

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minu

Meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Tuesday, 12th November, 2019 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor T.Thomas (Chairman)
County Councillor L.Jones (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: L.Brown, M.Groucutt,
D. Jones, M.Lane, M. Powell, J.Watkins

Mr. P. Strong – NEU
Mrs. M. Harris – Association of School Governors

Also in attendance County Councillor R. Harris

Officers in Attendance

Jane Rodgers, Head of Children's Services
Nikki Wellington, Finance Manager
Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager

APOLOGIES: Ms. F. Middleton (NASUWT) and Ms. Thomas (Church in Wales)

1. Declarations of Interest.

None.

2. Public Open Forum.

No members of the public were present.

3. Scrutiny of the performance of safeguarding children.

The report was being brought to the Children and Young People's Select Committee in order that they could evaluate the progress of the council's key safeguarding priorities during 2018/19 and the effectiveness overall of safeguarding in Monmouthshire. The report highlighted risks and mitigations and outlined key actions for further improvement. The lead officer explained that having reported on a six monthly basis following previous unsatisfactory audits and the authority being taken into 'special measures', the council has much greater confidence in the journey undertaken and that the future reporting arrangements are to be annual. The committee heard that the outcome of a recent Wales Audit Office inspection will be reported in the near future. The lead officer discussed the performance of the council in detail, referring to Appendix 2 of the report, the key points included:

- Safeguarding should be embedded within every council service and a self-assessment is currently being undertaken within each directorate.
- The council is well aware of emerging risks on safeguarding, key examples being modern day slavery and child sexual exploitation and how other council

departments such as licensing have a key role in ensuring safeguarding of children and adults.

- External commissioned services remain a challenge as every service commissioned needs to be thoroughly checked, so in terms of self-evaluation scoring, the score is lower until we have really made sure every department has done that and internal audit have verified that is the case.

Challenge:

- The committee acknowledges the tremendous strides that have been made since the time that safeguarding was deemed inadequate. Last year, a joint inspection by Estyn, the Care in Wales and Wales Audit Office concluded that safeguarding practice was robust, but that work needed to continue with some departments who may not have an obvious connection with safeguarding. I would like some reassurance that we are doing this and that now that we have better systems in place, we are revisiting the old system to see if things have slipped through the net.

There are lots of layers as to how we reassure ourselves we have the right checks in place. I can reassure you that the employment checks are in place and the safer recruitment process ensures that people we employ have the correct checks in place. We've not taken our focus off that. The element we are acknowledging is still transitional and is therefore reflected through our scoring, is the training aspect. All departments are completing SAFE self-assessments and must comply with the safeguarding programme, so our self-evaluation score is an acknowledgment that in terms of a cross-council approach with this system, we're still not there. We are currently reliant on the SAFE'S and the safeguarding leads in the department undertaking more manual systems until we are fully automated. It's a reflection of the work we need to do around this.

- There are concerns in relations to community delivered services, having attended a community-led mother and toddler group last year where it was evident that any adult could come to the group. In addition, the head of the centre had not been trained on safeguarding. I followed it up a few months later and this person still had not been trained. How proactive are we as a council in going into communities and advising that people need training?

This is a really good question. There are our directly run services, then there are those where we have a tentative relationship and we take some responsibility even though our role is less clear. It really is a case of how good the relationships are. We need each directorate to identify groups in communities and make the right connections. The work around volunteering has brought much more control to some of these activities, but this is a prime example of where every officer needs to be able to be vigilant and every elected member and to highlight to us these cases, in line with our statutory responsibilities.

- This leads on to the issue of elected member training. Do you need to work with group leaders to ensure that every member is trained?

We do, but there are still members who have not been trained and it's very difficult, but the responsibilities for members are statutory and therefore, they should all attend mandatory training.

