

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held
at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK - County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk on
Friday, 22nd March, 2019 at 10.00 am**

PRESENT: County Councillor M.Groucutt (Chairman)
County Councillor L.Jones (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: L.Brown, D. Jones, M. Powell, T.Thomas, and
R.John.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Nikki Wellington	Finance Manager
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Matthew Jones	School and Student Access Manager

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Mike Fowler	Parent Governor Representative
Leanne Wakerley	Chair, Monmouthshire Association of School Governors (MASG)
Zoe Elsmore	NASUWT
Peter Strong	NEU
Beverley Randall	Headteacher, Mounton House Special School
Gareth Jones	Chair, Governing Body of Mounton House Special School

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors M.Lane, J.Watkins and S. Woodhouse

1. Declarations of Interest

- County Councillor P. Pavia declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in item 3: School Admission Policy and School Catchment Areas as Chair of the Governing Body of St. Mary's RC Primary School.
- County Councillor V. Smith declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in item 3: School Admission Policy and School Catchment Areas as her grandchildren attend Goytre Fawr Primary School
- Mr. M. Fowler declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in item 3: School Admission Policy and School Catchment Areas as Chair of Raglan Church in Wales Primary School Governing Body which is a member of the Monmouth cluster of schools.
- Mrs. L. Wakerley, declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in item 3: School Admission Policy and School Catchment Areas as Chair of Trellech Primary School Governing Body.
- County Councillor A. Easson declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in item 3: School Admission Policy and School Catchment Areas as a School Governor at Dewstow Primary School and Ysgol Gymraeg Y Ffin.
- County Councillor M. Powell declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in item 3: School Admission Policy and School Catchment Areas as a School Governor at King Henry VIII Comprehensive School.

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- County Councillor T. Thomas declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in item 3: School Admission Policy and School Catchment Areas as a School Governor at Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni.
- County Councillor D. Jones declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in item 3: School Admission Policy and School Catchment Areas as a School Governor at Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni and Llanvihangel Crucorney Primary School.

2. Schools Admission Policy and School Catchment Areas: To seek the views of scrutiny as part of the consultation on the proposed changes.

The Chair welcomed five parents representing parents and children at Usk Church in Wales Primary School and Goytre Fawr Primary School to the meeting. The following points were made:

Parents from Usk made the following points:

- There was support for the proposal that Usk and surrounding areas form part of the catchment area for Monmouth Comprehensive School, thus enabling children and young people to continue their education through the Monmouthshire education system. The current system has led to friendship groups of children being split up between four schools due to the lack of designated secondary school. This has adversely impacted on children and parents' wellbeing plus the stress of the admission appeals process.
- It was commented that, under the new plan, a child wishing to follow an older sibling to Caerleon Comprehensive School would not be entitled to free home to school transport as it is not now the nearest school, and there was the potential that siblings would not attend the same school.
- The oversubscription criteria was highlighted as a problem as there would be less chance of obtaining a place at Monmouth Comprehensive School from some addresses due to the distance from the school, with pupils from the Forest of Dean and Herefordshire being closer. Priority should be given to pupils living in Monmouthshire.
- The proposed change from Caerleon Comprehensive School catchment was felt to be too quick and unfair, and should be introduced from Reception age to better allow parental choice.
- Consultation meetings were held at the same time as school parents' evenings.
- The admission of children from English schools creates difficulties with Welsh studies at Monmouth Comprehensive School, having had no experience or appreciation of the language.

The Chief Officer responded that there had been full and complete consultation comprising public meetings and an online survey.

Parents from Goytre made the following additional points:

- There were too many consultation documents for parents to read, digest and respond to in a short period of time.
- Different information was given at different meetings.
- Concern about prejudicial interest from elected members with children educated in Monmouthshire schools.
- A younger sibling will be in catchment for King Henry VIII Comprehensive School, and the elder at Caerleon School. Parents would prefer they attend the same school as they live closer to Caerleon School which is oversubscribed.
- Concerns were raised about aspects of the online survey and storage of data.

