

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 10th December 2014 at 2.00p.m.

PRESENT: County Councillor P. Jones (Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Blakebrough, P.S. Farley, and M. Powell

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

County Councillors: P.A. Fox, E.J. Hacket Pain and P. Murphy

ADDED / CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Canon Dr. S. James (Church in Wales)

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

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Ms. S. McGuinness	-	Chief Officer, Children and Young People
Mr. S. Burch	-	Chief Officer for Social Care and Health
Mrs. J. Robson	-	Head of Finance
Mrs. D. Mountfield	-	Head of Resources, Children & Young People Directorate
Mr. R. Hoggins	-	Head of Operations
Mrs. S. Randall-Smith	-	Children and Young People Directorate
Mr. M. Howcroft	-	Assistant Head of Finance
Mrs. N. Wellington	-	Finance Manager
Mr. R. Cope	-	Passenger Transport Unit Manager
Mrs. S. Hawkins	-	Principal Officer, ALN
Ms. T. Thomas	-	Youth and Community Manager
Mrs. T. Norris	-	Improvement Officer
Ms. E. Archer	-	Gwent Music Service Manager
Ms. H. Illett	-	Scrutiny Manager
Mr. R. Williams	-	Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors G.C. Burrows, P. Clarke, L. Guppy, R.G. Harris, D.W.H. Jones and A. Webb.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest are identified under the relevant minute.

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**3. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING 2014/15 MONTH 6
OUTTURN FORECAST STATEMENT**

We received a report presented by the Assistant Head of Finance in which Select Committee Members received information on the forecast outturn position of the Authority at the end of month 6 for the 2014/15 financial year.

In doing so, the following information was noted:

- Monmouthshire's Unit costs were below the Wales average.
- Benchmarking could be used as good practice as having data available from other local authorities could allow Monmouthshire to learn from it.
- In response to a Select Committee Member's question regarding loss of income due to the closure of Monmouth swimming pool, it was noted that the loss of income was being treated as a budget pressure.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

4. CAPITAL BUDGET PROPOSALS 2015/2016 TO 2018/2019

We received a report for scrutiny from the Head of Finance which outlined the proposed capital budget for 2015/16 and the indicative capital budgets for the three years 2016/17 to 2018/19.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

5. BUDGET PROPOSALS 2015/16 TO 2018/19

We received a report from the Head of Finance in which Select Committee Members were provided with detailed proposals on the budget savings required to meet the gap between available resources and need to spend in 215/16.

In doing so, it was noted that the Authority was investigating ways to generate income in order to help save services provided by the Council.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

6. SERVICE AREA BUDGET MANDATES

We welcomed Officers who presented the budget mandates and we heard the proposals before the Committee were invited to ask questions.

During discussion the following points were noted:

i) Mandate 14 - Revised Home to School Transport

- It was recognised that the mandate covered all schools. However, clarification was requested whether special circumstances had been taken

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into account e.g. faith schools, where a larger geographical area inhabited by pupils which attended the schools. In response, it was noted that faith schools were a discretionary decision upon the authority and transport is a non-statutory element of faith schools. However, with the current policy it is provided free of charge. Further discussions would be required for the future, most secondary faith schools are currently out of county and transport is provided.

