

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Children and Young People Select Committee held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk on Wednesday 25th March 2015 at 10.00a.m.

PRESENT: County Councillor P. Jones (Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Blakebrough, P. Clarke, P.S. Farley, L. Guppy, D.W.H. Jones, A. Webb and M. Powell

ADDED / CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Mr. K. Plow (Monmouthshire Association of School Governors)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Ms. S. McGuinness	-	Chief Officer, Children and Young People
Mr. S. Kneafsey	-	21 st Century Schools Programme Manager
Mrs. S. Randall-Smith	-	Head of Achievement and Attainment
Mrs. N. Wellington	-	Finance Manager
Mrs. S. Hawkins	-	Principal Officer, ALN
Ms. P. Harris	-	Support Officer, 21 st Century Schools
Ms. S. Hall	-	Senior Officer Early Years
Ms. D. Morgan	-	Senior Officer
Ms. H. Ilett	-	Scrutiny Manager
Mrs. N. Perry	-	Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors E.J. Hackett Pain, P. Fox and R.G. Harris.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

County Councillor L. Guppy declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest under the Members' Code of Conduct, as her child receives a Welsh Medium Education.

3. WELSH EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN (WESP)

We received a report to provide Members with an update on progress made in relation to Monmouthshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.

The Chair advised officers that the Committee had concerns regarding the length and format of the report and suggested officers work with EAS to revise the regional report template. The Chair requested that in future, a summary version of data relating solely to Monmouthshire be brought to the Select Committee.

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We heard that WESP detailed how Monmouthshire planned to support, develop and secure Welsh language provision in schools and wider communities, and the plan for future growth. The plan reflected the objectives set out in the Welsh Government's Welsh Medium Education Strategy. The WESP had been developed in partnership with the local authorities in the South East Wales Consortium (SEWC).

Members were recommended to scrutinise the progress and performance made to date on the WESP 2014-2017.

Following the presentation Members were invited to ask questions, during which time the following points were noted:

A Member questioned that, as the idea of the Welsh Language programme was to meet targets set by Welsh Government in order to raise the number of Welsh speakers, would there be an effect on funding if we didn't meet the objectives? The Member also asked if there would be an impact on school staffing and budgets. In response we heard that developing access to the Welsh language was a Government priority and as an Authority we would be striving to meet those recommendations and guidelines. We were not accessing additional funding other than funding provided through EAS. Similarly, schools could access a Welsh Education Grant. In order to develop a second language provision, EAS were providing training to teachers to build their capacity, and provided an intensive level of support to schools.

A Member requested clarification as to whether we were trying to increase the number of people being taught Welsh within schools, or to increase the number of pupils attending Welsh Medium Schools. In response we were informed that the purpose of the plan was to facilitate both, to increase provision at English language schools and to increase access to Welsh Medium Education in order to provide parents with a choice.

We were informed that questionnaires had been issued at Primary level to assess demand

A Member raised a question whether Welsh Government would provide extra funding should we need to build more schools. We heard from the 21st Century School Manager that any funding would come through the 21st Century Schools Programme. WESP would provide a good case in order to bid for funding.

The Chief Officer for Children and Young People clarified that WESP was a requirement of every Authority. Also, it was an Estyn requirement for the Authority to demonstrate how we were providing currently, and how we intended to provide, Welsh Medium Education.

A Member required clarification on the demand for Welsh education in the Monmouthshire area. We were informed that the closing date for the questionnaires was the 13th March and the results were yet to be analysed. Early indications were that of 2500 questionnaires issued there had only been 180 replies. The Chairman noted that 180 replies would not be enough to indicate a true response for demand, and would welcome a report for scrutiny.

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In response to a Member asking if the Authority would have to provide 50% of funding in order to build a new school, the 21st Century Schools Manager explained that we worked on a consortium basis which involved 5 authorities working together. In Band A there were 3000 secondary places required for Welsh education. The gap was perceived as being in Newport where 600 places were required. Working with Newport, and contributing to the Duffryn scheme secured the places Monmouthshire would need for Welsh education. For Band B there may be a need for the Authority to make a large contribution. Welsh Government realise authorities wouldn't have 50% of the funding, so funding would be consortium based.

A Member requested clarification on figures in the report. Section 1, Vision and aim for Welsh in education, the last bullet point stated "*increase the proportion of pupils in Welsh medium education to 6.3% / Year 2 and 4.1% in year 9 by 2017*". It was requested that we be informed what the percentages reflected in actual figures. We were advised that the officer would confirm the figures with EAS and report back to Committee.

A Member expressed concern that as the report provided detail from 2014-2017. It was troubling that the Committee had not seen the document earlier. It was explained that the initial document had been presented to Council in February 2014, which had been the process for all regional groups.

There was an issue regarding quality control of the document. This would be rectified by officers.

A Committee Member questioned the statement that there was a greater demand for Welsh. The low response to questionnaires could indicate that people did not understand, or that there was low demand. It was suggested that the questionnaires should be undertaken independently. Also, clarity was sought regarding the resource implications of saving £120,000 but no reductions in services. The Chief Officer stated that there was a need to re-consider how the questionnaires were best managed, which was currently being undertaken. With regards to resource implications we heard that an explanation would be provided at agenda item 4.

A Member sought assurance that our investment in a Newport school would be protected. We were informed that we could be assured that our investment would secure lifetime places for children and young people of Monmouthshire. There was currently an increase in demand for secondary Welsh education. This would provide a lifetime guarantee.