The Chief Officer responded that:

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- There is no predetermined decision and that all views have been sought in a range of ways, as fairly as possible.
- There is no personal or prejudicial interest for elected members.
- Regarding the survey, GDPR is taken into consideration and a balance of data will be looked at.

The School and Student Access Manager summarised the proposals and provided an overview of the consultation feedback. This was mainly from Goytre and Usk parents where the majority of families didn't have a catchment school in Monmouthshire. A report will be written for consideration by Cabinet and will be publically available.

It was confirmed that, during the consultation process, the views of children and young people in the schools affected have been sought and will form part of the consultation report

It was clarified that Newport City Council is not reviewing catchment areas and still considers Usk and Goytre to be within catchment for Caerleon School.

It was confirmed that home to school transport would be provided to the nearest or catchment school.

It was explained that the oversubscription criteria will also be consulted upon and will form part of the Cabinet decision.

The Cabinet Member appreciated parents' concerns and supported that parents should be able to express a preference and have as much choice as possible, but also that Monmouthshire children should be able to access places in Monmouthshire secondary schools.

The Cabinet Member addressed the points raised about the consultation emphasising that timescales were reasonable for a decision by 15th April 2019. The conflict between dates for the public meetings and parents' evenings were not raised as an issue prior to the public meetings otherwise changes would have been made. It was confirmed that dual catchment is still under consideration.

Regarding oversubscription at Monmouth and Caerleon Comprehensive Schools, it was explained that consideration is being given to a feeder school in the admissions criteria so peer groups and siblings can stay together.

It was not possible to agree sibling criteria with Newport in advance as this would have prejudged the consultation.

Member Scrutiny:

- A Select Committee Member wholly supported the proposals. In a period of unprecedented education reform, implementation is being driven by the cluster and it is unfair that pupils from a school within a cluster don't feed into the cluster secondary school. It was suggested that catchment should align with clusters. Monmouth Comprehensive manages transition very well and not all pupils from Usk have the opportunity to benefit.
- A Member referred to the difficulties of parents managing children in different schools and asked how these difficulties could be lessened. The Member commented on the oversubscription to Monmouth and undersubscription to Chepstow Schools. It was

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suggested that Chepstow School could be offered as an alternative to Monmouth Comprehensive School.

- Several Members supported the proposals for Usk area and acknowledged the participation of parents in the meeting.
- A Member asked about Tredunnoch and Llanhennock pupils and it was confirmed that currently, they fall outside of Usk Church in Wales Primary School catchment and will remain part of Caerleon Comprehensive School catchment. If in future years Newport City Council discontinues this arrangement, an appropriate Monmouthshire School will be sought.

Committee Conclusion:

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, summed up that the local authority is trying to bring rationality to the admissions system, so that Monmouthshire children can attend Monmouthshire schools. The four Comprehensive schools lead the clusters and will know the schools and children feeding in (subject to parental wishes).

The Committee expressed a view by voting and unanimously supported that Monmouthshire children should attend Monmouthshire schools, that catchment areas align with cluster areas and that wherever possible friends from KS2 shouldn't be separated. Dual catchment for Caerleon Comprehensive School will remain available for at least one year until Newport City Council reviews its admissions arrangements.

It was agreed that future reviews will monitor the situation of Chepstow Comprehensive School.

The Chair thanked the parents for their attendance at the meeting.

