

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Thursday, 11th February, 2016 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor P. Jones (Chairman)
County Councillor P. Farley (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: L. Guppy, P. Clarke, R. Harris, S. Howarth, D. Jones, M. Powell and M Fowler (Parent Governor Representative)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Sarah McGuinness	Chief Officer, Children & Young People
Sharon Randall-Smith	Head of Achievement and Attainment
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Nicola Perry	Democratic Services Officer
Claire Marchant	Chief Officer Social Care, Health & Housing
Teresa Norris	Policy & Performance Officer
Nikki Wellington	Finance Manager

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor M. Hickman and C Robertshaw (Parent Governor Representative)

8. Declarations of Interest

County Councillors L. Guppy, R. Harris, S.G.M. Howarth, D. Jones and M. Powell each declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest under the Members Code of Conduct, as they are school governors.

9. Public Open Forum

There were no members of the public present.

10. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting

The Committee noted the minutes of previous meetings and made the following amendments:

16th December 2015 – Joint Budget Scrutiny Meeting

Mr M Fowler had given apologies for the meeting.

Page 3 – County Councillor P Farley wished to note an amendment to the minutes and noted that the context of the discussion may have made it appear that the Drill Hall may have been liable to be closed. It was stressed that there had not been a question of the closure of the Drill Hall, but rather that it was noted as a good thriving asset and a candidate for transfer.

16th December 2015 – Joint Special Meeting – Children and Young People and Adults Select Committees

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Mr M Fowler had given apologies for the meeting.

It was requested that the heading should state that it was a joint meeting of Adults Select and Children and Young People Select Committees.

14th January 2016 – Ordinary Meeting

Page 27 – The Chair expressed, that with regards to the funding of the residential element of Mounton House School, the Committee were in unanimous agreement that they could not agree the report deciding the funding formula for Mounton House when the future strategic direction of the school remained unclear. There were omissions from the minutes including £250,000 reduction in funding, and the deficit of £136,000.

The Committee had agreed that the Chair and Vice Chair would visit the school and meet with the Executive Head Teacher and the Chair of Governors to discuss the matter further

It was agreed that in noting these changes, the minutes would be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

11. Estyn Feedback - To receive final feedback from the inspection

We welcomed Estyn Inspectors Gerard Kerslake, Lead Safeguarding Officer and Karen Newby-Jones, Local Authority Link Inspector, who were in attendance to present the outcomes from a recent monitoring visits.

The Inspectors wished to thank the Authority for working with Estyn during the recent monitoring visits, which had helped the inspectors draw some firm conclusions.

We were informed that the visits followed the original inspection in 2012 which had achieved an overall judgement of unsatisfactory, with a consequence of the Authority being placed in special measures.

Following this visit, Estyn has judged that Monmouthshire County Council has made strong progress in addressing two of the six recommendations arising from the inspection of November 2012, and satisfactory progress in addressing the other four.

As a result, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales considers that the authority is no longer in need of special measures and is removing it from further follow-up activity.

Key messages in the report were highlighted.

Recommendation 1: Ensure that safeguarding procedures are robust and underpinned by a clear policy. The authority has made strong progress in addressing this recommendation.

Recommendation 2: Improve standards of attainment for all groups of pupils, particularly in secondary schools. The authority has made satisfactory progress in addressing this recommendation.

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Recommendation 3: Strengthen the level of challenge to schools and use the full range of powers available to the authority to improve leadership and management in underperforming schools. The authority has made satisfactory progress in addressing this recommendation.

Recommendation 4: Improve corporate planning to strengthen links between the local authority's priorities and service level targets. The authority has made strong progress in addressing this recommendation.

Recommendation 5: Improve self-evaluation across all services and make better use of data to plan services strategically and target resources appropriately. The authority has made satisfactory progress in addressing this recommendation.

Recommendation 6: Ensure that performance management is effective and robust and allows elected members and senior officers to identify and address underperformance. The authority has made satisfactory progress in addressing this recommendation.

Following presentation of the item Members were invited to comment.

A Member commented that as the Authority had been in special measures for three years it was disappointing that no recommendations were in the higher categories. It was evident there was further work to be done and important to tighten scrutiny processes. It was noted that information passed to senior management and the Cabinet Member for education should also be received by the scrutiny committee, in order to address the highlighted issues and to present a timetable of actions to be taken over the coming years.

