

# MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## Minutes of the Children and Young Peoples Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk held on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2015 at 10.00 a.m.

**PRESENT:** County Councillor P. Jones (Chair)

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

County Councillors G. Burrows – Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health, E.J. Hackett Pain - Cabinet Member for Education and Learning, S. Jones and V.E. Smith were also in attendance.

### **CO-OPTED MEMBERS:**

Mr K. Plow

### **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mr P. Matthews	-	Chief Executive
Mr S. Burch	-	Chief Officer for Social Care and Health
Ms. S. McGuinness	-	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Ms. S. Randall-Smith	-	Head of Achievement and Attainment, Education
Ms. C. Sheen	-	Client Liaison Officer
Mr. M. Howcroft	-	Assistant Head of Finance
Mrs. N. Wellington	-	Finance Manager
Ms. T. Jelfs	-	Head of Children's Services
Ms. G. Cox	-	Service Manager – Children's Services
Ms. D. Davies	-	Service Manager – Care and Assessment
Mr. R. Tranter	-	Head of Legal/Monitoring Officer
Ms. H. Ilett	-	Scrutiny Manager
Mrs. S. King	-	Senior Democratic Services Officer

### **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE**

Mr M. Campion	-	ESTYN
Mr C. Phillips	-	ESTYN
Mrs A. Ferris	-	CSSIW
Mrs B. Jones	-	CSSIW

## **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor L. Guppy and Canon Dr S. James.

Introductions were provided by all members and officers in attendance.

The Chairman advised that the order of the agenda would be changed, the Committee would be presented with the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales report on Children's Services (CSSIW), followed by the CSSIW report on the Fostering Inspection 2014 and then the Children's Services Development Report. Members

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noted that the Capital Budget Monitoring 2014/15 Month 9 Outturn Forecast Statement would be received for information, as it had been scrutinised at a previous meeting.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

County Councillor P. Clarke declared a personal non-prejudicial interest, pursuant to the members' code of conduct as a Governor of Usk Primary School.

County Councillor R. Harris declared a personal non-prejudicial interest, pursuant to the members' code of conduct as a Governor of two schools which were in alliance with Llanfair Kilgeddin school.

County Councillor R. Harris declared a personal non-prejudicial interest, pursuant to the members' code of conduct as a member of the Fostering Panel, appointed by Monmouthshire County Council.

County Councillor D. Jones declared a personal non-prejudicial interest, pursuant to the members' code of conduct as a Governor of Llanvihangel Crucorney school.

County Councillor P. Jones declared a personal non-prejudicial interest, pursuant to the members' code of conduct as a member of the Adoption Panel, appointed by Monmouthshire County Council.

County Councillor M. Powell declared a personal non-prejudicial interest, pursuant to the members' code of conduct as a Governor of Deri View Primary school and King Henry VIII Comprehensive school.

### **3. MINUTES**

The Committee confirmed and signed the minutes of the following meetings of the Children and Young Peoples Select Committee held on:

- i. Ordinary Meeting 27<sup>th</sup> January 2015
- ii. Ordinary Meeting 12<sup>th</sup> February 2015

### **4. ESTYN INSPECTION LETTER – MONITORING VISIT 2<sup>ND</sup> TO 5<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2015**

We welcomed Mr C. Phillips and Mr M. Campion, we were presented with the monitoring visit letter which followed Estyn's inspection of education services for children and young people in November 2012, where the authority was identified as requiring special measures.

An inspection had been held in March 2015, to review progress made by the authority against one of the recommendations which arose from the November 2012 inspection. Discussions had been held with the Leader of the Council, Elected Members, Chief Executive, Senior Officers, Cabinet Member and other relevant officers. Inspectors

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scrutinised documentation, which included evidence on the progress made on the recommendation in the context of additional learning needs, inclusion and youth support services.