3. To discuss future options for Mounton House Special School

Key Issues:

The Chief Officer clarified that the formal consultation on the closure of Mounton House School is in progress and provided background information about the school. Questions were invited

Member scrutiny:

- A Member of the Select Committee opposed the proposal and suggested that Option 3 (change type of provision) would be preferable to avoid closure which would go against the authority's policies and the wellbeing agenda. It was acknowledged that finances are difficult on the existing numbers but it was queried why there was no detail of alternative strategy to compare against closure. In response, the Chief Officer clarified that there are no other alternatives because these would have had to have been costed and would have led to a predetermined case. If the proposals are agreed, alternative strategy for the accommodation of additional learning needs would be compiled at that time.
- A Member of the Select Committee, and also the local member for the school, supported the original Option 3 to change provision at the school to meet the requirements of children with ASD and SEBD in the county on a transitional basis and referred to the table of advantages provided at that time Caerphilly. It was added that there is strong support for the school within the local community and that staff have enormous impact

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on the lives of the pupils. The Public Service Board priority of giving all children in the county the best start in life was referred to. It was recognised that these are vulnerable children in need of the support they receive through the provision at the school. In turn, this improves learning for mainstream pupils by reducing challenging behaviour in the classroom. The Member doubted the financial aspects of the reasons for closure and supported the school remaining open gradually widening the number of pupils and age range and transitioning to accessing 21st C School funding to make improvements to cover the growing need in the county. The Member referred to the Change.Org petition signed by 2200 people. Referring to possible modifications to the school, a breakdown of the costs has been requested. The Chief Officer explained that developments in other authorities has contributed to less pupils for Mounon House School. It was added, regarding Band B/C capital funding, that decisions on priorities in the county have been very difficult. A further capital cost will bring more challenges. Band C funding isn't released until 2024 and the financial position at the school will worsen in the interim time.

- A Member also opposed the closure of the school and supported Option 3 and was concerned about the consequences for the children e.g. the potential for long bus journeys to access alternative provision. The Chief Officer responded that there is need to think about appropriate access and provision for children, and levels of need. There is no presumption that pupils would return to mainstream with one to one support.
- A Member referred to the falling numbers at the school and suggested that the only way to keep the school open is to have more numbers. The savings would provide funding for more children in the county.
- The Chair referred to his experience with young people with diagnosed mental health disorders and of the need for close work with the NHS CAMHS services and the Public Service Board so they receive the services they need. He was clear that any saved money must not return to a general schools fund.
- A Member referred to the significant amount of staff dissatisfaction with the consultation process, and questioned why staff could not have been involved in options appraisal. Attention was drawn to the Outreach work carried out in schools by staff and requested that the funding follows the child in that respect. The Member referred to the previous inclusion of the School as an important component of the outcomes of the ALN review. The Member also supported Option 3 and the redevelopment of services on the site. The Chief Officer explained that everyone has opportunity to put forward views in the consultation process and the process will be fair and transparent. It was confirmed that the Age Weighted Pupil Unit of funding follows the child to the Pupil Referral Service.
- A Member raised the need for a better model for the school for both sexes to cope with the level of need and supported Option 3.
- A Member asked if the Select Committee could see the consultation responses.

The Headteacher of the school spoke about the successful work and outcomes achieved at the school. She expressed concern that there were only two options in the consultation report; to remain the same or close. She was encouraged by talk of Option 3. She supported the re-designation of the school by age and gender and to change the formula with a new business plan and use the school in a different way to meet the needs of Monmouthshire pupils including for those pupils in mainstream schools. The Chair of Governors supported the points made by the Headteacher. He added that there was an opportunity to capitalise on the residential facilities for respite care.

A union representative explained that her main concern behaviour in mainstream and referred to her positive experience of the outreach work provided by the school. She was concerned that, in the interim, there was the potential for good staff to leave due to uncertainties and supported an alternate change of provision.

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Committee conclusion:

The Chair summarised the views of the Select Committee noting the strong support for Option 3 and also a very strong case on whether the school should remain open.

It was considered very important that the voice of staff is listened to in the process, and also that the best use of expertise is made going forward.

The Committee encouraged all interested parties to make the best use of the opportunity to comment.

The Chair requested that the Select Committee has the opportunity to scrutinise final proposals, and asked that the matter is an agenda item for a future meeting.

The Chair thanked everyone for their participation and attendance.

4. Next meeting: 4th April 2019

The meeting ended at 12.47 pm