

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Children and Young People Select Committee held in the Council Chamber at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 23rd January 2014 at 2.30p.m.

PRESENT: County Councillor R.P. Jordan (Chairman)

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

ADDED MEMBERS:

Voting:

Revd. Dr. S. James (Church in Wales)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr. S. Burch	-	Chief Officer, Social Care and Health
Mrs. D. Mountfield	-	Head of Achievement & Learning Infrastructure
Mr. M. Howcroft	-	Assistant Head of Finance
Mrs. N. Wellington	-	Finance Manager
Mr. T. Stokes	-	Finance Manager
Ms. G. Cox	-	Service Manager, Children's Services
Ms. H. Ilett	-	Scrutiny Manager
Mr. R. Williams	-	Democratic Services Officer

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.- Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor A.C. Watts.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.- County Councillors D. Blakebrough, P.R. Clarke, P.S. Farley, L. Guppy, P. Jones and M. Powell declared a personal interest under the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of references made to schools under Minute 3 – Revenue Budget Forecast Statement 2013/14 Month 6 and Minute 4 – Capital Programme 2013/14 Month 8 Forecast Outturn Statement, as they are School Governors.

REVENUE BUDGET FORECAST STATEMENT 2013/14 MONTH 6

3.- We received a report by the Head of Finance, presented by the Finance Manager, in which Members received information on the revenue outturn position of the services relevant to the Children and Young People Select Committee at the end of Quarter 2 for the 2013/14 financial year.

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Select Committee Members were informed that at Quarter 2 the forecast outturn for 2013/14 was as follows:

- Social Care and Health Directorate – Children’s Services were forecasting to over spend by £882,000, principally comprising an increasing pressure on the external placement budget (£363,000), additional increased costs across Young People’s Accommodation of £154,000 (£135,000 at month 3), and other Children’s area over spends (£365,000) on work experience schemes, transport and legal costs, ‘in house’ fostering allowances and family contact costs.
- Children and Young People Directorate – A forecast over spend of £744,000 (£633,000 at month 3). School-based redundancy costs for which reserve cover will be requested (estimated at a £479,000) were the main element of this over spend. The redundancy costs remain within the overspend prediction until the matter is formally considered and financing approved.
- The more significant aspects of the remaining £265,000 overspend include:
 - A continuing combined funding deficit of £47,000 for the shared School Library Service.
 - As reported at month 3, a continuing £39,000 over spend in the Adult Education Service from costs anticipated to be necessary to compensate for absences.
 - An increased pressure of £18,000 to the School Improvement Service consequential to an unbudgeted £58,000 (£40,000 at month 3) Safeguarding Officer post that had been transferred from Social Care and Health without the corresponding budget.
 - As part of the 2013-14 budget setting process, the service identified savings of £645,000, a shortfall of £260,000 had been identified at month 6 of which £160,000 had been delayed for a staff restructuring (£100,000) and £60,000 for as yet unidentified SEN transport savings. Thus, leaving £100,000 unachievable savings with regard to school meal provision.
- Schools – School balances at the beginning of the financial year amounted to £1,240,000. The forecasted draw on balances at month 6 is £689,000 (£554,000 at month 3) an unfavourable movement of £135,000 resulting in budgeted closing surplus school balances of £551,000.

Having received the report the following points were noted:

- In response to a Select Committee Member’s question regarding reference to the School Improvement Service overspend and the

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funding of a Safeguarding post, it was noted that the wording needed to be changed, as the School Improvement Service now fell within the remit of the Education Achievement Service (EAS).

- In response to a Select Committee Member's question regarding areas of concern, it was noted that Additional Learning Needs (ALN) provision and Special Educational Needs (SEN) transport provision were volatile areas and were therefore areas of concern.
- ALN was forecasting an under spend of £67,000 mainly due to a reduction in contingency funding allocated to schools. All schools were advised to spend 5% of its budget on ALN provision. Currently, at Month 6, there was no requirement to spend additional monies on ALN provision. Officers with specific knowledge relating to children with additional learning needs could be invited to future Select Committee Meetings to advise Members and answer questions on ALN provision.
- Non-payment of school meals was being actively addressed by the Directorate by liaising with schools. Schools were responsible for investigating non-payment.
- There had been a reduction in take up of school meals last year due to the introduction of the 'Appetite for Life' programme. There had also been an increase in ingredient costs resulting on a loss of income. The Directorate was reviewing this matter and investigating all options.
- In response to a Select Committee Member's question regarding redundancy costs, Members were informed that enhanced redundancy costs were being paid. However, this matter was being reviewed. The Finance Manager would arrange for details to be forwarded to the Chair. A budget for redundancy costs in the sum of £320,000 was being set aside for 2014/15. The Head of Achievement and Learning Infrastructure stated that she would send a copy of the H.R. Policy and Re-engagement of Staff for Schools Policy to the Select Committee.
- It was noted that Chepstow Comprehensive School was carrying a deficit budget. Officers had met with the school and to implement a deficit reduction plan.
- Concern was expressed that a reduction in the number of school staff year on year could increase the pressure on the remaining staff resulting in an increase in sickness due to work related pressures. The Select Committee asked for further details in order to establish whether policy decisions were impacting on staff health.
- In response to a question raised in respect of Mounton House School, it was noted that as part of the Cabinet Mandate, engagement sessions were taking place with the school.

