

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK on Wednesday, 21st June, 2023 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor Alistair Neill (Chairman)
County Councillor , Laura Wright, (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: Jill Bond, Paul Pavia Rachel Buckler, Catherine Fookes, Meirion Howells, Phil Murphy (substituting for Ann Webb) and John Crook (substituting for Peter Strong).

Also in attendance County Councillors: Sara Burch, Cabinet Member for Inclusive and Active Communities, Rachel Garrick, Cabinet Member for Resources and Angela Sandles, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement, and Ben Callard

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Peter Davies, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer, Resources
Frances O'Brien, Chief Officer, Communities and Place
Will McLean, Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Jane Rodgers, Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Matthew Gatehouse, Chief Officer People, Performance and Partnerships.
Jonathan Davies, Head of Finance
Linda O'Gorman, Principal Licensing Officer
Dave Loder, Finance Manager

APOLOGIES: County Councillors Peter Strong and Ann Webb

Note: the following minutes focus on the challenge from members – for the full discussion, the recording of the meeting is at www.youtube.com/watch?v=keu1v-rbZfs&list=PLlmqn4nAaFJDsC93C-EKJZrFkDEQBdiXK&index=8

1. Election of Chair

Councillor Neill was nominated by Councillor Murphy, seconded by Councillor Buckler.

2. Appointment of Vice Chair

Councillor Wright was nominated by Councillor Bond, seconded by Councillor Crook.
Councillor Buckler was nominated by Councillor Pavia, seconded by Councillor Murphy.
Councillor Wright was elected as Vice Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

None.

4. Public Open Forum

None.

5. Public Protection 2022-23 Performance Report

Following introductory remarks by Sara Burch, David Jones and Linda O’Gorman introduced the report and answered the members’ questions.

Key points raised by the Committee Members:

- Whether officers can assure Members that we aren’t overstressing ourselves in supporting other organisations with capacity, advice, training etc.
- Understanding how we work with building compliance, as residents have raised concerns about unsafe working practices in Chepstow, for example, and where burden of responsibility lies in reporting to HSC.
- Noting that gambling premises had been raised with licensing committee and Members were satisfied with how the matter was handled.
- Clarifying the rules around fair trading: crackdown on illegal vapes and trading them, Members questioning how we work with local traders and schools (recent example in Kidderminster referenced).
- Querying why was there no food hygiene training in 2022/23, compared to 208 pre-pandemic.
- Whether Food Safety inspections are timetabled and the definition of high-risk locations and whether inspections are undertaken at these
- Whether complaints increased since pandemic.
- Whether there are differences in regulations between England and Wales, and if there are things that England does that we could do in terms of a partnership approach.
- Whether an education programme could be put together for schoolchildren around flytipping and litter.
- Concern expressed about vulnerable scam reports, which is becoming an increasing problem and whether the Public Protection team might need support from other council services to ensure the right messages are conveyed about how to recognise them and what people should do.

Actions:

- Request for officers to provide a response in relation to the point about 53% of noise cases being closed within 3 months – Members questions whether 6 months would be a more reasonable target.
- Officers to share the scope of the Environmental TSO.
- Work programme item ~ lessons learned from pandemic and preparation for the next one.

Chair's Summary:

- The chair highlighted that resources are a concern, in terms of ensuring we have sufficient capacity to do what we need to do, given that the Committee heard that the team would struggle to take on new statutory work.

The chair also raised a topic for future consideration ~ Lessons learned from pandemic and what can we do to prepare for next one.

6. 2022/23 Budget monitoring - Outturn Report

Rachel Garrick and Jonathan Davies introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Peter Davies and Jane Rodgers.

