

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK on Tuesday, 15th November, 2022 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor Sue Riley (Chairman)
County Councillor John Crook (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: Christopher Edwards,
Jayne McKenna, Maureen Powell, Maria Stevens,
Jackie Strong and John Crook

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Jane Rodgers, Chief Officer for Social Care,
Safeguarding and Health
Chesney Chick, Service Manager - Youth Offending
Service

APOLOGIES: County Councillor David Jones

1. Election of Vice Chair

Councillor Powell and Councillor Crook were nominated as candidates for Vice-chair. Following a vote, Councillor Crook was elected as Vice Chair.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Public Open Forum

No submissions were received.

4. Youth Offending Service

Chesney Chick gave a brief overview of the inspection report and answered the members' questions with Jane Rodgers.

Challenge:

There doesn't seem to be a great emphasis in the report on preventative work and I know you receive a grant from Welsh Government of approximately £170k. Is there any information on how that is spent as I can't see it in the report.

That wouldn't have been included in this report which is statutory in nature, however, there has been a shift in the way the YOTS undertake their work and there has been a real shift towards prevention services rather than just the statutory responsibilities, so there is a large proportion of money given to us to be able to deliver this. We feel the quality of service we offer is very good, but there can always be improvements.

In relation to the inspection conducted over the two counties Torfaen and Monmouthshire, is the inspection work undertaken equal or more heavily focused on one area, not giving us a true picture?

There tends to be a 60:40 split, in favour of Torfaen, but we feel the inspection was undertaken well.

Governance and leadership was a concern in the report in relation to the induction process, the attendance of board members and the disconnect between board members and front line staff, with recommendations made. How long were there issues and is everything in hand now?

There has been a transition of elected membership and a bit of a hangover from the covid period. There were times during the pandemic when the board members weren't always able to make it but it will be prioritised going forward. The health colleagues have to attend multiple board and that was one of the contributing factors. The new chair is very experienced and has a background in the service to reassure you.

One of the other things related to governance that we have acknowledged is that we had a lot of documents and procedures in place but not an overall approach to bring it together, so that is something we are working on.

I am concerned that girls form 28% of the service caseload which is more than double the average figure for England and Wales. As 61% of the staff are female and two thirds of the volunteers are female, I found it odd that the inspection identifies the need to develop a strategy to meet the needs of girls supervised by the service.

In respect of the statistics on girls, we have much more information now than previously and this pattern has arisen over the last 6 months. Prior to the inspection, we didn't have this data so we hadn't really bottomed out the reasons, but it's fair to say that these are not huge numbers of individuals, but often the picture is inflated by seeing it as a percentage. We are noticing that some of the offences are more serious, so we aren't able to do the preventative work, but we are starting to do work in schools and via the youth service to address it.

The response to the 'tech survey' was very low with only 12 out of 121 responses. Why was it so low? And does that offer us a real cross section of answers or just those who found the service positive? How do you plan to engage to increase the number of responses?

It is low and although we prioritised engagement, it's of low priority to the children and it's therefore difficult to enforce responses, but we do want the continual feedback from children and their families and we are finding that for whatever reason, they don't want to engage with us. We are considering events or an awards conference to get the feedback from children. As to whether it's a true reflection, knowing the individuals, I really feel the answers would be genuine answers.

I couldn't see any specific targets in the action plan around service users, for example, girls, boys, Looked After Children, BME groups etcetera. Do you have you targets? Are they realistic and how will they inform your work going forward?

No, we don't. We are aware of our current position in relation to a higher number of females, so we will ensure we have the necessary skills and we plan to undertake the preventative work in educational establishments and youth services and ensure we have dialogue about concerns with any cohorts. We are aware of the repeat offenders and are always looking to reduce those, but there are many factors outside of our control. We put plans in place for these individuals and I can reassure you it's a holistic approach working with partners to provide tailored support.

I can't see any mention of provision for Welsh speakers or for those where English is a second language. Please can you explain?

We've not had any Welsh speakers come through the system requiring us to communicate in Welsh but should this be the case, we have Welsh speakers in the authority and we can offer translation.

I see that there wasn't a probation officer for period of 10 months. Surely this would have had an impact and therefore what measures will you put in place to ensure a stable workforce?

We had someone backfilling that post, was known to the service and was very experienced, so it certainly wasn't vacant for 10 months. There are process and systems within probation that are well established, so meetings would have been taking place with information shared throughout that period.

I don't see within the report any mention of 'restorative justice programmes' and I have experience of one undertaken in Caldicot several years ago that was very successful. Given recent anti-social behaviour in the area, is this something we could look to re-introduce?

Yes, we still have 'restorative justice programmes' within the service and the person who managed it then is still in post. The model has been applied in Torfaen with success so whilst this wasn't picked up on in the inspection, we can discuss this further. **Action: Chesney to contact Caldicot Town Council.**

I am concerned about children who may have additional learning needs and become vulnerable targets for criminal groups. Do you do anything to alleviate this, because some young people may be victims as well.