Mr Kerslake advised the Committee to take heart from the letter that good progress had been made. The Authority was commended for coming out of special measures and it was heard that there were well designed systems and practices in place. However, it was stressed that there was room for continuous improvement and the good evaluation taking place could be improved upon.

A Member referred to the 'next steps' highlighted in the report and the use of the Recovery Board and other external experts. It was requested the Committee be advised of any suggestions or pointers from experiences at other authorities. In response, Mr. Kerslake expressed that the use of external challenge could be highly productive in moving things forward, and noted that in a recent round of monitoring visits to authorities in special measures, external challenge had been productive and should be maintained. It was suggested that a conversation with an authority regarding approaches taken and the groups engaging would be beneficial.

In response to a Members question regarding the EAS, we heard that a number of authorities in the EAS went into special measures, and in terms of criticism of the EAS, it would be worthwhile to wait for the outcome of the inspection of the EAS.

We were informed that the Chair and Vice-Chair were members of the EAS Audit Committee and would be able to take forward the ideas of the Authority.

The Leader of the Council, speaking also on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Education thanked the Inspectors for the way the visits were carried out over the last few months, and noted that it was absolutely important to continue on the journey of continuous improvement. The Leader welcomed the perspective that the Authority had made good progress but there was still more to do. It was noted that Children and Young People Select was a strong scrutiny committee, and the whole organisation had strengthened due to the Estyn inspection. The Chief

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Executive and Leader had met with the Minister to provide information on how we would maintain the continuous improvement, and it was felt important to maintain external challenge. To conclude, the Council welcomed the final letter and acknowledged the key messages.

Committee Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the Estyn Inspectors and noted that as a Committee we were pleased with the progress. We acknowledged there were areas for improvement and agreed that it was important to maintain scrutiny in all areas. It was important not to become complacent, and to maintain continuous improvement. We noted the need for detailed, accurate reports which should be challenged and held to account.

The Committee were grateful for the advice received and were reassured that contact would be maintained with the Link Inspector.

It was recommended that the Cabinet Member and Chief Officer provide feedback to Committee any information received through meetings with critical friends, and other experts within this field of education, and to advise how other authorities were moving forward.

12. National Categorisation Report - Scrutiny of the report categorising schools

Context:

We received a report from the Head of Achievement and Attainment in order to provide Members of the Children and Young People Select Committee with the National Categorisation Summary Report for Monmouthshire Schools 2016.

Key Issues:

In September 2014, the Welsh Government implemented a national categorisation model for all schools in Wales. The purpose of the national categorisation system is to identify schools that are most in need of support, to ensure that support and resources are directed effectively to secure the improvements necessary so that all schools have the capacity to be self-improving and sustainable.

The categorisation process involves the following three 'Steps'.

1. Performance and Standards.
2. Self-evaluation and capacity to self-improve in relation to leadership and teaching and learning.
3. Categorisation and level of support, challenge and intervention.

The Welsh Government have worked with schools, local authorities, consortia and trades unions to further strengthen the national categorisation model. As a result revisions have been made to all three Steps for 2016.

The proportion of Monmouthshire schools placed in a Green or Yellow support category has improved by 13 percentage points compared to 2015. This means that over 70% of our schools are in now Green or Yellow, closing the gap between Monmouthshire, the region and the rest of Wales.

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Primary and secondary school outcomes for Steps 1 and 2 shows an improving and upward trend.

Member Scrutiny:

Members expressed that it may be difficult for members of the public and parents to perceive the actual categories due to the high and low elements. It was agreed that there was a need for a further explanation to provide people with further understanding. It was suggested that the press should provide further information to inform that a 'Red' category could mean needing improvement in certain areas. By simply stating the school is in a Red category could give a bad reputation and be demoralising for pupils and teachers. The Head of Achievement and Attainment explained that they had approached a school in that position and were encouraged to hear that the school had taken steps to explain to parents the meaning of the category. The Officer agreed that it was not helpful when a Red school was reported as being not a good school as this was not the case. A Red school is a school that needs more support but unfortunately the press do not report it in that way.

A Member highlighted that the set targets and percentages of free school meals could significantly reduce the percentage, however there may only be one or two pupils. This could be deemed unfair and have a significant detriment on the banding. It was requested that for future reporting numbers, as well as percentages, be included to provide further light. In response officers agreed that it was important to discuss numbers in schools and report on outcomes for free school meal pupils now include numbers. Officers had attended a school to review progress against an Estyn visit and to challenge the school on outcomes for this year and the free school meals pupils were discussed at an individual level. We heard there were 21 free school meal pupils across the secondary school, which was considered a low number and a positive, and something significant could be done for these pupils. The aspirations were the same for all pupils in Monmouthshire.