Estyn advised the outcome of the monitoring visit:

***Recommendation 6:*** *Ensure that performance management is effective and robust and allows elected members and senior officers to identify and address underperformance.*

- The local authority had developed a new corporate performance assessment process, which had provided a more robust system to manage performance. This ensures that the Children and Young People directorate priorities appropriately reflected the corporate priorities.
- Assists individuals and teams to have a better understanding of roles and how the work contributes to that of the directorate and wider corporate priorities.
- Local authority's processes for performance management were more consistent, more transparent and better understood by staff.
- Improvement plans aligned well with key corporate themes within the single integrated plan.
- The directorate had a more effective system for reporting on progress against action in the service improvement plans and on the achievement of performance indicators to senior officers and elected members. Staff at all levels had begun to be held to account more rigorously for areas of responsibility.
- The directorates use of performance data had improved, e.g. in identifying progress of vulnerable groups and pupils with additional learning needs. The authority had improved the range of data in the youth service, the authority and partners had a better understanding of how the provision helped learners to achieve.
- However, access that schools have to management information systems is inconsistent. Information and analysis provided in managers' reports was not always helpful to ensure that messages are identified accurately.
- The regional school improvement had commissioned services which provided better quality information to the local authority on standards and leadership in school. The local authority had intervened more appropriately in schools that had underperformed. Headteachers had been invited to attend scrutiny meetings, which had had been positive and provided school leaders with a better appreciation of their lines of accountability, which had begun to impact well on the outcomes achieved by the pupils.
- The authority had appropriate arrangements to scrutinise aspects of education department's work. The arrangements aligned well with monitoring of the post inspection action plan and priorities of the department.

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#### **Committee's Conclusion:**

The Chair summed up that the next steps for the authority would be to continue to address all the recommendations from the 2012 inspection, with the final visit being held in autumn 2015.

Members thanked the inspectors for presenting their views on the progress made and for the clarity of their recommendations which significantly helped in terms of understanding where improvements needed to be made.

The Chair requested ongoing engagement with scrutiny and clarification on whether the link arrangements could continue if special measures were to be lifted. Estyn confirmed that there would be an ongoing working relationship with two link inspectors in supporting the authority to make continual progress. Estyn had confirmed that Monmouthshire County Council had engaged effectively with other authorities and lessons had been learnt from good practice and there was now a need for actions to be put in place.

The Chair advised that scrutiny would continue with a discussion with the 4 comprehensive school head teachers and the Education Achievement Service on areas for improvement.

The Chair requested the link inspectors continue to work with the authority and to confirm their arrangements for the final visit at the earliest opportunity.

#### **5. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM**

A member of the public addressed the Committee as part of the public open forum and requested an update regarding Llanfair Kilgeddin School. The Committee were advised that the school had been affected following the school being combined with Usk, it was perceived that there had not been efficient communication. Parents were opposed to the closure of the school and welcomed appointment of a new head.

Further information was requested regarding when issues would be resolved, which included pupils being returned to the school, timescales for a new head to be appointed and the authority were encouraged that issues were communicated effectively to the public.

- In response, the Chief Officer, thanked representatives for presenting a clear outline of the community view and acknowledged the emotive subject. We were informed that job adverts would be the responsibility of the governing body and a meeting would be held. We were unable to confirm timescales, however welcomed further engagement with representatives of the community.

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### 6. SCRUTINY ITEMS

#### i) CARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES INSPECTORATE WALES (CSSIW) REPORT ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES

##### Context:

Members welcomed Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) who presented a report and presentation on Children's Services, following the inspection held in November 2014. Members were informed that this had been a challenging report due to the volume and extent of the inspection work involved.

##### Key issues:

The Committee were advised that the inspection focused on 4 areas which were identified as:

- Access Arrangements
- Assessment
- Care Management & Review
- Leadership & Governance

The inspection focused on outcomes for children and families, there was emphasis on quality and interaction of children and families and process and timelines were considered. A small response had been received from families that were engaged, during the inspection.

During the presentation it was highlighted that statutory requirements were achieved, however, there was potential for improvement and processes were not sufficiently embedded. It was recognised that the workforce had stabilised within the service area and was working effectively, but that this could not be evidenced.

