

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 8th May, 2019 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor M.Groucutt (Chairman)

County Councillors: L.Brown, M. Powell, T.Thomas, J.Watkins and S. Woodhouse

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Sue Hall	Early Years Manager
Beth Watkins	Flying Start Manager

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors L.Jones and Revd. M.Lane

1. Declarations of Interest.

County Councillor M. Powell declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest for Item 4: Chief Officer's Annual Report as a Governor of King Henry VIII Comprehensive School and member of a group to raise money for those families less able to afford school trips and events.

The Chair welcomed Elizabeth Thomas, Provincial Diocesan Director of Education, representing the Church in Wales, to her first meeting.

2. Public Open Forum.

No members of the public were present.

3. Chief Officer's Annual Report (to follow).

Purpose

The purpose of the Annual Chief Officer's report is to inform Council of the progress that the education system has made in the past twelve months since the last report.

- This reporting period includes the examination period that ended in August 2018, this is the second year of the 'new GCSEs'.
- The report is not limited to analysis of school based outcomes but is intended to offer a broader view of the services that is offered to children in Monmouthshire.

Key Issues

- The Annual Report to Council provides all councillors with a clear understanding of where Monmouthshire's education system is, focussing on outcomes and reporting every indicator and variance. The report also reflects on the system as a whole. The section on student outcomes focuses on strengths as well as areas for improvement.

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Much of the comparative detail from other local authorities is no longer available but all the detailed reports have been presented to Children and Young People's Select Committee.

- The last year has been challenging. Student outcomes in 2018 changed from the previous near continuous progress in the last three years. In particular Foundation Phase and Key Stage 4 were not at expected levels.
- The Categorisation process in 2019 was more challenging than in previous years. There was more volatility in the primary phase. Some schools continued their improvement but more schools needed greater levels of support. At the secondary stage two of our schools are now 'Green', this represents 1/3 of all green secondary schools in the region.
- Delivering excellent outcomes is only part of the role of our schools. There is also a wide range of services that Monmouthshire offers to its children and young people. In 2018/19 attendance was better than other authorities; rates of 95.2% for our primary schools and 94.8% for our secondary schools.
- There is an emerging trend of higher fixed term exclusions from our schools. Headteachers have indicated that behaviour is becoming more challenging. The causes can include underlying additional learning need, links with childhood trauma or the effects of events at home. We need to work closely with all services to provide appropriate support for these learners.
- In preparation for implementing the ALN and Tribunal Act, significant work has been undertaken to streamline Statutory ALN Service functions.
- 2018/19 has been a year of significant change in school leadership. 50% of our secondary Headteachers have moved on to new opportunities and last year 30% of our primary Headteachers (9 schools) have changed. It is recognised that the role is becoming more demanding and that the resilience of our school leaders (and all staff) needs support.
- There are significant changes across the education system in Wales. The new curriculum is the cornerstone of the Welsh Government's 'National Mission' and will be a huge opportunity for our schools to change the way we teach our children. This level of change will also bring challenges and it will be critical that Monmouthshire responds as a whole education system, not as individual schools, to ensure that there is equity across our County.
- In the last year there has been more involvement with partnerships such as Education Achievement Service (EAS) and we are evolving the relationship to ensure that its focus is clearly on the concerns that are identified in the system. It remains a close and effective relationship which has brought challenge but also support. The Directorate continues to be supported by our External Reference Group (ERG) which provides advice and challenge on a termly basis.
- The funding of wellbeing and mental health initiatives by the Welsh Government's transformation funding has been led by the regional Children and Families Partnership. We need to ensure that we maximise our involvement in this work to ensure that our young people gain the most benefit.

Member Scrutiny

The Chief Officer, Chief Officer Children and Young People presented his annual report. Questions were invited from Members and responses provided as follows:

- A Member commented on the good performance of Free School Meals (FSM) learners at Foundation Phase (FP) /Key Stage 2 (KS2) that decreases from Key Stage 3 and the importance of parental support and encouragement. It was also commented that the high number of exclusion days doesn't reflect that this relates to a recurring, small

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number of learners. The Chief Officer explained that some primary schools have very low numbers of FSM pupils who benefit from the cohort around them which can lead to smaller gaps at FP and KS2. There is research that supports that it can be more difficult to make progress in more affluent schools. Where children need support to achieve expectations, other services can help e.g. youth service for care support and guidance. It was confirmed that the authority doesn't have access to some grants because of low FSM numbers. Regarding exclusions, detailed analysis shows pockets of challenging behaviour not general poor behaviour.