- The Mandate is clear that it is non statutory provision. Some concern was expressed that faith school transport appeared to be prioritised over post 16 Transport. Concerns were expressed regarding the effect on Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and whether targeted consultation would be undertaken and in addition, the amount spent on transport to faith schools. In response, £490,000 was current provision on transport to faith schools. Post 16 SEN policy - any changes have to be consulted on and published by October 2015 to come into effect September 2016.
- The aim of the mandate was to reduce home to school transport and increase income on concessionary on non-statutory transport. It was clarified that this would be if a parent chose to take a child to an out of catchment school, it would not be charged.
- In relation to pick up/drop off points, increased vulnerability and ALN of pupils, information was requested regarding impact of pupils in these areas. We were advised that in terms of dedicated pick up points, any special circumstances would be considered and dedicated pick up points would be more for mainstream and not ALN pupils. Currently there were different arrangements for ALN. Looking at dedicated pick up points within a long distance route.
- Feeder buses currently provided to certain areas, dedicated pick up points for where feeder buses are currently used, for mainstream, not ALN.
- Concern was expressed that pupils were not encouraged to stay on at school due to the cost to families. Clarification was required on how low income families have been considered. We were advised that post 16 transport was not funded and was not statutory, reduced costs were available for low income/benefit, also payment plans could be put in place and circumstances are considered. However, further discussions are required regarding the issue.
- In comparison to other authorities, some are in the same situation as Monmouthshire and there have been significantly increased costs. Concessionary schemes will be introduced by the Welsh Government in 2015/16 for work/training, not education. Further clarity was required on criteria for the type of training and how eligibility would be considered. In addition we noted that post 16 pupils of low income families may be eligible for support through the Education Maintenance Allowance from Student Finance Wales.

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- A query was raised whether the service could be shared between other authorities. Officers confirmed that a regional transport policy was being considered, which would assist all authorities.
- In relation to the policy aligning with other Monmouthshire County Council values e.g. poverty, single integrated plan, access and mobility, it was noted that post 16 travel to school was difficult and parental choice was to be considered. The policy does not discriminate against college or school.
- Policy would be discussed in the coming year and a draft policy would be circulated for consultation. Further consultation would be held with stakeholders.

The committee resolved to approve the mandate.

ii) Mandate 16 – Revised Schools Delegated Budgets

- A Select Committee Member welcomed cluster working. However, clarification was requested regarding whether savings could be achieved through working in clusters. Officers confirmed that clusters were working differently and the impact of the savings was unknown, but they were working towards. This was the first year of actively working with schools on alternative educational delivery options.
- One area which should be considered was to the LEA. There was a need to consider as the LEA that everything the authority has offered has been effective and efficient. It was noted that this issue had been discussed within clusters and one challenge was offering value for money to clusters, this was being considered by services.
- The Chief Officer reassured the Committee that every possible step was being taken. In terms of value for money, it was being considered through Service Level Agreements and expert advice within the authority. Schools were being supported and early informed in relation to business models and new ways of working.
- Information was requested regarding risks due to savings being met and it was noted that deficit positions were risks. However, they would be managed and monitored in year to assist with financial decisions. Staff would be reduced if there were surplus staff. It was clarified that performance was reliant on excellent management and delivery, it was not anticipated that the budget would affect performance.
- In terms of redundancy, there was a fund for school based redundancies. However, some funding would have to be contributed by schools. However, savings would be made on future salaries.
- Concerns were expressed regarding the effect on health and morale of the education workforce and it was requested that further information could be provided e.g. significant sickness absence.

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- In order for engagement to be increased, it was suggested that information should be passed on to school governors, which in turn could be passed onto parents. Members were advised that it was for Head Teachers to engage and that each governing board were encouraged to have a finance committee.
- Members were reassured that outcomes were not solely reliant on finances. There was a requirement to ensure that there was good planning and financial management, as an intrinsic part of the job. The authority was enabling schools. However, there were restrictions put upon the authority.
- Further detail was requested regarding the costs for commissioning and design work. This related to officers working with schools and identifying possible changes, not external commissioned service.