A Member of the Committee was impressed with 70% of Monmouthshire schools being in the Green or Yellow category, but questioned the 30% in the amber or red category, and what was being done for these schools. The Head of Achievement and Achievement explained that any school not categorised Yellow or Green was a concern. It was noted that all schools had times of change which could cause the need for additional support. Within Monmouthshire the two Red schools were due to a change of leadership and a change of leadership and significant change to the governing body. Officers explained that both schools were receiving intensive support. Red schools received a high level of scrutiny, carried out half termly. Eight schools in the Amber category had support plans in place. Meetings were held with the schools regularly to determine where, and what levels of, progress had been made. Officers reassured Members that some schools were at the threshold of moving from Amber to Yellow.

The Chair directed a question to the Cabinet Member to determine how the data reflected on the EAS, and if Monmouthshire was receiving value for money. The Cabinet Member for Education explained that Monmouthshire did receive value for money from EAS. Cabinet Members from the region would meet and look at what the EAS were doing for the whole region. There were no specific areas of concern, and the one issue being addressed was the finances of one secondary school, but there was confidence in the action plan in place.

In terms of assessing schools, we heard that the criteria was very tight and processes were moderated regionally. Schools were able to disagree with the categorisation, and appeal. National processes were much tougher. The Chief Officer explained that a change of leadership does have an impact on categorisation and reassured Members that where there was a change of leadership, schools would receive more support.

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It was suggested that in future the report should provide historic data, to enable Members to identify changes and trends.

Recommendations:

The report recommended that Children and Young People Select Committee receive the National Categorisation Summary Report for Monmouthshire Schools 2016 and that Members consider the information contained in the report including the current position of our schools and areas for improvement.

It was also recommended that the Committee use the report to scrutinise the performance of Monmouthshire schools and impact of the Educational Achievement Service and challenge any underperformance.

Committee Conclusion:

The Chair noted that the evaluation of the progress of each school would play a key part of the scrutiny of the EAS. It was acknowledged that the categorisation was an ongoing process and this time next year, with clarity of reports, we would hope to see even more progress.

The Committee noted the good progress to date, indicating effective support and intervention overall. There were areas of concern, specifically media input.

13. Quality Assurance Report EAS - To scrutinise the Quality Assurance Report to ensure an effective service is delivered by the Education Achievement Service (EAS)

Context:

We received a report from the Head of Achievement and Attainment in order to provide Members of the Children and Young People Select Committee the Annual Quality Assurance Report 2015 for the commissioned service provided by the Education Achievement Service.

Key Issues:

In September 2014, a revised process for quality assuring the work and impact of the Education Achievement Service was implemented across the region. This process followed an annual cycle and included monthly reviews and termly evaluations by the Local Authority School Improvement Lead and the Principal Challenge Adviser. At the end of the year the work and impact of the Education Achievement Service was evaluated in detail and presented to the Cabinet Member for further scrutiny and challenge.

The strengths of the service are noted and areas for further improvement identified. Outcomes from this process feeds into the directorate's self-evaluation processes. Included in the report is

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an overview of the work of the Challenge Adviser, the role of the Principal Challenge Adviser and the Quality Assurance process.

Member Scrutiny:

A Member highlighted that the reported meeting had taken place in August and questioned why it had taken so long to receive the report. It was explained that officers did not have the full raft of information at the time the report was put together because the EAS were unable to provide the reports in a consistent format. Officers had been gathering information and the Estyn inspection may have been cause for delay. EAS had taken on board the issues raised and the bundle of reports were now of a different quality. It was confirmed that next year comprehensive reports would be brought to Committee sooner.

We heard that the acronym BIS stood for Business Intelligence Service. Members reiterated the need for explanations of acronyms within the reports.

Members suggested that the report should highlight concerns from the Senior Officer and Cabinet Member, however we noted that by this time the report is actually a summary. Members were keen to scrutinise reports throughout the year in order to address any issues as they arise.

In response to a question regarding adequate engagement between schools and EAS we were informed that the level of engagement was driven by the support category. Almost all schools would accept that the balance is right.

