

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Special Children and Young People Select Committee held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk on Thursday 9th October 2014 at 10.30a.m.

PRESENT: County Councillor P. Jones (Chairman)

County Councillors: P.R. Clarke, P.S. Farley, D.W.H. Jones, M. Powell and A.E. Webb

County Councillors P.A. Fox, E.J. Hackett Pain and J.L. Prosser attended the meeting by invitation of the Chairman.

ADDED / CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Revd. Dr. S. James (Church in Wales)
Mr. K. Plow (Monmouthshire Association of School Governors)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr. S. Davies - Managing Director, South East Wales Education Achievement Service
Mrs. Nicola Allan - Principal Challenge Adviser, South East Wales Education Achievement Service

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Ms. S. McGuinness - Chief Officer, Children and Young People
Mr. S. Burch - Chief Officer, Social Care and Health
Mrs. T. Jelfs - Head of Children's Services
Mrs. N. Wellington - Children and Young People Finance Manager
Mrs. D. Mountfield - Head of Achievement and Learning
Ms. S. Randall-Smith - Head of Achievement and Attainment
Ms. H. Illett - Scrutiny Manager
Mrs. S. King - Senior Democratic Services Officer

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.- Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor L. Guppy and R.G. Harris.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.- Declarations of Interest are identified under the relevant minute.

**Minutes of the Special Children and Young People Select Committee
dated 9th October 2014 - continued**

EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT SERVICE

3.- County Councillor P.S. Farley declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in this item under the Members' Code of Conduct, as he is a governor of Chepstow Comprehensive and the Dell Primary Schools.

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

We met the Managing Director of the Education Achievement Service (EAS) for South East Wales. In order to ascertain a more detailed overview of the Education Achievement Service, a question and answer session ensued, as follows:

The Managing Director, EAS, was invited to discuss issues raised at the Children and Young People Select Committee meeting held on 17th July:

- **The extent to which the new SIMS is up and running and whether there is consistency in its application**
- **The picture post-restructure – whether we have secured a greater consistency in System Leaders and Challenge Advisors**
- **Key Stage 4 – whether the improvement in attainment is delivered – i.e. whether your optimism has become reality**
- **A specific breakdown of how the 69k underspend will be spent this year (see question 6)**
- **A specific breakdown of the financial picture (down to unit cost) to clearly show how Monmouthshire money is being spent**
- **Evidence to clearly show satisfaction levels through self-assessment**
- **Evidence to confirm that training to governors has been provided**

The Managing Director responded, as follows:

- An electronic system was being developed which enabled collection of pupil level data targets, concerns had been expressed regarding the interface of system and how data was collected by the EAS. The system was trialled mid 2013 and continued into early 2014, outputs of data would be tested by the five authorities, clinics and courses would be available for staff. The system would enable a stronger indication of the process for achievement and data would be collected easily, however, the process would have to be refined.
- A meeting regarding the picture post-restructure was held in early September and pre-planning structure meetings had been held with Directors. A permanent principal challenger had been appointed, with a smaller team of challenge advisors and a team who would be able to respond promptly. Since structures in place, the assistant director had visited director and senior staff, to plan interface of meetings and sharing of information.
- The role of the Challenge Advisor role was critical, particularly in relation to the school set of published criteria which defined the position of the school and could be used for monitoring and learning. There was a need to extract raw

**Minutes of the Special Children and Young People Select Committee
dated 9th October 2014 - continued**

data and for it to be evaluated through Challenge Advisors engagement with School Chair of Governors. All schools would have a categorised colour, which would determine the intervention of the school, schools within red zones would have targeted intervention plans and extensive support, which would be monitored by the lead members for education. Schools within the orange level, would have intervention support plans but would unlikely to go to the red level, it was expected that schools would move through from orange to yellow then green.