Key points raised by the Committee Members:

- The following points were noted from the Revenue Budget Early Update for 2023/24:
 - *£2.6 million of revenue budget pressures*
 - *Planned application of £2.5 million of useable reserves to finance pressures.*
 - *Strategic Leadership Team required to engage in immediate mitigating action.*
 - *Officers required to develop structured approach to tackling pressures.*
- It was also noted that in Table 1 of the report there are £6.1 million of actual underlying indicative early pressures in addition to the £2.6 million, which include:
 - *Children and Young People – £687,000*
 - *Social Care and Health - £3,001,000*
 - *Communities and Place - £1,513,000*
 - *Corporate, Treasury and Finance - £710,000*
 - *Further major pressures arising in Waste; Care Providers; Homelessness (of which additional security measures at £75,000).*
- Request for further explanation about the capital slippage of 42%.
- Whether for the coming year, all income generating opportunities have been considered.
- Whether in terms of the Capitalisation Directive, with delays in Replacement Local Development Plan, we will have delays in capital receipts and how the Cabinet sees that unfolding, and whether it is sustainable at the current level.
- Noting the underspend implications: in terms of vacancies and the impact on performance of these areas.

- Noting that Newport leisure park is operating at a loss of £109k and questioning whether it is time to take a long-term view of the leisure park and review learning from the purchase.
- Concern that Castle Gate is operating at a loss.
- In view of the overspend in Children's Social Care, whether there is a particular issue in terms of realistic forecasting. Asking how closely the Finance Team works with Children's Services, given that it has the largest overspend.
- Clarifying the number of children in the looked-after care system and asking whether numbers have increased. Whether the complexity of cases is increasing, and therefore driving the costs.
- Concern around how the Council can safeguard against running into deficit and whether the Cabinet Member is confident that strategies are in place to stop us delving into reserves.
- Noting that concerns are being raised relating to the budgetary position at Month 2.
- Noting the 5-year reserves reduction of 33%, questioning how much vulnerability that will bring after 5 years.
- Clarifying the £1m Reserve insurance and risk, questioning why this is so high.

Chair's Summary:

Through the scrutiny of the 2022/23 Budget monitoring – Outturn Report, specific important questions have arisen in relation to waste services cost management, bank holiday cover, food standards and costs in Free School Meals. Members heard that staff resources are being stretched and causing stress for those in service, with staff reductions in our community hubs and staff needing to apply greater flexibility in roles. Questions have been raised around the approach being taken by the cabinet towards balancing sound financial management with service demands – given that if control over finances is lost, it would create a very serious situation for all services. It has been noted that the cabinet has moved £3.5 million from reserves at the end of the 2022/23 year and plans to move a further £2.5 million from reserves to cover new pressures. Members have expressed concern that the rate of reserves' depletion is unsustainable and that whilst these are challenging times, it is important that the Council addresses the service overspends and redesigns services capable of being delivered within service budgets. Members expressed a view that reserves could be better used to redesign and transform services, rather than balance the financial budget.

7. Strategic Equality Plan Monitoring

Angela Sandles and Matt Gatehouse introduced the report and answered the members' questions.

Key points raised by the Committee Members:

- If we are reviewing previous objectives, asking how the next plan will relate to the Community and Corporate Plan and the Inequality Action Plan. The Poverty Dashboard should also be part of this.
- Objective 2 is policy-speak language and it is unclear what it actually means, so the language could be simplified.
- Whether over the lifetime of the plan, the Gender pay gap has been reduced, as it refers to the tendency for women to be in lower paid roles, so asking what we are doing to attract men to those roles.
- The statistics on bullying would be helpful when this report moves forward and some reference to the challenges of school attendances post-Covid.
- Noting that Police hate crime figures are not related to proportions.
- The need for unconscious bias training for all staff and members.
- Request that the Armed forces personnel and veterans' families are included.
- Acknowledgement that whilst the objectives are laudable, residents may feel that some groups are being treated more preferentially than others.
- In terms of Objective 1, to what extent are we developing resilience in young people and providing resilience training which would assist those who are disadvantaged.
- Objective 2 refers to 'economic inequalities', but health inequality should be included.

Chair's Summary:

That subject to the points raised by Members through the scrutiny, there is support from the Committee for the plan.

8. Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Action List

The work programme and action list were noted.

9. Cabinet and Council Work Plan

The planner was noted.

10. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 27th February 2023

The minutes of 19th April 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

11. Next Meeting: 17th July 2023

The meeting ended at **Time Not Specified**