When asked if there were areas where the EAS was currently letting us down, the Head of Achievement and Attainment explained that the BIS reports were not helpful, yet the challenge advisor reports had become increasingly better over time. The National Categorisation Reports viewed by Estyn had not been through the QA process at the time they were requested and were still at a point of discussion.

A Member questioned if there were any areas where the EAS were letting the Authority down. Officers believed that over the years the Challenge Advisor Team had changed and there was now a strong team providing consistent challenge within schools. The BIS area was developing well and there was a good programme of support.

A Member questioned the Cabinet Member if there was confidence that the reports from EAS were fit for purpose as per the Estyn letter. In response we heard that the EAS had grown into their role and report writing had been an area of development. The EAS had received an inspection and was due another in the near future, and were therefore ensuring all was in order.

A Member requested further clarification on why we believe the EAS provided value for money. The Cabinet Member explained that value for money was important in all aspects of the Council. The EAS had broken the budget down to enable Cabinet Members to see what we were receiving and to identify if schools were progressing accordingly. We were able to identify that targets were being met, and if they were not we would be asking different questions. The targets set in schools were being achieved and standards were going up faster than the all Wales. It was believed that the value for money was greater now than when it first started.

A Member questioned if the EAS were delivering effectively in Welsh education. In response we heard that there the EAS provide two areas of support being Welsh as a first language and Welsh as a second language. Although the Welsh team were one group they both work differently and different support was given. The second language support was very good and

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the schools were doing very well. Where Welsh as a second language had been identified as an area for development progress was swift with a good impact from the EAS team. There were only two schools with Welsh as a first language often with a small cohort. It was noted that many of the pupils who attended the schools were not from Welsh speaking homes and were being judged as they would be judged in all Welsh schools where a greater proportion of pupils were from a home where Welsh was spoken as a first language. With only 2 schools to compare the average would be brought down which would therefore have an impact on the overall position of the Welsh first language schools, putting up 16th and 20th in Wales. The support for the Welsh first language schools was provided by an experience challenge advisor, and things were developing and improving significantly.

A Member questioned if the reports had been well written would it have reflected a different position. The Head of Achievement and Attainment confirmed that certain impacts identified in schools by officers had not been reflected in the reports. Improvements could be seen that were not appearing in the reports being received. It was not thought that the reports would have changed what was being seen but rather would have confirmed and clarified what had happened.

In terms of a programme we heard that this was dependant on needs, and progress was monitored half termly. The Cabinet Member confirmed that there were plans in place for all red schools and the Head of Governors would be asked if the plan was working and to identify progress being made. Schools would be assessed to monitor the progress of the plan.

The Chair suggested it would be appropriate from a scrutiny point of view to receive reports sooner. We were advised that the regional group were looking at a mechanism to enable even greater scrutiny of Red and Amber schools. Further detail could be provided to Committee as it becomes available.

Recommendations:

The report recommended that the Children and Young People Select Committee receive the Annual Quality Assurance Report 2015 and that Members consider the current position and areas for improvement for the school improvement service provided by the Education Achievement Service.

It was also recommended that Members use this report to scrutinise the quality and impact of the Educational Achievement Service and challenge any underperformance.

Committee Conclusion:

The Chair thanked officers for the report and, along with the Cabinet Member, providing detailed answers for the Committee.

The Committee were satisfied that overall the impact of the EAS work was improving, and improving outcomes from schools had been positive. The overall balance between support and intervention was appropriate, and challenge had been welcomed by schools.

The Committee had noted shortcomings, for instance the standard of reports, which were now improving.

Progress would be considered when the next annual report is received.

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The Committee recommended that we receive 6 monthly updates on the progress being made within the Red schools.

We noted that the Chair and Vice Chair would be members of the EAS Audit Committee and would therefore be able to provide greater feedback.

14. Childhood Obesity - To consult the Committee on a Childhood Obesity Strategy for Gwent - Public Health Wales

We welcomed Dr Sarah Aitken, Consultant in Public Health Medicine from Aneurin Bevan Gwent Local Public Health Team who was in attendance to present a report on the Childhood Obesity Strategy for Gwent.

Context:

The purpose of the report was to introduce the Gwent Childhood Obesity Strategy to 2025, "Fit for Future Generations" to the Children and Young People Select Committee and to develop understanding of the significant impact of obesity and childhood obesity on people and the public service sector, the benefits of coordinated effective action and the recommended strategic approach to delivery.