- There was a need to ensure that challenge advisors are effective in their role and all officers would work to templates and procedures, in addition to Welsh Government training. It means that, challenge advisors would shadow Internal Monitoring Board officers to understand operations and what evidence should be identified. Quality assurance process would be reassured, in the visit followed by submission to senior officer and regional moderation process. An important element was for bespoke support plans and levels of support to be identified. There was a stronger position in terms of knowledge and the EAS worked closely with Estyn to accelerate out of special measures.
- The level of improvement at KS4 was an indicative figure in Wales, there had been good news and more to be achieved. Improvements had been achieved at GCSE level 2, English and Maths, Monmouthshire was highlighted as best improved authority. There were good levels of improvement across the region and aspirations were high.
- Quartiles would assist in the positioning of schools, compared to similar schools in Wales. There were four groups, 1 being the top 25% and 4 being the bottom 25%, of schools with similar characteristics. This was encouraging as schools had moved significantly into upper quartiles. The authority had improved and would still continue to be supported so that ambition could be achieved.
- In terms of 69k breakdown, there had been an under spend of £600k in overall budget for EAS last year, not all from core budget. EAS has significant amount of resource from grants, which are retained. Some require all money spent in one year, in some areas it would be legitimate to leave some and the budget was agreed by the board. The board agree and approve the budget and challenge in terms of spending. The three areas where the under spend could be allocated, were identified as 1) staffing – inherited structure 5 Local Authorities, Monmouthshire County Council contributed approximately £13k. 2) Management Information System, linked to SIMS system and extended to support schools in what was required around school development planned spend of grants and links with monitoring evaluation. There was planned expenditure and activity with directors, which would be undertaken in the financial year. 3) school to school work, this was the part of work that the EAS were expected to do. Some schools doing exceptionally well, in aspects of teaching/learning. Freeing up staff, by doing outreach or schools visit and engage to see work in practice.
- A breakdown of the financial picture for core money, £400k, was provided. The finance would be split between challenge advisors, literacy/numeracy programmes and governance. The EAS would look to refine value for money model, Monmouthshire County Council contribution 12.6%. The challenge advisor would be responsible for tracking the process and EAS could be accountable by individual schools and for the EAS by the challenge advisor. A

**Minutes of the Special Children and Young People Select Committee
dated 9th October 2014 - continued**

higher percentage of the SEG grant was going to schools, it was 72% when inherited and had now increased to 85%.

- The evidence for self-assessment contained main headlines and areas for where concerns were raised, areas of strengths and developments. 23 schools had responded (anonymity was an important factor) 91% agreed that the head was fully aware of school improvement direction (EAS and MCC partnership), 65% agreed they were clear on relative roles of EAS and MCC, there are actions for EAS to identify the role and distinction between MCC and where there is partnership working. 81% thought that the system leader knew the school well and 70% challenged well. High feedback was received in what had been responded by the system leader and 87% feedback had been provided in a timely manner. There had been considerable improvement at KS4 in Monmouthshire. Areas for development, 60% felt support for SEG PEG and WEG needed more support to ensure systems of EAS and LA come together to make most of it. Developed School Improvement Dashboard (SID), 65% schools felt it had been effective in planning and it would be developed further to use as a more effective tool. Response back identified key areas of training in more detail, national curriculum subjects and tackling poverty and disadvantage, eligibility of free school meals and underperformance. A key part of categorisation was how to make a difference to those more vulnerable. Responded that 92% agreed governing body was able to access quality advice from EAS. Strong messages were received in relation to what had been done and where were the areas to be improved.
- Meetings held with challenge advisors, discussed feedback and 10 key messages were identified across the region.
- In terms of training to governors, 100% of schools had accessed training. Issues had occurred in relation to data and statutory training and prior to 2013 governors would have one year to be trained or would be removed. A common governor data base had been created and those who had not received training would be contacted. The Chair of Governors would be contacted in relation to those who had not received training. Secondary schools had performed lower and the full governing bodies would be contacted to undertake training as a whole. The EAS were committed that for all red/orange schools, the governing bodies would be visited to take through categorisation.

The Chairman thanked officers for information received and invited the committee to ask questions:

- In response to a question in relation to how the role was delivered, primarily managerial or whether there was a presence in school in own right, we were advised that the role incorporates challenge advisor for 7 of the schools and there was a need for continued contact with the job, to ensure that work was moderated. The key part would be to support, ensure quality assurance and challenge other challenge advisors, in addition to encouraged partnership working with the Local Authority.
- A member queried whether anything could be done to bring governor training to the cluster instead of wider. We were informed that there was difficulty for it to be delivered locally across a regional plan. Challenge advisors would work

**Minutes of the Special Children and Young People Select Committee
dated 9th October 2014 - continued**

individually with governing bodies. The core statutory element would be delivered from Usk and this had proved effective.