We were informed that Social Workers could effectively articulate risks but it was felt that this was not identified within the assessments and the approach was varied. The quality of risk assessments were variable and this was an area which could be improved.

The report highlighted that there was good quality direct work being undertaken and all social workers were committed and enthusiastic in their roles, with excellent morale amongst the team.

There appeared to be disjointed approach with regard to high level corporate planning and how clear front line staff were in terms of their contributions. It was suggested that good practice was rolled out in order for senior management and members to be sighted on the positive work that was being undertaken. It was perceived that senior officers were not often sighted and a greater connection was needed with the front line.

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#### Member scrutiny:

The Chair remarked that there were generalisations throughout the report and the word 'potential' was used several times in the report to suggest that children could be exposed to harm, although there is no evidence that any child has been harmed. The Chair asked the CSSIW whether they thought this was a fair analysis. In response, the CSSIW informed that whilst the workforce issues had stabilised, processes were so new that consistency could not be demonstrated.

Members suggested there was a generally a negative feel to this report which was not been counterbalanced by the positive improvements made to the service. Members advised that national performance indicators around Social Care clearly demonstrate Monmouthshire is seeing significant and sustained improvement in this area and questioned why this was not taken into account in compiling in the report. The CSSIW explained that whilst the inspection had highlighted good practices, these practices required time to be sufficiently embedded and that on this basis, some areas were possibly identified to require potential improvement.

The Committee requested examples of "senior management not being sufficiently sighted on child protection work". Members requested evidence to support this finding, in order to undertake further scrutiny? The CSSIW responded saying that the quality of access arrangements had deteriorated without senior management being aware of it. They suggested that this comment related to the quality of assessments and that from what they had witnessed, whilst social workers articulated risks well verbally, these were not clearly identified in written assessments.

Members queried how many elected Members had been engaged with throughout the inspection and the CSSIW were unsure of the number, the Chair confirming that only the Cabinet Member and herself had been interviewed. The Committee suggested that in future, the CSSIW undertake wider engagement with Members as part of the inspection process.

The Chair asked whether the inspectors felt Monmouthshire's Children's Services warranted specific CSSIW follow-up/intervention or whether the inspectors were satisfied with the progress made to date, despite recent headlines in a local paper suggesting otherwise. The CSSIW advised that they did not consider Monmouthshire's Children's Services necessitated a re-inspection and that they were content to work with the Chief Officer on areas for improvement, with a return inspection being made within 3 years (in line with the usual inspection framework).

The Chair invited the Chief Officer to comment on the report:

- Two inspections had been held in Children's Services within a short space of time, the impact was significant and staff had been supported and training had been undertaken.
- The child protection and high risk cases were secure.
- There was a good plan in place going forward which was embedded and a standard relationship had been established with the CSSIW.

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#### **Committee's Conclusion:**

The chair concluded that the written report appeared negative and lacked evidence or analysis to support some 'generalised' statements made, which contrasted with the more positive verbal presentation. The Committee were reassured that despite the tone of the report, the CSSIW were satisfied with the service being provided, with no immediate plans for a re-inspection. The Chair expressed the Committee's concern that an overly negative tone in respect of the performance of Children's Services in Monmouthshire, could have a negative effect on staff morale and also the Council's reputation.

Furthermore, the Chair suggested that Regulatory Bodies should consider the effect the inspection process has on a service, particularly in cases where there is a significant impact on staff's ability to provide a full service due to the inspection demands.

The Chair concluded that significant and much needed improvements had been made to the service following the appointment of the Head of Children's Services. Members congratulated the Head of Children's Services and the team on recent awards that had been received and acknowledged their hard work and commitment.

The Chair advised that recent meetings, conferences and seminars have highlighted the need for Scrutiny members to work with the various regulatory bodies at an early stage. The current practice of only informing the Committee of findings post-inspection, when the select Committee are held to account for their depth of scrutiny and challenge was felt to be unhelpful. The Chair requested that future inspections enabled an opportunity to meet the scrutiny Chair prior to inspection and a further meeting before the final report is drafted to discuss emerging findings.