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- It was noted that Voluntary Controlled Schools' finances were the responsibility of the local Authority.
- Schools were expected to hold some of its finances in reserve, with investment plans being encouraged for schools with surplus budgets (primary schools – surplus budget in excess of £50,000 and secondary schools with a surplus budget in excess of £100,000). Officers provided support to schools in establishing investment plans.
- Legal costs were forecast to overspend by £112,000 with 16 care proceedings completed to date and 26 care proceedings initiated. Demand was currently outstripping the Council's legal team's capabilities and another local authority has been asked to take on some of the legal work at a cost. However, a number of legal proceedings were coming to an end and it was anticipated that legal costs will reduce.
- The Chief Officer, Social Care and Health would liaise with the Head of Children's Services with a view to a report being brought to a future Select Committee meeting outlining details of the Legal Department's negotiations with regard to 'buying in' legal services.
- The Finance Manager stated that the unit costs in respect of Looked After Children were being reviewed and the exercise was producing valuable data in understanding the costs incurred. This process will be shared with colleagues in the Children and Young People Directorate.

We resolved:

- (i) to receive the report and note its content;
- (ii) that the Chief Officer, Social Care and Health would liaise with the Head of Children's Services with a view to a report being brought to a future Select Committee meeting outlining details of the Legal Department's negotiations with regard to 'buying in' legal services.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2013/14 MONTH 8 FORECAST OUTTURN STATEMENT

4.- We received a report by the Head of Finance, presented by the Finance Manager, regarding the forecast outturn position for the current year's capital programme compared to the budget for the year for schemes relating to the Children and Young People Select Committee.

Members were informed that the Month 8 forecast capital outturn position for 2013/14 for schemes relating to the Children and Young People Select Committee was as follows:

- An adjusted revised budget £5,585,000, being based upon £4,777,000 original 2013-14 approval, £462,000 of budget revisions, £2,907,000 of

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slippage from 2012-13 and £49,000 virements from other Select Committee areas, less provisionally slipping £2,609,000 into 2014/15.

- Actual expenditure was £1,995,000 (36% of revised budget) at month 8, compared to £3,832,000 (48%) at month 8 of 2012/13.
- A forecast net under spend of £285,000 resulting from an under spend of £144,000 on school development schemes, an under spend of £33,000 on property maintenance schemes and an under spend of £108,000 resulting from surplus finance brought forward from 2012/13, as yet unallocated.

Capital Receipts

- The forecast total Capital receipts balance at 31st March 2014 has increased by £1,594,000 compared to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) (£169,000 at month 5) primarily due to an increase in forecast receipts of £312,000, forecast slippage of capital expenditure of £1,670,000 into 2014/15, budgeted set aside of £1,000,000 not going ahead, a forecast under spend of £407,000 in the capital programme which is financed via capital receipts, offset by a lower receipts balance brought forward (£1,184,000) and an increase in expenditure budgets (£611,000).
- Based on 2012/13 outturn, the capital receipts forecast and the capital budgets in place for 2013/17 that there will be a balance of available receipts at the end of the MTFP window of £32,557,000 (£32,745,000 at month 5).

In light of the Williams Report regarding proposed Local Government Reorganisation, concern was expressed regarding the future of the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools Programme. The Head of Achievement and Learning Infrastructure informed the Select Committee that the Directorate's Programme Manager would shortly be meeting with Welsh Government staff and she would ask that he enquires about the future of the 21st Century Schools Programme.

We resolved to receive the report and note its content.

DELIVERING A REGIONAL AND NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE

5.- We received a report by the Service Manager, Children's Services, on the new arrangements at a national and regional level with a view to establishing a National Adoption Service for Wales from 1st April 2014.

Select Committee Members were informed that the National Adoption Service will be responsible for:

- Establishment of a National Board.

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- Monitoring the delivery of services in accordance with the national performance framework.
- Producing an Annual Report and action plan.
- Developing a national marketing and awareness raising strategy.
- Providing a single point of contact for anyone seeking information about adoption.
- Providing a database of information.
- Developing and maintaining a National Adoption Register.
- Co-ordination of Adoption Panels, Panel Members, Pre-Approval Training, Post Adoption Support Services and provision of the Independent Review Determination Service.
- Acting as a Centre of Excellence for Adoption in Wales.

The operational adoption services will be delivered by five Regional Adoption Collaborative's as follows:

- North Wales – Wrexham, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire and Ynys Mon.
- South East Wales – Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, Torfaen, Newport and Caerphilly.
- West & Mid Wales – Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Powys.
- Western Bay – Bridgend, Neath, Port Talbot and Swansea.
- Mid & South Wales – Cardiff, the Vale of Glamorgan, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda-Cynon-Taff.