- We welcomed further information of cross border or quality assurance that could be compared with other schools. It was noted that schools should not be prevented from undertaking work if cross boundaries, however, there were major differences in terms of accountability and inspection for Wales and England.
- Further information as required regarding how quality of teaching was ensured. We were advised that this was the responsibility of the school and part of the moderation process is for schools to have their own quality assurance process. There was a need to be confident of systems in place and governors have key responsibility which the governing body should be aware of. It would be within the remit of the school to check quality of teachers, this would ensure that progress would be monitored and the role for the EAS would be to check whether a school had delivered, there was a role to support but not directly observe.
- We were advised that the local authority would provide ALN support, quality would be monitored and performance management was in place. There was a need to increase capacity of schools to ensure a more effective model going forward, which was an area of responsibility for the Local Authority.
- It was highlighted that there was a need for the level of responsibility to be communicated to governors and a member queried whether feedback from training was considered seriously. The EAS had been encouraged by several events and focused that more public events were required, in order to promote to people who wanted to be involved. It was highlighted that there were areas where communication could be improved.
- We thanked officers for the presentation and requested a timeline for when results would be expected. Members were informed that the EAS had fundamentally changed pieces of work for target setting. EAS deadlines were 17th October and would be returned to the Local Authorities by 24th November, after being quality assured. Issues had been discussed and collaborative working would ensure that relevant information was available.
- A question was raised on what was considered as core business for the EAS and how this was funded. In response, we were advised of teaching, learning and leadership. The EAS focused on these outcome areas and rounded measures and were encouraged regarding judgements about schools, the criteria for colour related to leadership and learning by governors and head teachers. The heart of the job would be how to positively influence, through leaders, heads, middle leaders (department heads). Every secondary school within the region had been visited and discussed the systems that were in place and whether accountabilities and additional responsibilities were clear. There was a need for it to be modelled in terms of the service. Some services would be charged for, this was dependent on resources available through grants.

**Minutes of the Special Children and Young People Select Committee
dated 9th October 2014 - continued**

- Clarification was requested regarding how schools would be affected following underspends. The committee were informed that a new budget had been set and finance had been committed and allocated for school to school work. It was not anticipated that there would be a subsequent over spend position.
- Further information was requested in relation to how the overall criteria was assessed. We were informed that ultimately judgement would be made by the Local Authority, however, if there was a need for evidence then the first stage could not be changed, the second stage would be clear set criteria and best fit. Evidence would be considered and head teachers were making judgements in order for evidence to be brought forward. Improvement strategies would already be considered, and there was an opportunity for challenge. The final judgement would be the stage when the school were informed, however, judgement would have to be agreed by the Welsh Government. A process was in place where moderation would be agreed and work could be observed by other regions. This would be operated so that Welsh Government would be provided with confidence that it is being achieved, however, ultimately the judgement would be made by the Local Authority. Monitoring and moderation was being considered, to assess confidence and rigour of monitoring system.
- A question was raised in relation to what measures were in place to ensure consistency, and how was it correlated with national assessments. This was identified as a challenge during the primary phase. Some authorities were at the top of league on teacher assessment. Issues had been discussed with Welsh Government and had moved into a new programme of study, in previous year the moderation process had been strengthened. There was a need for processes to be standardised and modernised. The Welsh Government had invested in contract and categorisation, confidence would have to be demonstrated to challenge advisors by the schools. There was a need for strong foundation.
- A key aspect within the working relationship was that a joined up message on moderation an assessment was provided to heads. Support of the Local Authority would be important to ensure that everyone was engaged in opportunities during the following year. There was positive correlation within Monmouthshire County Council generally, but where this was not in place then support would be provided. Work would be undertaken through the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Schools and Learning. We welcomed the response and it was noted that governors would be pleased with information.
- The Chief Officer, advised that in conjunction with the Cabinet Member, the EAS had been contacted and considered year 6 and year 9 outcomes, so that there was a clearer picture of teacher assessments in schools. The role was to support, from a teachers perspective, as it was a huge responsibility along with governance. Practitioners would be supported to become better at what they do, which was identified as intrinsically linked with teaching in classrooms.

**Minutes of the Special Children and Young People Select Committee
dated 9th October 2014 - continued**

- A query was raised regarding unspent funds. We were advised that processes would be transparent through the EAS Board. Money would be spent, however, it would be used more effectively and creatively.

On behalf of the Select Committee, the Chairman thanked the Managing Director for his attendance and providing the Committee with answers to the questions put to him.