Yes, I can reassure you that robust assessment is undertaken at the start of the process, talking to the school and then the information is shared multi-agency, so that everyone responds to the child in the correct manner and that they have the additional support they may need. There is a lot of county lines activity, with young people being targeted so we have discussions with Police, the courts and the Crown Prosecution Service and if we feel a child is vulnerable and we can recommend that they aren't prosecuted, as well as look at ways to make them feel safer.

I have a question around resources. Is there an underspend every year and what it tends to be used for?

There has been an underspend over time and it is then returned to partners accordingly. There was also some resource put into preventative services. The reserve is to safeguard the service because the funding streams can be uncertain and would jeopardise staffing and continuity of service provision.

How are the different contributions toward the £1.6m partnership expenditure determined?

I couldn't offer a specific answer as to how they are formulated, but I know that Monmouthshire's contribution is slightly less because they contribute other elements, such as financial support, but I could seek this information if you wish.

Do all the children who have welfare concerns or are Looked After Children have a separate social worker within social services?

Yes, they do and a number of other professionals and support workers may be involved too.

Is there an issue in relation to housing young people coming out of prison?

We work with lots of agencies to help resettle the young person back into the community after a period in custody, to avoid them getting back into negative behaviours. Accommodation hasn't

really been a feature for us as we've not had cases transferring from custody back into the community, but we are well aware of the potential impacts and the need to support the young person. We are seeking to get housing representatives involved with our management board, so that's something we are taking forward.

There has been recent cases of misogyny within Gwent Police and I'm wondering if this affects the higher number of females entering the system?

I can't really answer this, but we have good contact with Gwent Police and if we have any issues with the children that are being referred in, we have a point of contact and if there's any learning to be done, it's cascaded down. There are scrutiny panels such as the Gwent Monitoring Review Panel that scrutinises things such as time in custody, how children are processed etcetera and there are vast improvements as to how children are progressed through the system so I'd like to think it hasn't impacted on the females, but I will raise it. **Action: Chesney to highlight at network meetings.**

Chair's Summary:

Thank you for coming and congratulations on a good inspection outcome. The committee is reassured by the answers you have provided today, so thank you.

5. Chief Officer for Social Care - Annual Report

The chair asked the chief officer to answer outstanding questions that had been given in advance of the meeting following previous scrutiny.

Challenge:

How much are the most expensive placements costing?

We would consider most expensive placements as being from £1,000 per week to over £8,000 per week.

Are these bipartite or tripartite funded?

Currently 3 placements are bipartite funded, one is with health and one is with education.

How many are there in the top cost brackets?

Currently 33, but it varies.

Who is in them? Are they those with a diagnosis? Are they ordered by the Courts and/or known to the Youth Offending Service?

All except 2 in education placements are on statutory orders. The children's needs are either complex disability or complex trauma presentation / attachment difficulties / high risk behaviours. A small minority are known to YOS, but no children are in placements where risk of offending / offending behaviour is the main reason for the child needing to be in care.

I'm concerned about the costs long term and what strategies you have in place in a difficult financial climate.

We will prioritise the recruitment of in-house foster carers, but it's about making sure the foster carers we have develop their skills so maybe they can take on more complex children. It's one of our main vehicles to avoiding costly placements and we'd like to see our children living in Monmouthshire. We have 4 homes that are being developed, but these take time. Regionally we are engaging with partners in Gwent to expand regional provision. At the heart of it, we really need more foster carers. Action: Jane to send information on foster carers to the Scrutiny Manager to distribute to members to raise awareness in the community.

Acknowledging that some of the cases are very complex, I'm concerned we would need to make sure they are equipped to deal with these cases.

Yes, we are very careful how we match children to foster carers and ultimately it is their choice and we will support them.

Chair's Summary:

Thank you for coming and answering our outstanding questions.

6. People Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Agreed to defer the Corporate Parenting Strategy to the 28th February and liaise regarding the timing of the respite report.

The committee was advised that they had received a request from Chepstow Community Council for the scrutiny committee to review minor injuries services. The committee agreed to await a future discussion at full Council.

The committee agreed to programme County Lines and Child Exploitation for a future scrutiny workshop. **Action: Scrutiny Manager to add to the work programme.**

7. Cabinet and Council Work Plan

The forward work plan was noted.

8. To approve the minutes of the meetings held on 27th September 2022 and the Joint Scrutiny Committee (Performance and Overview, People Scrutiny Committees) held on 11th October 2022

The minutes were confirmed and signed as an accurate record, proposed by Councillor Butler and seconded by Councillor Rooke.

9. Next Meeting - 10th January 2023

The meeting ended at **11.25 am**