The Chair advised that the Committee would continue their scrutiny of Children's Services, beginning with scrutiny of safeguarding children procedures at their June Committee meeting. The Committee agreed to support the recommendations of the report and communicate the Committee's stance on this issue to the Cabinet Member.

#### **ii) CARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES INSPECTORATE WALES (CSSIW) REPORT ON THE FOSTERING INSPECTION 2014**

#### **Context:**

Members received a report on the 2014 Fostering Inspection, which gathered evidence from foster panel, foster carers association meeting, staff members, management, samples of foster carer electronic files, samples of other records, attendance at premises.

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#### **Key issues:**

The CSSIW's findings were presented to the Committee as follows:

- ✓ Fostering service had an experienced staff team with staff who have associated experience in other aspects of children's social work.
- ✓ Mechanisms are in place to elicit foster carer views and to involve them in the development of the service e.g. FC4FC and involvement of carers in staff recruitment and induction.
- ✓ Assessment reports have improved due partly to specialist staff training
- ✓ Tracking/gatekeeping
- ✓ The sharing of information with foster carers
- ✓ Written information for children about the fostering service
- ✓ Computer monitoring system to ensure timely DBS updates

Members were informed that there were no non-compliance notices issued at the inspection and that areas requiring improvement were:

- Letters to carers following decisions in relation to approval or ongoing approval need to take place in a timely way and a copy placed on file.
- Training strategy to be developed for foster carers and monitored to ensure that foster carers are provided opportunities to complete the core training in a timely manner.
- Section on carer supervision records for the manager to sign/complete needs to be completed or format revised.
- Clear records needed in place following placement disruption.
- Carer files needed to include record of children placed.
- Further developed annual review of quality of service.

The CSSIW had identified that staff had demonstrated effective performance and were transparent and cooperative during the inspection. There had been criticism in relation to poor communication, however, improvements had been made.

#### **Member Scrutiny:**

- Members advised the CSSIW that in contrary to the previous report, this report had clear evidence to support statements made and appeared to present a balanced view and provided a sound analysis of the areas identified for improvement.
- The Committee were reassured that the report demonstrated effective progress had been made in the fostering service and commended officers on their hard work in ensuring continuous improvement in providing such a vital and complex service.

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member to comment:

- The Cabinet Member supported Committee views, that the report demonstrated good working relationships between carers and the authority.



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- It was recognised that there were areas which could be improved, however, the service was performing well.

#### **Committee's Conclusion:**

The Chair concluded that the report was clear and concise and that the report provided constructive challenge and suggested areas for continued improvement.

The Chair acknowledged that the report presented a positive outlook for the Fostering Service, however, the Committee confirmed that it was committed to supporting the on-going improvement and that the Committee's role would be to ensure that the improvements suggested in the report were taken on board and are implemented.

The Committee agree to monitor the ongoing-progress of the following:

- Timely communication to carers following decisions.
- The development of a Training strategy foster carers and the monitoring of training take-up by foster carers.
- Ensuring all records (e.g. carer supervision records, placement disruption records and carer files) are completed accurately and in a timely manner.
- An annual review of the quality of the service.

Members agreed that they would undertake further scrutiny via staff focus groups and that as part of the Committee's own training agenda, Members would be presented with 3 case studies per year to improve their understanding of the service.

### **iii) CHILDREN'S SERVICES DEVELOPMENT REPORT**

#### **Context:**

Members scrutinised the Children's Services Development report from the Head of Children's Services, which advised members of the developments in Children's Services and updated members on the significant budget issues and financial requirements of the service.

We noted that the request contained in the report only met current demands and further increased services demand for Children's Services was not included.

#### **Key issues:**

Work had progressed in Children's Services over the past year to make changes to service delivery. These have included a greater focus on a child centred approach as well as implementing a number of practice changes.