The Committee were informed of the response across the Gwent / ABUHB area and heard suggestions that Members could take to support implementation of the strategy in Monmouthshire and to enable the Committee to input at the early stages of development of a Monmouthshire response.

Following a detailed presentation highlighting the key issues of the strategy Members were invited to comment.

Members Scrutiny:

A Member expressed that in order to develop a programme of obesity prevention there were many areas that would need to be addressed, such as supermarket lay outs, access of leisure centre vending machines, lack of exercise adequate facilities. Also it was thought that there was no indication of children who were obese through illness. Dr Aitken responded by noting that there were choices that families could be made in terms of supermarkets. With regards to the environment it was recognised some aspects were more difficult but there were still things that could be done, such as walking. It was important to focus on what we can do. It was recognised that there are some genetic dispositions but this was a small part of what is recognised about people being obese.

The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health expressed that this was a fascinating subject in terms of many social issues. It was important to form understanding and to determine what could be done. Education is key, and we need to address the issue in a simple way. Every person who presents obesity issues would do so for individual reasons. In context of the Social Care and Wellbeing Act being introduced in April 2016, was as an Authority we must be more informative to the community on what is available to them and understanding how people can be helped. It was important to consider developing education from an early age to understand the tendencies people have and what can be done to abstain in order to achieve a healthier and happier life.

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A Member observed that many people think that eating healthily could be expensive and that more should be done to educate and develop cooking skills in young mothers. It was suggested that this could be developed in more areas.

Dr Aitken noted that all suggestions were valid but should be part of a joined up plan.

Members expressed that the huge choices of food, low pay and low aspirations were all part of the problem.

It was suggested that Planning and Tourism and Leisure departments should be involved to determine the action plan, in terms of the development of fast food establishments, or to develop free swim programmes. It was recommended that further discussions take place to a wider audience.

A Member suggested that a career line be developed to identify points where the organisation can intervene and make a difference. A suggested starting point would be to address the healthy schools programme.

The Chair suggested that there should be wider membership and this could be addressed at full Council, to ensure maximum involvement.

In terms of what was required of the Committee we noted that a timeline was needed and a meeting should be held as soon as possible to establish an initial action plan.

Recommendations:

The Committee were asked to provide comment on the draft strategy: "Fit for future generations – a Childhood obesity strategy for Gwent to 2025" particularly noting the public service wide benefits if we tackle childhood obesity effectively.

The Committee were asked to note that Monmouthshire Local Service Board (in future the Public Service Board) have agreed to provide overall governance and accountability for delivery on the Childhood Obesity Strategy. Structures and processes for delivery of the strategy are at the early stages of development, and any input from the Committee at this stage is welcomed.

The Committee are asked to consider the following:

- The role of Elected Members as leaders for this cross-government agenda
- The role of Elected Members in scrutinising services and policies for impact on childhood obesity
- How we can best engage with the population to change attitudes around obesity and the leadership role of Elected Members in facilitating this

Committee Conclusion:

The Chair thanked Dr Aitken for the report and reiterated that there would be benefits to bringing the report to full Council.

The Committee looked forward to implementing the Fit for Future Generations Act.

It was noted that each Local Authority would be represented on the PSB Audit Committee, where ideas could be brought forward.

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The Committee fully supported adopting the Childhood Obesity Strategy as a Wellbeing Objective.

15. Revenue & Capital Monitoring 2015/16 - Month 9 Outturn Forecast Statement

The Committee agreed to defer the item to the meeting on the 22nd February 2016.

16. Children and Young People Select Committee Forward Work Programme

We noted the future Work Programme for the Children and Young People Select Committee. In doing so it was confirmed that there would be a special meeting on Monday 22nd February at 10.00am, to include the following items:

- Adoption and Fostering - Scrutiny of the performance of the South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) ~ Annual Report
- Implications of the Social Care and Wellbeing Act
- Flying Start performance report
- Deferred Item – Month 9 Revenue and Capital Monitoring.

It was proposed and agreed to Call In the Cabinet Decision dated 3rd February 2016 'Proposed changes to the funding formula for schools'. It was agreed to bring this to the Special Meeting on 22nd February 2016.

17. To confirm the date and time of the next meeting

We noted forthcoming meeting dates as:

- 22nd February 2016 – Special Meeting
- 17th March 2016 – Ordinary Meeting

The meeting ended at 1.30 pm