We welcomed the Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning and members were invited to ask questions, during discussion we noted the following:

- **Intervention Plans** - we were advised that as part of an ongoing process intervention plans were being discussed. Schools were being reviewed to ascertain the appropriate intervention required and if a significant amount was needed then a plan would be produced. The Head would be called in and accountable to actions, the schools would be informed of the process.
- Progress would be demonstrated through evidence produced of performance and regular meetings would be held with officers. A warning letter would be issued if there was no progress.
- Officers would report progress to the Cabinet Member and schools of concern would be picked up with the Education Achievement Service (EAS) Evidence from Challenge Advisors would be considered and discussed with the Principal Challenge Advisor, which included the impact of any intervention. Information would be summarised and reported to the Cabinet Member, progress would be frequently reviewed to ensure that effective collaborative working arrangements were in place
- We were informed that target setting from the EAS is structured and impact has improved. Expected impacts were demonstrated within the intervention plans and progress could be monitored.

We welcomed the Chief Officer, Children and Young People and members were invited to ask questions, during discussion we noted the following:

- **EAS service delivery** – A query was raised regarding how the EAS was challenged on service delivery and how it would be held accountable.
- In response, we were advised that process had vastly improved and robust quality assurance processes were in place. Timelines were in place, for meetings and challenge meetings with EAS. The purpose of meetings would be for a number of issues to be considered e.g. personnel, school categorisation, inspection, inclusion ALN.
- Wider stakeholder views would be obtained and value for money on the commission service would be surveyed. Results had improved, which demonstrated a clear indicator of value for money, however additional factors had to be considered. A number of issues would be considered, alongside performance of schools.
- Difficult conversations had been held over time and there was a confidence that a service was now being received which met the needs of the Education Authority. Improvements had occurred in recent weeks and the collaboration was on an upward route.

**Minutes of the Special Children and Young People Select Committee
dated 9th October 2014 - continued**

- The Chairman welcomed the information.
- **Survey responses** – Responses had been received anonymously from schools, however, further information was requested regarding satisfaction rates.
- The committee were informed that 100% of schools did not respond and it was perceived that the number of responses received may be dependent on how they were challenged.
- Further work would be undertaken, with schools/heads/governing bodies, in the area of how challenge was communicated.
- Straightforward flow charts were being developed which would demonstrate clear responsibilities of the EAS and Local Authorities and where some areas would be linked, there was a need for responsibilities to be clarified.
- Issues would be continually discussed with any school that had been challenged and the local authority would ensure that appropriate processes were followed.
- **Challenge Advisors** – A query was raised regarding recently introduced roles of Challenge Advisors and whether improved quality could be demonstrated through this avenue.
- Members were advised that this was crucial to the success of schools and the process was in early stages, however, improvements had been exhibited.
- Dialogue had been difficult, but the authority had ensured that the best quality was available in terms of Challenge Advisors. The Principal Challenge Advisor worked at a managerial and operational level.
- Joint visits to schools would be frequently conducted by officers and data shared with EAS.
- **Areas for improvement** – We were advised that some areas could be improved, such as the crucial quality of how teachers were assessed. Work would be undertaken closely with the EAS and it was hoped that it would impact on the quality of teaching across the Country and a consistent approach will be adopted alongside training provided by a regional consortia.
- Improved scrutiny procedures for grant expenditures were being considered and the Authority was to be proactive to ensure that grants were spent appropriately.

We welcomed the Leader of the Authority and members were invited to ask questions, during discussion we noted the following:

- **EAS Board** – Information was requested regarding the role of the EAS Board.
- We were informed that the role was fundamental to the evolution of consortia, improved standards of education across Wales were required and a crucial part of the role was how the company was formed and developed.

Minutes of the Special Children and Young People Select Committee dated 9th October 2014 - continued

- The improvement function would be maintained and included challenge, budget management and monitoring.
- There was a need to ensure that the service was efficient and operated in line with procedures and regulations.
- We were advised that Councillor Fox had recently stepped down and he had recognised the need to take a key objective perspective on areas to hold to account.
- The Deputy Leader had replaced Councillor Fox and would be formally appointed to the board, governance arrangements would be strengthened.
- **Value for Money** – Members were reassured that the authority were confident in the high quality service being delivered by the EAS. The company had changed and matured, rationalised staffing and schools had improved.
- Focus had been on individual authorities and school standards had improved. A strong robust improvement service was in place and challenge was being delivered, value for money was being received.

We thanked the Chief Officer and Executive Members for attendance.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE

4.- We welcomed the Head of Children's Service and the committee were presented with a report which advised regarding development work within Children's Services and presentation which provided members with the opportunity to consider recent developments, we noted the following:

Children's Services Pathway to Change – August 2014

•Our Purpose -

•“Enabling families and communities to keep children and young people safe and to reach their full potential.”