The committee resolved to approve the mandate.

iii) Mandate 20 – Schools Music Service Mandate

- Research had shown that music can improve the educational achievement of pupils.
- It was noted that the structure of the service would be maintained.
- A hardship fund was operated in Newport City Council, helping children living in families that were less well-off to be able to take advantage of the services provided by the Schools Music Service. A similar fund could be investigated for Monmouthshire's children in similar circumstances, i.e., creating a hardship fund for Free School Meal children.
- 5,500 children from Monmouthshire were currently accessing services from the Schools Music Service.
- The Schools Music Service was being advertised with a view to bringing the service to as many children as possible. Any support to preserve this service from local press and media would be welcomed.
- On a national level the Schools Music Service was well placed following a re-structure to respond to the budget cuts.
- The Incorporated Musicians Society was being launched in January 2015, which could be accessed via twitter.
- In response to a Select Committee Member's question regarding the service, it was noted that if the Schools Music Service did not exist then there would be no cohesive pathway for pupils to participate musically in groups.
- A reduction in the budget from Monmouthshire this year equated to £50,000. The Service will therefore not fill a management post that was currently vacant. Also, funds would be recouped by charging music centres and introducing a nominal charge for instrument hire. However, the Authority will still contribute £162,000 to the Schools Music Service in 2015/16.
- It was noted that one of Cabinet's priorities was to keep the Select Committee up to date with the future of the Schools Music Service.

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The committee resolved to approve the mandate.

iv) Mandate 35 – Transformation of Children’s Services

- The Mandate covers a two year period, focussing on the first year.
- Consultation with key clients will be undertaken in January 2015.
- The Mandate will allow the service to be flexible and to meet the changing needs of learners, providing advice and support to learners and parents.
- The Mandate ties in with work already undertaken and scrutinised by the Select Committee with the infrastructure being put in place to deliver it.
- The Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Service will be robust in its engagement with the Aneurin Bevan Health Board.
- The Mandate would allow Monmouthshire children with ALN to be educated within Monmouthshire, with the Authority not having to pay for these children to be educated out of County. By educating these children within County, the cost to the Authority would be significantly less.
- In response to a question raised regarding potential staff cuts within the ALN service, it was noted that this matter was currently being reviewed and information was not yet available.
- It was noted that the savings identified in the Mandate would be recouped over a two year period.

The Committee resolved to approve the mandate.

v) Mandate 42 – Youth Service

- The Youth serve was conscious of its market groups and would therefore avoid duplication of services.
- Income generation will be delivered by providing bespoke training packages in Youth Work with staff being re-aligned to provide income generation.
- It was agreed that the Youth and Community Manager would come back to a future meeting of the Select Committee to provide Members with an update on progress.

The Committee resolved to approve the mandate.

7. WHOLE AUTHORITY RISK LOG

County Councillor M. Powell declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in this item under the Members’ Code of Conduct, as she was a governor at King Henry VIII Comprehensive School.

We received a report by the Improvement Officer in which Select Committee Members received an overview of the current and future strategic risks facing the authority.

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Select Committee Members were informed that the risk assessment ensured that:

- Strategic risks were identified and monitored by the Authority.
- Risk controls were appropriate and proportionate.
- Senior managers and Elected Members systematically reviewed the strategic risks faced by the Authority.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The Improvement Officer stated that a number of required changes to the document had already been made to the copy presented to the Select Committees, which was also the version taken to the Senior Leadership Team meeting.
- Page 4 of the document – Potential for harm to vulnerable children or adults due to factors outside our control – This risk needed to consider that the abuse of older people was being given a higher profile by the Authority.
- The former risk assessment for 2013, which had informed the new version of the risks for 2014 on Comparative Standards at Key Stages 3 & 4. The risk was marked high. However, The Chief Officer for Children and Young People stated that projections for next summer were sound and the new risk on education performance should be changed from high to medium. It was noted that the balance of this risk was based on evidence and therefore should be monitored closely.

We resolved that the following issues across the consolidated risks for 2014 would be discussed with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People in January 2015:

- Results.
- Gap attainment in Fee School Meals.
- ICT Development.
- Capital Receipts.
- 21st Century Schools.
- Increase in child poverty related to homelessness.
- Reducing Budgets.
- The Williams Commission.
- The relationship with the Education Achievement Service.
- Further consideration of the Risk Log.

The meeting ended at 5.07pm.

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