- Regarding FSM performance, a Member pointed out that the Vale of Glamorgan performs better. It was queried what strategies are used and what support can be given especially at KS4. It was responded that Chief Officers are now required to sign off Pupil Development Grants following review by EAS and cross reference to Sutton Trust data. Some were sent back to schools for resubmission. The authority will ensure that its funded interventions are the best possible and work will continue with the Vale of Glamorgan and other colleagues.
- A Member commented on the high percentage of leadership changes and questioned if it is the same across Wales. The Chief Officer agreed that there are significant concerns about resilience of the workforce and explained that actions have been undertaken with schools to reduce some pressures. It was agreed that there are challenges in recruitment. There is an opportunity to build capacity of middle leaders and deputy heads as we want good candidates from in county for the future.
- A Member referred to the good levels of attendance in comparison with other areas.
- It was clarified that the Capped 9 score is based on an average score for nine qualifications on a points basis. Points are awarded for five of the nine qualifications used to calculate the score will be GCSE English Language or GCSE Welsh Language, GCSE Mathematics (Numeracy) and GCSE Mathematics, the learner's best two science GCSEs and four of the learner's best (highest grade) other qualifications. It is expected that this score will improve in the summer examinations. It was agreed to ask the EAS to provide an all member's (and other members of this Select Committee) seminar on this topic and to include an explanation in the report.
- It was agreed to change the presentation of the FSM tables to show the different key stages in Wales and Monmouthshire. For the Additional Learning Needs table, it was agreed to include numbers and percentages to provide better context.
- A Member commented on the importance of presenting data on both achievement (progress) and attainment (results) in view of the new system. It was agreed that the definition of attainment and achievement would be included in the report.
- A Member noted that one secondary schools was doing better with FSM learners. The difference between Green (categorisation) and Excellent (Estyn) was explained noting that they don't always correspond.
- It was explained that the new curriculum is under consultation and reform of GCSEs will follow.
- It was clarified that last year Welsh Government announced significant grant funding directly to schools for professional learning to prepare for the new curriculum. More funding is due this year that will be allocated to schools through the authority.
- In response to a question, it was confirmed that Estyn was reviewed by Prof Donaldson who suggested that inspections are paused for a year to allow schools to prepare for the new curriculum. Estyn follow-up visits will still take place.
- Regarding exclusions, it was queried what strategies are in place to improve the situation. It was responded that schools are supported in the use of their own wide range of strategies and they have access to other initiatives such as ELSA, THRIVE and Play Therapy.

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- Additionally, some information was requested on complex Individual Development Plans (IDPs). It was explained that complex needs are where a child has more than one need. The authority will be working closely with schools on IDPs.
- Concerning leadership, a Member questioned the concept of the use of executive headship and federation stating that parents don't like this approach. It was responded that there had been very positive responses to a federation in Abergavenny from staff and parents; pupils are benefitting and there is good leadership across both schools. In the case described, there was an opportunity for two VA schools to work together. In the case of the secondary school arrangement, it was explained that for 3 days a week there will be an Executive Headteacher and 5 days a week a Head of Learning. The two new arrangements will be reviewed and monitored. Members supported the point of view that a good senior leadership team can step in at any time.
- Regarding the availability of £900,000 extra capital, the Chief Officer confirmed that there are discussions ongoing with Cabinet on a range of suggestions.

Committee Conclusions:

The Chair, on behalf of the Select Committee, commented that there would be better opportunity for scrutiny if the report had been received earlier.

He thanked the Committee Members for the useful suggestions and additions to the Chief Officer's Annual Report.

It was agreed that an all members' seminar would be arranged for the EAS to explain School Data especially the Capped 9 score.

It was noted that strategies used by schools to address exclusion will be shared when compiled.

4. Scrutiny of the plans for Welsh Government to give 30 hours free childcare for nursery age - a position update and discussion on the implementation in Monmouthshire.

Purpose:

To receive a position update on the Welsh Government scheme to provide 30 hours free childcare for nursery age children and to discuss the implementation in Monmouthshire.

Key Issues:

What is the Childcare Offer?

- The Childcare Offer is a Welsh Government funded scheme that aims to support working parents with childcare costs and to help parents progress into work.
- This offer runs alongside the universal offer for Foundation Phase Nursery education.
- In Monmouthshire, parents can access their FPN education at an LA Nursery or with an approved non-maintained provider.
- LA Nursery provision is 12.5 hours per week; approved non-maintained settings are funded for 10 hours per week.
- During term time, the 30 hours available through the Childcare Offer is made up of a combination of FPN and childcare. If parents don't access Foundation Phase Nursery provision, they can only receive funding for up to 20 hours of free childcare.
- The Childcare Offer is available for 48 weeks of the year; during 9 weeks of the school holidays, the full 30 hours can be taken as childcare.

