Committee welcomed the Children’s Commissioner for Wales, Sally Holland, who had been invited to provide an overview of the role as Commissioner and to detail her work programme.

The Commissioner began by outlining that her main role was around promoting and safeguarding the rights of children and young people. She advised that she was responsible for three individual teams, these being the ‘Policy and Public Affairs Team’, an ‘Investigation Team’ and a ‘Participation Team’.

With regard to the Policy and Public Affairs Team, she advised that this team’s purpose was to examine key service areas and to lobby Public Sector organisations on behalf of children and young people, an example of this being; the need for greater advocacy support, work in relation to promoting safeguarding in cases of physical and mental health abuse and around curriculum reforms in schools in order to promote the wellbeing of children and young people. This team would work to gather evidence which would be reported to Welsh Government and would be responsible for responding to new legislation to ensure that the rights of young children were at the heart of any new Acts or Bills.

The Commissioner stated that there was also an ‘Investigation Team’; its role related to individuals accessing their rights, for which, officers from her team would engage with Public Sector organisations. Children were able to contact this team directly.

The third team was responsible for greater participation of children and young people at a strategic level. This related to areas such as the development of youth panels within Local Authorities. The Commissioner highlighted that the Vale of Glamorgan had a good record in the area of participation and she referred to the Vale’s Youth Cabinet and the level of training on children’s rights. She also cited the example of St. Joseph’s Primary School, where the rights of children had been well embedded in the school.

In terms of going forward into the forthcoming year, the Commissioner highlighted some of the key priority areas. The first related to mental health with a particular focus on bullying around which a lot of work was ongoing with schools. The Commissioner was also keen to promote access to play and culture in order to

enhance children's social opportunities and she would also be focusing on care leavers. The Commissioner also highlighted her residential care report and she was pleased with the response provided by Welsh Government and the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW). She advised that she was keen to see improvements in the way that planning for Looked After Children was implemented, particularly in terms of cross-border work between English and Welsh Authorities.

In outlining some projects of interest, the Commissioner referred to the work being undertaken following the introduction of the Well-being of Future Generations Act. For this, the Commissioner and her teams were working closely with Public Service Boards and Local Authorities to ensure that there was a cohesive approach in which children's rights were fully embedded into the process. The Commissioner advised that some Local Authorities had formally adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, although this did not necessarily mean that those Local Authorities were fully following them. It was therefore important for the Commissioner to look at how Local Authorities were implementing the UN Convention and whether children's rights were fully embedded into their plans.

Another key project related to the transition into adulthood of care leavers. The Commissioner advised that her widespread consultation had highlighted that transition was a key issue. For this, an important consideration was the change in legal status when a young person turned 18 years of age, but it was also important to recognise that the young person would still be the same individual whose care needs would continue. The Commissioner also referred to the ongoing engagement project with care leavers in order to understand what worked and what did not. She advised that a key element to come out of this was the number of care leavers who were not in education, employment or training (NEET). The Commissioner outlined the importance of meeting the holistic needs of these young people, which related to having a stable place to live and having emotional support available. She added that many young people found it difficult to interact socially or hold down a college place if they were worried about paying rent, which was why a lot of care leavers returned to their birth parents.

Furthermore, the Commissioner also highlighted the importance for a whole Council approach and she hoped that by Spring next year she would be able to outline to all Councils her aspirations for care leavers. Welsh Government was keen for this and had proposed that additional resources should be allocated. The Commissioner would also be looking to share best practice among Local Authorities and she was keen for Local Authorities to act like a family, treating Looked After Children as their own children and creating the right opportunities for them.

The Chairman, in referring the work to improve Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, commented that this was something that the Scrutiny Committee had been monitoring for the past three years. It had been reported that improvements were being progressed and the Chairman asked whether the Commissioner had any observations on this issue. In reply, the Commissioner stated that she had seen a mixed picture across Wales and she referred to a slow fall in the waiting lists and the challenge of recruiting to key staffing positions. She expressed the view that more

work needed to be progressed in regard to early intervention and preventative work. She also referred to the new performance targets in respect of waiting times which were the most ambitious in the UK, which all Health Boards had hoped to meet by April 2017. She also indicated the need for more work to be undertaken around wellbeing and early intervention in respect of schools.

A Committee Member asked the Commissioner whether she would be in agreement with the lowering of the voting age to 16. In reply, the Commissioner stated that she was in support of this. She added that most young people would be more likely to vote if the chance was offered to them at an earlier age and she stated that the lowering of the voting age would encourage MPs and local Councillors to address the needs and concerns of the younger age group.

In reply to a question relating to the reduction in the provision of Youth Services, the Commissioner stated that Youth Services were a vital strand in prevention and in reducing the rate of mental health referrals. She added that Youth Services played an important role and the more that services were reduced, the more disadvantaged young people would be.

With regard to the role of Super Ambassadors in the Vale of Glamorgan, the Commissioner informed the Committee that there had been an excellent response with one of the highest take ups in Wales. She added that children rights had been well embedded into schools in the Vale and she highlighted St. Josephs, St. Helens and Barry Island Primary schools as some good examples.

The Commissioner, responding to a question relating to improved play areas, advised that this would be younger people having more places to play and for older children having places to 'hang out'. She added that Wales had the most progressive legislation on play in the UK and she would be also considering how children with a disability would be able to access areas of play.

The Chairman highlighted concerns in relation to training of residential care staff. In reply, the Commissioner stated that there was a recommended minimum standard that the Care Council would expect, but this was difficult to achieve because of the high turnover of staff. She stated that good staff training was key and the quality of staff made a big difference to the experiences of children and young people. The Commissioner also highlighted that lottery funding had been made available which had been used to develop a training course called 'Confidence to Care' that would be launched across Wales. This was evidence based and it was hoped that this would help train a large proportion of the workforce.

A Committee Member queried the work being undertaken in conjunction with the Older People's Commissioner. He referred to the interaction between different generations, and in particular to NEETs, who would face similar challenges to Older People struggling to find work. The Member stated that we should not forget the 50plus forum and the possibility of sharing experiences. He also referred to Young Carers and he felt that more could be done to identify this group and he queried whether the Commissioner was able to share best practice. In response to the

Member's comments, the Commissioner stated that in her role she would work with all the other Commissioners. Best practice was something that she was trying to highlight and a film on NEETS would be available next year. In terms of sharing of intergenerational experiences, she advised that there were a number of potential benefits to those who felt isolated or lonely, with some children missing out on having a father figure and older people who may have missed out on having children.

With regard to Young Carers, the Commissioner advised that she had not been able to speak to a Young Carer in the Vale. However, feedback from other parts of Wales had shown the need to have support and available for their social and wellbeing needs to be recognised. She also alluded to many Young Carers not wanting to be negatively labelled. She advised that she would share best practice where she could.

#### RECOMMENDED -

- (1) T H A T the role of the Commissioner and her work programme be noted.
- (2) T H A T the report be referred to Cabinet, the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee and the Corporate Parenting Panel for their consideration.

#### Reasons for recommendations

- (1) To ensure that Members continue to have a good understanding of the context within which the Council delivers its statutory responsibilities to children and families.
- (2) To ensure collective oversight of this shared corporate responsibility.”

Attached as Appendix – [Report to Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee: 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2016](#)