- In terms of staff training, 48% of workforce have not been trained and this is a concern. When are we expecting 100% of staff to have completed the training?
The figures do not represent the very latest position and we need to review this and assess the less obvious people who may need the training.
- Appendix 3 mentions deadlines in terms of safeguarding actions and it seems most of the actions are anticipated to be completed by March 2020. Would it be possible for the committee to receive an interim report in April 2020 to review progress made (bearing in mind that reports will now be annually)?
It is true that most actions are scheduled for completion in March 2020 and by then, we should have a progress report against each action, with outcomes, but the data won't have been validated, so we wouldn't be in a position to do a full report until November 2020, but we could prepare an interim report on the key areas.
- The report discusses 'managing allegations' and suspensions. I have concerns around suspensions in terms of recent case law stating that suspensions are not a neutral act. In recognising that the decision to suspend is not taken lightly, the suspension process is extremely costly and highly upsetting, so I'm concerned as to whether schools have adequate guidance on the advised approach, to ensure everyone is acting in accordance with the law.
I understand your points made around suspension. We have a process that supports employees and there's a risk assessment to guide those decisions, but it is hard to generalise as each case is unique. There is a clear process and schools are supported as opposed to being left alone to make that decision. We have regional guidance that we work to.
- We are unsure whether level 1 training for school governors is enough and would ask that you review training for governors.
- Clarity on whether the 'Prevent Strategy' training covers all types of extreme behaviour, which was confirmed to be the case.

Outcome and Chair's Conclusion:

The committee were satisfied with the progress outlined in the report and agreed the following outcomes:

- The recent WAO review would be reported to the committee when published.
- Progress report in April 2020 to review progress on key actions, together with a summary of the self-assessments undertaken in each of the directorates.
- We request officers work with the political group leaders to ensure that all elected members are trained.
- We request that officers provide clarification for schools on the process around suspension.
- The committee will scrutinise the next annual report in November 2020.

4. To scrutinise the proposed changes to the School Funding Formula as part of the formal consultation process.

The report was brought to the committee to seek the views of members on the proposed changes to the funding formula for all schools, whilst this is under consultation. The lead officer advised that this review is a regular review in order to ensure the fairest distribution of funding to schools. The Schools Funding Forum had requested a working group review the formula and having undertaken the review, the forum has made the recommendations outlined in paragraph 3.2 of the report. The officer explained that the rationale for the recommendations is outlined in section 3 of the consultation document attached in appendix 1 of the report.

The committee were advised that there were no proposals to reduce the overall funding, but that the recommendations outlined in the report proposed a redistribution of funds in a fairer way. The views of the select committee would be taken into account with the consultation responses when the Executive make a decision.

Challenge:

- My first question is around equity. I'm keen for everyone to be treated equally and I believe that whenever we get an opportunity to consider funding, we should address inequality and disadvantage. Some schools have to spend a lot of resources on addressing inequality, so I would be reassured if we could somehow acknowledge the effect of deprivation.
It is difficult, it's essentially the same pot of money and we are just redistributing it in a fairer way, but we will consider this. There are Welsh Government grants that address deprivation and the pupil deprivation grants that go to schools are one of these, but we will take tis into account.
- Please can you offer more explanation into the rationale for the changes, the justification and explain the impacts on schools?
The officer described in detail the rationale for the recommendations, explaining that some schools received funding streams for services they no longer administered and that through consultation, the feedback of each school had been taken into account in making the recommendations.

Outcome and Chair's Conclusion:

The committee supported the proposals to change the schools funding formula in line with the findings and recommendations of the Schools Funding Forum's review. They acknowledged that the overall funding for schools is not being reduced, but that funds are being distributed in a fairer way. The committee requested:

- The officer considers how best to reflect the issue of deprivation.
- The Service Level Agreement on payroll is emailed to the committee.

The chair reminded the committee that all elected members can feed their individual comments through via the consultation process.

5. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting.

There were some amendments to be made in terms of attendance at the meeting and it was requested that Democratic Services revisit the attendance sheet and make the necessary amendments. Co-opted members Peter Strong, Fay Middleton and Maggie Harris were in attendance but are not listed. In addition, Councillor Paul Pavia is listed as a member of the committee when he is not a member and attended in an observing capacity.

6. Children and Young People Select Committee Forward Work Plan.

The Scrutiny Manager discussed the forward plan and this was agreed by the committee.

7. Council and Cabinet Work Plan.

Noted.

8. Next Meeting: Tuesday 17th December 2019 at 10.00am.

Noted.