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In addition the service was tasked with ascertaining the current and future needs of the service to further enhance service delivery to children. This has taken place over the past 8 months and significant progress has been made to enable a better understanding of the needs of children and the needs of our staff group to deliver the services required.

A focus on training has been implemented to begin to underpin effective practice and develop a more child focussed approach across Children's Services. This has included play therapy, case recording, risk and vulnerability and life story work training.

An inspection took place in April 2014, the outcome of which resulted in a further inspection being undertaken. This key inspection took place with 4 weeks' notice to the department. This was undertaken by CSSIW over a 3 week period in November 2014. This looked at Children's Services as well as a full Fostering Inspection. Weeks 1 and 3 focused mainly on the front end of Children's Services that included a case review of 42 cases and interviews with case holding social workers on 24 of those cases. Inspectors also attended meetings, such as, core groups, Child Protection Conferences, meetings with multi-agency partners, meetings with staff groups, visits to children and their families.

The Fostering Inspection took place mainly over 2 days during week 2. Inspectors reviewed foster carer files (asking for 2 additional files on arrival) and interviewed staff and the Team Manager. In addition the inspector attended a Fostering Panel meeting and attended FC4FC (foster carer support group).

The information in this report and the associated business cases were provided to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 2015. SLT agreed to the requests and are currently working with Children's Services to develop a timeline to introduce these posts. They will not all be needed at the same time. For example, until the new Social Workers in the Placement Team have assessed new foster carers, we will not need the additional psychology support until carers have been agreed by the Fostering Panel.

#### **Member Scrutiny:**

- Members questioned the effect of additional expenditure, for the authority, in Children's Services. However, recognised that additional demand for the service had been demonstrated and provision was required, as a statutory service had to be operated. Members were informed that due to the time sensitive nature of the report, there was a need for increased financial resources to be agreed by Cabinet and vulnerable children were a priority for the authority.
- The Committee queried the current staff/caseload ratio. Officers advised that Monmouthshire ratios were similar to that of other authorities however, resources required were dependent upon the individual case.

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#### **Committee's Conclusion:**

The Chair expressed the Committee's support for additional funding for Children's Services in light of the constraints presented within the report.

The Chair confirmed that the Committee agreed to support in principle the following recommendations:

- i) Select supported in principle a commitment to increase financial resources to Children's Services to meet current demand requirements as detailed within this report.
- ii) Members noted that the report related to a number of additional posts. All posts are seen to be permanent posts apart from the 4 additional Social Worker posts (see 5.2), currently covered by agency staff. These posts are viewed as being 18 month posts, whilst further work is undertaken to consider whether service demand can be reduced. It is therefore, unclear at this time, whether these additional posts will be needed long-term. In addition one of the Social Work posts within the Placement and Support Team (see 5.4) is for 12 months only.
- iii) As noted at 5.1 of this report Members have previously agreed an increase of £900,000 to Children's Services. Therefore consideration needs to be given to addressing the short fall on the current expenditure of £300,000 in relation to the costs of placements.

The Chair agreed to write to the Cabinet Member to confirm the Committee's stance and to invite officer to a meeting in 6 months' time to provide a performance update.

#### **iv) CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING 2014/15 MONTH 9 OUTTURN FORECAST STATEMENT**

We noted, for information, the Capital Budget Monitoring 2014/15 Month 9 outturn forecast statement, which was scrutinised at a previous meeting.

### **7. WORK PROGRAMMING**

#### **i) SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2015-2016**

- Meeting 21<sup>st</sup> May 2015:
  - Youth service
  - Gwent Music Service

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- Comprehensive School Heads to be invited to a special meeting, prior to Estyn's autumn visit.

#### **ii) CABINET FORWARD WORK PLANNER**

Members noted the Council and Cabinet Forward work planner.

#### **8. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

Members noted the next Children and Young People Select Committee Meeting would be held on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2015 at 2.00pm.

**The meeting ended at 12.30 pm.**