We heard that the commitment to secondary transition had been in place for some years, of which historical minutes could be tracked. The transition figures were based on the increase of primary provision which would result in a need for secondary provision.

In summing up, the Chairman noted that we had an understanding of the statutory requirements of Welsh Government. The Committee would need to know the exact demand prior to provisions being made in the future, and before effective planning could be carried out. The Committee recommended that the quality of the report

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was ambiguous and needed editing. It was thought that, in future, the report should be amended to address Monmouthshire County Council only. It was noted that the lack of response to questionnaires could be indicative of a lack of interest, but should be re-issued within schools.

4. ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS UPDATE – STAGE 2 PROPOSAL

We were presented with a report by the Principal Officer, ALN in order to advise Members of the next stage of the proposed strategy for the transformation of ALN service provision across the Authority.

Members were recommended to agree to accept the next stage of the ALN strategy:

- To provide an effective and coherent inclusion package to schools which would support the identification of children with special educational needs and the most appropriate pathway of intervention,
- To establish a regional north and south provision model managed by a central management team in order to facilitate an effective joint planning and cross disciplinary working based on need,
- To introduce a Service Level Agreement for non-statutory services to seek a contribution from schools towards the cost of the provision.

Following presentation of the report Members were invited to ask questions.

A Member asked how the Pupil Referral Service (PRS) fitted into the structure. In response we heard that the Pupil Referral Service would not be included within the structure as it was included under the Inclusion Service. The PRS was now a separate entity and had its own management structure.

A Member questioned what the future role of the Authority would be in terms of the strategy. We were informed that as the statutory responsibility remains with the Authority, we would always be responsible for the direction of a child's education. The new statutory reform would mean that the children would have individual development plans. The Local Authority would support the statutory element but the ALN would be worked within the schools. The funding panel, now the School Action Plus Resource Assist was based within the schools. Part of that package would be a report written for the child which would include the child, parent and school.

We heard that the Local Authority had quite a small SEN team, having reduced the amount of clerical response. It was not reasonable to reduce that team further.

In response to a Members question regarding where Deri View and Pembroke Primary would fit into the structure, we were told that the special units would be included in Stage 3.

An explanation was required as to why some primary costs were £3,000 and some were £1,000. We were informed that figures were based on free school meals and the number of pupils attending the schools. The Officers had looked at neighbouring areas. The Gloucester Psychology Service charged £650 to attend Monmouth

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School for half a day. Newport charged an hourly rate, based at Maes Ebbw School. There had been the opportunity for officers to meet with head teachers and funding forum. Schools agreed that a Service Level Agreement was the best way forward.

We heard from the Finance Manager that the schools had been consulted and there was no significant concern. The general feeling was that it was fair value for money.

The SLA would end on 31st March 2016. Moving forward it may become a three year SLA.

A Member raised a point that should a parent take their child to see a GP, a child's condition would be covered under the NHS. We heard that it was unlikely that health would refer to educational psychology.

A Member requested clarification on the resource implications, *"the SLA would be paid from school budgets and the remainder of costs met by the Local Authority. This would realise a £120,000 in directorate savings in line with Mandate 35, but would not result in a reduction in services"*. It was questioned what would be the added pressure to schools.

The Principal Officer explained that we had to work in an effective and transparent way. The strategy ensured that schools would moderate the amount of referrals and requests for consultations. A concern had been that too many children had been referred which was a costly process.

The Finance Manager explained that the £120,000 was the cost of the SLA, therefore schools would have a pressure of £120,000. The contribution would be to the non-statutory service. The SLA would be a contribution, as the actual service costs a lot more. Therefore there would be no savings to the Authority as schools would be paying for essential services. There would be no loss of staff.

The Chief Officer explained that the purpose of the work being done was to safeguard our children. Our schools had seen that there would be a strength by coming together under the agreement. SLAs in relation to ALN had always come from school budgets.

It was noted that the services provided by Chepstow and Caldicot were different. Both provided different functions and children may need to transfer depending on needs.

In summing up the Chairman advised that the Committee were reassured that the key issues were being addressed by the new policy, especially given that Monmouthshire pupils would now not have to attend schools outside the County for ALN provision. It was noted that quality and consistency of service should be the main objective. The Committee agreed that the report should be progressed for Cabinet decision and agreed to schedule the next stage of the policy review into their work programme.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

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**5. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING 2014/2015 MONTH 9 OUTTURN
FORECAST STATEMENT**

We received a report presented by the Finance Manager in order to provide Members with information on the capital forecast outturn position of the Authority at the end of month 9 for the 2014/15 financial year.

Members were recommended to consider the position concerning the 3rd quarter capital monitoring with a revised budget of £16.1 million, month 9 spending of £8.2 million and forecast spend of a further £7.7 million in the last 3 months of the financial year, to derive an outturn under spend of £187,000.

Members were also recommended to accept slippage proposals totalling £8,159,000, and to de-prioritise schemes totalling £771,000 whose funding was of general nature subject to a final outturn position being confirmed.

A question was raised regarding the under spend in relation to the SIMS development. It was explained that it had been moved back and was due to timings.

The Chairman thanked the officer and acknowledged on the quality of the report. The Committee resolved to accept the recommendations.

The meeting ended at 11.15am.