

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

**Meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held
at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Tuesday, 17th September, 2019
at 10.00 am**

Councillors Present

County Councillor T.Thomas (Chairman)
County Councillor (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: L.Brown, M.Groucutt,
L.Jones, M.Lane, M. Powell and P.Pavia

Also in attendance County Councillor(s):

Officers in Attendance

Will McLean, Chief Officer for Children and Young
People

Sharon Randall-Smith, Head of Achievement and
Attainment

Matthew Gatehouse, Head of Policy and
Governance

Nikki Wellington, Finance Manager

Tyrone Stokes, Accountant

APOLOGIES: Councillors D. Jones and J.Watkins

1. Declarations of Interest

Members declared non-prejudicial interests as school governors.

2. Public Open Forum

There were no members of the public present.

3. Quarterly scrutiny of the Revenue and Capital Monitoring 2019/20 Outturn Statement

- Across the authority as a whole there is a forecast net revenue deficit of £2.4M and 88% of budget savings have been achieved. Children's social services are forecasting a £2.3m overspend.
- External placements for looked after children are significantly more expensive including increased legal costs.
- There was an overspend for the central part of the Children and Young People Directorate of £391,000 and an Additional Learning Needs overspend of £618,000. Of this £275,000 was a result of a shortfall of income for Mounton House.
- There was a shortfall of income from breakfast clubs

Members Challenge

- Members sought further detail on the reasons behind the rising costs of looked after placements. They heard that the trends reflect the picture nationally while many placements are determined by courts.
- Members queried the number of schools in deficit. They heard that 14 schools are in deficit. The pay award and pensions were fully-funded for schools and there have been no revisions to the fair funding formula for a number of years. Staff have been working with Additional Learning Needs Coordinators and Headteachers on the needs of the children to ensure that the funding has the maximum impact.
- Members questioned the position regarding the redundancy budget and what the impact of Mounton House closure could be. When the council has overseen school closures in

the past there has been central funding of redundancy costs as this is an exceptional circumstance. The budget is replenished each year.

Outcomes

- Members examined the budget report and asked a series of questions to seek assurance that appropriate actions were being taken
- The committee had concerns about the increased expenditure in childrens social care but the committee recognised that it was difficult to budget for with many factors beyond the authority's control

4. Presentation on the latest school performance outcomes for 2019

- The committee heard from the Principal Challenge Advisor and the Assistant Director of the Education Achievement Service (EAS). They heard that Teacher assessment data is longer used for accountability and is not aggregated to local authority level. Data is still available to inform teaching, learning and challenge at a school level.
- Members heard how EAS will report performance under these new arrangements comparing Monmouthshire schools against others in the EAS area. This is contextualised with the use of free school meals data
- The tables in the report enable EAS to ask questions of schools examining why there are outliers and looking at school development plans to ensure they are acting appropriately.
- The local authority work with EAS to ensure that these questions are asked and answered appropriately. Additional level of scrutiny and sanction takes place through the school development plans to ensure that they address any shortcomings.

Members Challenge

- Members challenged the validity of using free school meals data as a proxy for the impact of income levels on attainment. The committee heard that while this is not perfect it is the best available measure and is more reliable with larger cohorts.
- Members sought clarity about how EAS supports schools to ensure that teacher assessment is accurate. The challenge advisor reported that there was moderation by peers at a cluster level and throughout the year.
- Members raised concerns that the new approach makes it harder for parents and scrutiny committees to understand comparative data. Members heard that this is a Welsh Government decision and is not in the gift of the chief officer.

Outcome

- Members heard about, and took time to understand and clarify, the new way in which school data would be presented which would inform and ensure on-going scrutiny of educational attainment

5. Proposals for Mounton House School

- A report on the proposal was brought prior to consideration at Cabinet.
- The chief officer had briefed committee several times about the future direction of travel for how learners with additional learning needs would be supported.
- Officers are recommending publishing notices for the closure of Mounton House School at the end of August 2020.

- The school has capacity for 58 students and there are currently 15 students attending, 8 of these reside in Monmouthshire of which two belong to other authorities. There is very little need for this type of school in the county.
- The school cost £1.26M to run this year and the authority will be able to recover £471K. There is a net cost of £131K per pupil rising to £263K from September 2020 if the school were to remain open. This is significantly higher than the charge made to other authorities for placement. The Chief Officer reported that this recommendation not taken lightly or with any motive other than finding the right provision for the pupils. The building is no longer fit for purpose and designation no longer meets the needs of the pupils in Monmouthshire.

Members Challenge

- Members sought re-assurance on the future of staff and how provision for pupils presently at the school would be made after closure. Members heard that closure at the end of 2019-20 would allow two additional terms time to plan and identify education opportunities suitable to the needs of every pupil. Members also heard that following a decision made by Cabinet the council's Protection of Employment Policy would be used to support and seek opportunities for all staff.
- A member made reference to an alternative proposals to support the school to widen its provision to meet growing in-county ALN need on a gradual basis as a third option and indicated that the proposals had not taken adequate account of the consultation responses. Members heard that the report answered the themes that emerged from the in the consultation exercise in a clear way. They also heard that the school needs a significant amount of money spent on it and a make-do and mend approach would not be suitable. The school had previously been funded on capacity rather than the number of pupils on-roll which is how other schools are funded. The Chief Officer stated that is not the environment that would meet the needs of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder alongside the current pupils and committed to developing provision in the county for pupils aged 7 – 19 who have difficulty in learning because of a range of significant and complex additional needs.
- Members questioned whether money be spent to build provision in different schools. The committee heard that wherever possible the needs of pupils with additional or special needs should be met in mainstream provision and Monmouthshire has four resource bases and the council will continue to develop these. However some pupils with very highly specific and complex needs will need to access placements out-of-county.
- Members queried whether 21st century schools funding could be sought to build a new school. It was confirmed that there is no possibility of additional bids for Band B funding from Welsh Government.
- The committee voted on whether to recommend to Cabinet that they consider a third option, as put forward by Cllr Brown to change the type of provision offered at Mounton House to meet the growing in-county ALN need, and the vote was carried.

Outcomes

- Members examined the proposals and asked a series of questions of officers. The chair will attend Cabinet to put forward the committee's view that a third option should be considered

6. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were recognised as a true and accurate record.

7. Children and Young People Select Committee Forward Work Plan

Members received the forward work programme.

The chair indicated that the Head at Chepstow offered to attend the committee with his deputy to give a presentation on free school meals performance. This meeting could also look at the number of Chepstow pupils crossing the border to Wyedean School.

8. Next Meeting:

Tuesday 12th November 2019 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 12.45 pm