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Who is eligible for the Childcare Offer?

- The Childcare Offer is available to working parents from the term following their child's 3rd birthday until they are offered a place in full time education; in Monmouthshire, this is when they enter Reception in the September following their 4th birthday.
- The criteria for working parents is that both parents / lone parent / carer must earn equivalent to at least 16 hours a week at National Living Wage or National Minimum Wage and neither parent must earn more than £100,000 a year.

How has it been implemented in Monmouthshire?

- Monmouthshire is only an engagement authority; Newport City Council is the delivery authority for the Childcare Offer in Monmouthshire.
- As an engagement authority, we are required to engage with parents and childcare providers to promote the Childcare Offer. We appointed a Childcare Engagement Officer who commenced in January 2019; she supports parents and childcare providers through the application process and has advertised the offer extensively throughout Monmouthshire.
- Newport City Council manage the application process with parents and childcare providers, checking eligibility and distributing the funding.
- They had a few problems initially with their database provider, so there were delays to the application process for the autumn term and parents were unable to use the online application form. These issues have now been resolved and parents are able to complete their application and upload documents online, so the process has been much smoother. From the spring term onwards, childcare providers are also able to log into a portal to submit invoices and attendance data.

Where can parents access the Childcare Offer?

- FPN education can only be accessed in an LA Nursery or with an approved non-maintained provider. We currently have 12 LA nurseries and 27 approved non-maintained providers. Take up of places is monitored termly and we currently have surplus places in all areas of Monmouthshire.
- The childcare element can be accessed with any registered childcare provider. To date, we have 90 providers of different childcare types registered to provide childcare through the Childcare Offer for Monmouthshire families, as follows:
 - Childminders – 27 registered
 - Day nurseries and playgroups – 37 registered
 - Out of county providers – 26 registered

How many Monmouthshire families have taken up the Childcare Offer?

- There were 507 applications for the spring term 2019. As of 5th April 2019, 469 of these had been approved, 22 had been refused as parents were not eligible and 16 were awaiting further information.
- To date, there have been an additional 67 applications received for the summer term 2019 and 43 of these have been approved.

Member Scrutiny:

The Select Committee received a briefing paper from the Early Years Manager providing a position update on the scheme to provide 30 hours free childcare for nursery age children. Questions were invited as follows:

- A Member said the scheme would make an enormous difference but queried the provision available in maintained and non-maintained settings in respect of the

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education and childcare elements. It was noted that maintained settings do not offer any childcare elements and consequently parents have to take their children elsewhere for wraparound care. There was also a concern that non-maintained settings will still charge a top up fee to fit in with their session times which will be a pressure for parents. This being the case, it was questioned what the authority will do to provide childcare.

It was responded that the Welsh Government guidance is clear that schools are not to provide childcare. This can only be provided in non-maintained settings as they are inspected and registered by Care Inspectorate Wales. The authority has worked closely with non-maintained settings in the county to ensure the provision of wraparound care which is either on school sites or close by where the staff collect the children from the nursery. Such care is available for approximately a school length day. Parents can claim the funding for up to two childcare elements. It was confirmed that Monmouthshire is well placed for wraparound care and only one or two schools don't have childcare within walking distance.

Regarding the number of local authority non-maintained settings, this was decided many years ago with the intention of providing more flexible opportunities as school nurseries are limited to 2.5 hours. In Monmouthshire, this has led to parents choosing non-maintained over maintained settings.

It was agreed that top up fees are a significant issue; not for eligible working parents who will have the childcare element funded but for more deprived families who are not eligible especially if for a full session for which there will be a charge. Some non-maintained settings have agreed to allow two hours only free of charge; this is generally not taken up.

The authority is looking at more flexibility to meet needs of working parents.