The current delivery structure for the Adoption Service in Monmouthshire is via the tri partite Adoption Service with Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Councils. This service has been in existence since the 1st April 2011 and has recently begun to make progress in securing adoptive placements for children. However, Monmouthshire County Council has always been a net contributor of prospective adopters and in providing adoption support to those children and their new families within Monmouthshire County Council. It was noted that the original funding of the tri partite service was not based upon a cost benefit analysis of what would be required to run the service but instead upon what each authority could afford to contribute. This means that additional costs such as inter agency funding for external placements and adoption support packages continue to be met by the relevant child's local authority.

The five local authorities in Gwent established a working party in March 2013 in anticipation that the Minister would decide to proceed with the announcement to deliver a National Adoption Service from 1st April 2014. It is proposed that the new South East Wales Adoption Service from 1st April 2014 will be delivered through one centralised location based at Mamhilad.

The key functions of the service will be as follows:

- Ensuring compliance with legislation, regulation and the performance management framework.

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- Recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters.
- Ensuring appropriate matching of children.
- Provision of the whole range of support services including birth parent counselling, step parent adoptions, intermediary services and letterbox contact. Including pre and post adoption support for children and their prospective adoptive and adoptive carers.
- Inter country adoption.
- Ensure effective links are maintained with local authorities Children's Social Services including tracking and monitoring of permanency plans where adoption is the plan.

A management board will be established with representatives from each Local Authority who will be responsible for governance of the service. The current arrangements for the Adoption Panel will remain unchanged.

In addition, each local authority will retain responsibility for the following:

- Assessment and care planning and reviewing of Looked After Children and young people.
- Ensuring the Agency Decision Maker functions are fulfilled.
- Assessment of the Adoption Support needs of children for whom the plan is adoption.
- Involvement in the matching and linking of children and adopters.
- Providing birth parent counselling.
- Making applications to the Courts for appropriate orders.
- Attending Adoption Panels where proposed matches are being considered.

As a member of the existing tripartite arrangement the move to a five authority model brings additional resilience but does not bring significant tangible benefits in the short term. Consequently, Monmouthshire County Council has negotiated firmly to agree a funding formula which offers good value for the Authority and compares favourably with the costs of remaining in the current arrangement. Due to the Authority's increase in Looked After Children (a key component of the adoption service funding formula) an increase in costs was being planned for and the additional cost to the Authority would be £18,000. This will be accounted for via other efficiencies within the adoption budget.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Currently, Monmouthshire County Council was responsible for 105 Looked After Children. Of these, seven children had a placement order. Of these seven children, two of them had achieved matches for adoption.
- The Nation Adoption Service will be a virtual service acting as a Centre of Excellence for Adoption in Wales.

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- In response to a Select Committee Member's question regarding scrutiny of the service, Members were informed that the Management Board currently meets monthly but will likely change to quarterly meetings. The Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) will scrutinise the service via inspection every three years.
- Currently, no joint scrutiny arrangements of the service between the Greater Gwent Authorities have been established.
- The Scrutiny Manager informed the Select Committee that if the National Adoption Service's Management Board was a non-executive Board, it might be appropriate for two of the Select Committee to sit on this Board and provide feedback to the Select Committee. The Scrutiny Manager stated that she would raise this matter at the next Scrutiny Officers Network meeting.

We resolved to recommend to Cabinet that:

- (i) it endorses the proposals for achieving a National Adoption Service in Wales;
- (ii) Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council acts as the lead authority for the Gwent Wide Adoption Service known as the South East Wales Adoption Service within the National Adoption Service;
- (iii) Monmouthshire County Council contributes funding resources as established in the report required to deliver the South East Wales Adoption Service.

WORK PROGRAMME

6.- We received the Children and Young People Select Committee work programme for 2013/14.

We resolved:

- (i) to receive the work programme and note its content;
- (ii) that the Schools Budgets Report for 2014/15 be added to the Select Committee Work Programme to be scrutinised by the Committee in May / June 2014.

FUTURE MEETING DATES

7.- We resolved:

- (i) to postpone the ordinary meeting of the Children and Young People Select Committee dated 6th February 2014, in order to allow Members to attend the funeral of the wife of former County Councillor Brian Hood. The re-arranged meeting will be held on Tuesday 11th February

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2014 at 1.00pm, subject to the availability of the Head teachers of Monmouthshire's four secondary schools. The Head teachers will be provided with a list of questions that the Select Committee intends to ask;

- (ii) that the Scrutiny Manager identifies potential dates for a Special Meeting of the Children and Young People Select Committee between 11th February and 20th March 2014 and inform Select Committee Members accordingly.

The meeting ended at 4.45p.m.

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Committee dated 23rd January 2014 - continued**