What are the requirements?

- Child focussed
- Statutory Obligations
- Working to a prescribed framework – intervention which is compulsory
- State intervention which is compulsory and contested

Impact on Children's Services

- Time spent on making it right instead of getting it right in the first place
- Duplication of tasks
- Bad PR with other agencies, internally and Courts
- Lack of capacity to develop / lack of drive to achieve good practice
- Lack of consistent and known process
- Staff morale

**Minutes of the Special Children and Young People Select Committee
dated 9th October 2014 - continued**

Impact: Children's experience

- Feeling abandoned when case is transferred
- Loss of accessibility and continuity of social worker
- Telling their difficult story on lots of occasions & not being heard or seen
- Not understanding why we are involved and the reasons for decisions about them
- Parents Experience this too!

Views of Children's Services from others

- Loss of confidence in our service
- Limited communication
- Lack of understanding about our service
- Impact of constant change and developments within the multi-agency practice
- Perception of the service from others within MCC
- Lack of shared priorities and focus

The vortex at the beginning of 2014!

Barriers

- KPI's / Database / Tools
- Change
- "Overspend"
- Staffing

What the service wanted

- Focus on children and young people
- To be heard
- Keen to improve
- Appropriate resources to deliver the service

What are we working to solve?

- Accommodation that meets our needs
- Change in culture
- Staffing – competency, confidence, attitude
- Developing new ways of working – sabbaticals, reducing emails, focus on what matters
- IT
- Responses to external criticisms

Accommodation

- Accessible to our service users
- Contact venues that are family friendly
- Able to be together as a whole service
- Visible to the rest of the Authority
- Staff and service users valued
- Safe for our staff
- Presenting ourselves as professional service to other organisations and our service users

Culture Change

- Clear focus on our purpose and doing what matters
- One service not four teams

**Minutes of the Special Children and Young People Select Committee
dated 9th October 2014 - continued**

- Consistent policies and practices across service
- Enabling, trusting and respectful culture within a framework of high expectations
- One tea fund and stationery cupboard

IT

- New system developed by Staff
- Experimenting with agile technology
- Direct work apps including children who are non verbal

Children and families

- Staff trained to play with children
- Re-emphasis on direct work with children and young people
- Apprenticeship scheme for care leavers
- Young women's well-being group for children and care leavers
- Football group for looking after children and care leavers
- Garden party for families with a disabled child
- Inspirational speakers from care leavers
- New IT system to record children's stories effectively

Business Cases

- 0.5 safeguarding post
- BASE
- SGO Social Worker
- Senior Practitioner in Children with Disabilities
- Social Worker in Fostering
- Placement and Contracts Officer
- Additional administration

This is our perspective of what the best Children's Services looks like:

Full of quality staff

Working together to achieve the best outcomes for the child

Safe, sound, fair

On the ball

Focused on children and young people

Child first

Interactive

Reflective & learning environment

We were advised that the pathway to change related to how the service would be developed, in terms of critical framework, child focus, staff morale, culture change, accessible service, family friendly. Additional issues were being considered regarding the IT system within the service and engagement with children.

Members were invited to ask questions and during discussion we noted the following:

- Members thanked the Head of Children's Services and welcomed the information contained within the report and presentation, we recognised that a significant amount of work had been undertaken.
- We highlighted that the service had improved and staff were commended.

**Minutes of the Special Children and Young People Select Committee
dated 9th October 2014 - continued**

- The committee were informed that whilst improvements had been made, some areas were still to be developed. The CSSIW inspection would be carried out in November, which would demonstrate how the service had progressed.

Members thanked officers and received to note the information.

SCHOOL BALANCES

5.- We welcomed the Children and Young Peoples Finance Manager and the committee were presented with a report which provided Select Committee Members with information on the school balances for both the 2014/15 budget and the latest forecast at month 3 (end of June) for the financial year 2014.

The committee were informed that school balances had increased year on year until last year when the balances dropped. Information was contained within the report which compared Monmouthshire to other authorities and officers were awaiting further statistical information. School balance figures were appended to the report and some schools were identified in a deficit position, the majority of these schools had recovery plans in place, with the exception of King Henry and Chepstow Comprehensive schools.

Members thanked officers for the report and we noted that this was an update document. Further scrutiny would be undertaken at the 6 month stage.

We received the report.

The meeting ended at 1.10 pm.