- Regarding Welsh Government's financing of the scheme, it was queried if the amount was sufficient to meet costs. It was responded that, in Wales, £4.50 per hour is the set rate for all providers and the authority receives an administration fee. There is a different system in England. Providers are not permitted to charge any more. Some child minders claim to be worse off. Welsh Government have committed to review the rate.
- A Member found the various combinations allowable under the scheme complicated and confusing. Examples of the combinations for up to 48 weeks per year were provided. It was explained that leaflets have been produced for settings to explain the scheme to parents.
- It was queried how the take up of 50% compares with other authorities. It was responded that the first pilot year was evaluated and there is also evaluation this year. Take up is higher in Monmouthshire than other areas. There is no comparative data with similar profile counties currently.
- A Member noted that there is a new nursery planned in Portskewett and asked for an update. It was explained that there was an opportunity for a capital funding bid and this will be used for a standalone provision run by a non-maintained setting on the school site. Foundation Phase nursery education and wraparound care will be offered, from 9.00 a.m. until 3.00 p.m. and possibly in school holidays. Discussion with the Diocese is in progress. The need for additional school places is also under consideration.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the update.

5. Presentation providing an overview of the Flying Start Programme.

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Purpose:

To receive an update on Welsh Government funded Flying Start services delivered in areas of deprivation in Monmouthshire to children between the ages of 0-3 of Income Benefit households.

Member Scrutiny:

The Select Committee were provided with an update by the Flying Start Co-Ordinator. Questions were invited and answered as follows:

- It was confirmed that there are Flying Start nursery and toddler groups.
- Concerning new housing developments and the portion of affordable housing, it was explained that there is a target cap maximum number of children of 556 0-3 year olds to work with within the allocated budget. Most services are delivered in the existing areas. New developments can be complicated as the target cap is already achieved in the existing areas of highest need, however there are some changes in progress that will reconfigure Flying Start areas to accommodate new developments. Families affected by changes or that leave Flying Start areas may be eligible for outreach services funded by the Children and Communities Grant if they are still in need.
- A Member asked what intensive support is available in the medium of Welsh. It was responded that in Abergavenny there is the Cylch Meithrin providing services, that has the services of an Early Years Advisory teacher. Support is provided to ensure an effective environment for speech and language.
- In response to an enquiry, it was explained that it is difficult to evaluate progress as there is currently no common comparison tool available.
- A Member welcomed individual tracking of progress to trace the effect of Flying Start as children progress through the primary phase and noted that there is less of a FSM gap. It was commented that a similar approach and intensive support could reap benefits in the secondary phase. It was explained that Families First has a remit for 0-25 year olds and parenting programmes are available to provide help for parents to support the education of their children.
- A Member was reassured of the aims and asked how we can help and what grants are available. It was confirmed that the services are funded by Welsh Government. It was suggested that it is very important that all councillors are reminded of the importance of Flying Start. It was explained that there is little promotion of the service as families are advised by the Flying Start Health Visitors.
- A Select Committee Member asked if staff have noticed a difference due to universal credit but it was noted that it is difficult to identify any effects yet.
- It was queried how the number of 556 was calculated and responded that it is based on the LSOA data for income benefit households.

The Chair reflected on the importance of the Flying Start work and thanked the Officer for the update.

6. To confirm the following minutes:

7. Children and Young People Select Committee dated 21st February 2019.

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Select Committee held on 21st February 2019 were approved as an accurate record:

8. Special Meeting - Children and Young People Select Committee dated 22nd March 2019.

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The minutes of the Special Meeting of the Children and Young People Select Committee held on 22nd March 2019 were approved as an accurate record.

9. Actions arising from the previous meetings.

Matters Arising:

- From 21st February 2019 – the Chair sent a letter as agreed to the Welsh Government about the lack of specialist training for Special Educational Needs Communication teachers. A response was received that universities have responsibility for selecting which courses to offer.
- From 22nd March 2019: Regarding the proposal to close Mounton House Special School, it was confirmed that the Select Committee wished to see the final document. The consultation results are available on 29th May 2019 and the report is due to go to Cabinet on the 5th June 2019 which was viewed as a short timescale with little opportunity for the Select Committee to revisit the matter especially to ensure that points made at the meeting on 22nd March 2019 have been addressed. The Chair reminded the Committee that it is possible for the Cabinet decision to be called in and the final document could be reviewed by Select Committee in that way.

The Chair asked that he and Officers monitor the situation and bring it back for further consideration as necessary.

10. Children and Young People Select Committee Forward Plan.

The forward planner was noted.

With regard to the Partnership Agreement, it was noted that Officers are not available to attend the next meeting. A meeting has taken place to review some of the wording to address concerns of the Monmouthshire Association of School Governors. It was supported that the Chair is briefed outside the meeting so that the agreement can be received by the Select Committee.

11. Council and Cabinet Work Planner.

The Council and Cabinet Work Planner was noted.

12. Next Meeting.

21st May 2019 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 1.30 pm