



**To/
Councillor Hayley Gwilliam
Cabinet Member for Community
(Support)**

BY EMAIL

cc: Cabinet Members

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SPC/2023-24/5

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Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member following the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 14 November 2023. It is about delivery of the Council's Children & Young People's Rights Scheme. A formal written response is not required.

Dear Councillor Gwilliam,

Children & Young People's Rights Scheme Progress Report 2021-23

Thank you for attending the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 14 November, in which we considered progress with the implementation of the Children & Young People's (CYP) Rights Scheme.

Since adoption and launch of the Scheme by Cabinet in 2014, representing a formal public commitment to Children's Rights, the Committee has been regularly reviewing progress. Our Scrutiny ensures monitoring and challenge to work undertaken, compliance with the Council's duty to have due regard to the UNCRC, the way the CYP Rights Scheme is being implemented and embedded across the Council, and assessing its impact on children and young people. This letter reflects on what we learnt from the discussion, shares comments and views of the Committee on how well the Rights Scheme is being put into action and the embedding of Children's Rights across the Council, and highlights any outstanding issues / actions for your response.

We last discussed progress in March 2021. At that meeting we considered the impact of the pandemic on this work, lessons learned, the restructuring and

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remodelling of Children's Rights work, and planned revision to the Rights Scheme, which we note was subsequently published in 2021 complimenting the 'Right Way' principled approach that is being embedded nationally and led by the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

The Committee reviewed the latest progress report which reflected on the period September 2021 – September 2023. We heard that the 'Right Way' approach is framed around five Human Rights principles: Participation, Empowerment, Embedding, Accountability, and Non-Discrimination. The progress report was structured around these principles and priorities identified by Children & Young People, highlighting activities and achievements across the Council in upholding the Children's Rights commitment, as well as containing recommendations relating to areas for development to take things further. It was reported that alignment to the national process means opportunity to provide clear guidance, and tangible benchmarks for Council departments to embed a whole Council approach and evidence outcomes.

We are grateful to the lead officers, Jane Whitmore and Julie Gosney, for their contribution to the session, who in addition to the written material provided spoke in detail about the progress, achievements, and impact made, as well as issues and challenges. Amongst the highlights mentioned to the Committee, included:

- Work to ensure young people aged 14+ years were aware that laws had changed in Wales enabling young people aged 16+ years to vote in Welsh elections.
- Looking at play sufficiency and making Play Area improvements across Swansea
- Delivering 'Children's Rights and Participation' workshops across Primary & Secondary Schools allowing Children & Young People to expand their knowledge of Children's Rights and take part in discussions about what rights mean to them, how rights are embedded through school, home and community life, how we ensure they have a voice on issues that impact their lives and what can be done if they feel their rights are not being upheld.
- Incorporating the commitment to the UNCRC within the Council's Integrated Impact Assessment process, with a designated section which fully examines the impact of the proposed decisions on Children and Young People. Officers have access to support and advice on how to engage with young people to seek their views on new initiatives, etc.
- Providing Children's Rights Training for Early Years Practitioners with workshops helping practitioners to learn about rights and gather ideas on how they can embed rights into their settings.
- Establishing a Children's Rights & Participation cross-directorate Working Group, to support the Children's Rights commitment & contribute to a Children's Rights Scheme with focus on promoting and facilitating opportunities for Children and Young People to be heard, and ensure feedback.

Whole Council Approach

Although we heard many positives about progress that the Council has made, which would indicate a shift in understanding across departments about Children & Young People's Rights, the Committee is keen to see clear arrangements for benchmarking, measuring, and monitoring performance to better evidence how successful we are in embedding a whole-Council approach on Children & Young People's Rights. Recognising that the Council has adopted a new approach we acknowledged that this is 'work in progress', and welcome developments. The Children & Young People's Rights Scheme 'Plan on a Page,' which you reported has been recognised as best practice by the Children's Commissioner for Wales, is very helpful in setting out what this Council will do. It would be good to see as many measurables as possible against these objectives / commitments which will help us to capture, monitor and assess progress.

UNCRC Training in Schools

We noted that there is training provided to teachers around the rights of Children & Young People, supporting the overarching aim of helping Schools to promote the UNCRC and Children's Rights effectively. We suggested that appropriate training should be extended to School Governors. Officers agreed and stated they would discuss with the Education Department to ensure this can be incorporated into School Governor Training as a mandatory topic.

We also discussed the current position with regard to the UNICEF 'Rights Respecting Schools' journey and award. We noted that the original Council contract with UNICEF ran for five years and has now ended, and that things have been overtaken with the introduction of a new Curriculum for Wales. We heard that this has changed the focus as Children & Young People's Rights are embedded into the new Curriculum and closely aligned to the UNCRC articles, therefore integrated into teaching. You clarified that individual Schools can still engage with UNICEF for accreditation, but this would be at their own cost.

Youth Service

The recently concluded Anti-Social Behaviour Scrutiny Inquiry has flagged up issues with Youth Provision in Swansea including funding and the difficulty in recruiting qualified youth workers. We asked whether this has impacted on work to embed Children & Young People's Rights, for example outreach services, but were informed that there has been no direct impact on Children & Young People's Rights related activities. However, the topic of 'Youth Provision' will be included in discussion of future Scrutiny Work Programme, as a possible Working Group or future Committee item.

Future Progress Reporting

With the alignment to a national model and process, this would mean moving away from annual reporting to reviewing the Children & Young People's Rights Scheme (which would be based on a 5-year cycle) every two years. The Committee was content to receive future updates on a two-yearly basis for better alignment with Welsh Government model of reviewing the Children & Young People's Rights Scheme.

Your Response

We hope that you find the contents of this letter helpful and would welcome any comments, however we do not expect you to provide a formal response. However, we will follow up on the issues within when progress is next reported to the Committee.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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