

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK on Tuesday, 5th March, 2024 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor Jackie Strong (Chair)

County Councillors: Fay Bromfield,
Simon Howarth, Penny Jones, Maureen Powell,
Sue Riley, Maria Stevens

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Nikki Wellington, Finance Manager

APOLOGIES: Councillors John Crook, Christopher Edwards and Martyn Groucutt

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

No submissions were received.

3. Scrutiny of the School Catchment Review

Matt Jones, the Manager of the Access Unit presented proposals relating to primary school catchment areas and the consultation process for changing some of the catchments in Monmouthshire. He explained that the proposal was to change the catchment for Tredunnoch, Llanhennock and Llandegvedd, which currently have Charles Williams Primary School in Newport as their catchment school. The consultation proposed to align these areas with Monmouthshire primary catchment and Monmouth Comprehensive School, which is their secondary catchment, so that Monmouthshire children have equal access to a Monmouthshire school. The consultation was launched in January and closed recently, and the final decision will be made by the cabinet on the 10th of April, based on a report that will include the details of the consultation responses.

Challenge:

- The ward Member stated that she was very supportive of the proposal and had been fully engaged in the work to date in drafting this report.
- Questions were asked around how the access unit works with the planning department to prepare and ensure sufficiency in school placements and take into account future housing projections, citing examples where housing developments have been marketed as being within the catchment of a good school, when there may not be places in the school.

- Members highlighted their concern in relation to Crick Road and the sufficiency, due to the 2 primaries at full capacity.
- Questions were asked about how many responses were received from the consultation on primary school catchment areas (the answer was 17), how many were supportive of the proposed change (13 responses were supportive), and what the main reasons were for supporting or opposing the change. The officer responded that supporters wanted equal access to a Monmouthshire school, while the opponents were concerned about distance and travel options.
- Members asked how the travelling distance and transport options would affect the families in the affected area and how housing developments in the area will impact the capacity of the schools. The officer explained that the council would provide free home to school transport to the nearest or catchment school, and that parents could still choose to send their children to Charles Williams School if they preferred. He reassured Members that they had taken into account the projected numbers of children from the new developments and that Usk School had sufficient capacity to accommodate them.
- Questions were asked around pupil funding and where it goes if a pupil stays in an area, the officer explaining that funding is purely relevant to numbers on school roll, not per head, and that if children go to school out of county, the council doesn't receive the pupil funding and similarly, if they come into Monmouthshire from out of county, the funding comes in with them, so it tends to neutralise.
- Members asked how many pupils the proposal would involve and the cost of transporting them. The officer responded that it would be 9 that would be eligible and that the projected position between now and 2027, would be 2 children per year that would need to be built into Usk's catchment, served by an extra minibus.
- Questions were asked around the funding formula ratio we use, but it was explained that it is complex and could be brought to a future member workshop for discussion. is it 1.3 per household?
- Members asked about siblings and if there is an automatic right the sibling can go to the same school and the response was that the policy has been amended to give priority to catchment children over those who are outside of the area, even if there is a sibling link.

Summary:

The committee acknowledged the background, rationale and consultation process for the proposed change of catchment area for Tredunnoch, Llanhennock and Llandegvedd from Charles Williams Primary School in Newport to Usk Church in Wales School in Monmouthshire. The committee had heard that most responses were supportive of the change, although some had raised concerns about distance and travel options. Members recognised that the primary school catchment areas review will be a rolling programme, looking at each area of the county and assessing their suitability and need for change. The committee asked to be involved in the process through workshops and highlighted the need for the ward member to be engaged throughout. Members supported the proposals outlined in the report.

4. Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni relocation

Matt Jones presented the second report which concerned the proposal to increase the capacity of Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni by relocating it to the former Deri View Primary School site. He explained the background, the statutory process, and the consultation arrangements. He explained that the proposal to relocate the Welsh medium primary school from its current site to the former Deri View Primary School site, which would increase its capacity to 420 places. The proposal is part of the 21st century schools programme and aims to meet the demand for Welsh medium education in the Abergavenny area. The consultation process is ongoing and the cabinet will decide in April whether to proceed to the next stages of the statutory process. The committee was asked to give their views on the proposal and any feedback to the cabinet.

Challenge:

- Members asked how many percentages of new housing developments schoolchildren are and how that affects the school capacity. Matt Jones explained that the impact of housing developments varies depending on the area and the size of the houses. He said that they work closely with the planning team and use projections to assess the capacity of schools in the area. He said that they have obtained some funding from developers to increase capacity where needed and that they are looking at increasing capacity in Abergavenny as part of the 3 to 19 school and the Welsh medium provision.
- A question was asked around the facts and figures on the Crick Road development and the catchment area for Caldicot or Portskewett? The officer replied that it was part of an area of review that they are going to undertake and that they have already obtained some funding to increase the capacity of Castle Park Primary School. He said that they also need to look at the revised local development plan and the potential for more housing in the area. He said that they will bring more detail to the committee as part of the ongoing review of catchment areas.
- A Member asked how Monmouthshire would compete with schools like Panteg that have been rated excellent for Welsh medium education. It was explained that Monmouthshire doesn't lose many children to Panteg and that we are seeing an increase in demand for Welsh medium education in Monmouthshire.
- Members questioned the timescales for completing schools as part of the 21st century schools programme, notably the delay at the new King Henry 3 to 19 school in Abergavenny. The officer confirmed that all parents have been notified of that delay. Members also asked for clarification on any future proposals for children with additional learning needs.

Summary:

The Committee undertook thorough scrutiny of the proposal for relocating Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni and offered its support.

5. People Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

- It was agreed to hold a workshop on school catchment areas.
- The committee agreed they would like to scrutinise the Blue Badge scheme, particularly the criteria differences between Monmouthshire and other areas and to invite the Cabinet Member for Equalities, Age Cymru and Macmillan to a meeting for a discussion.

6. Cabinet and Council Work Plan

7. Minutes of the meeting held on 6th February 2024

Confirmed.

8. Next Meeting

16th April 2024 at 10am.