

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Thursday, 2nd December, 2021 at 10.00 am

Councillors in attendance

County Councillor T.Thomas (Chair)
County Councillor L. Brown (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: C.Edwards, M.Groucutt,
D. Jones, M.Lane, M. Powell and J.Watkins

Officers in attendance

Sharon Randall-Smith, Head of Achievement and Attainment
Will McLean, Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Jane Rodgers, Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Mark Fennessy, Youth Homeless Co-Ordinator
Louise Wilce, Inspire Co-Ordinator
Melissa Toombs, Key Stage 2/3 transition worker

Apologies: Peter Strong, NEU

1. View declarations of interest

The committee agreed to record any declarations of interest as and when appropriate in discussing the reports.

2. Public Open Forum

There were no representations from members of the public present at the meeting.

3. Chepstow School Update

The Chief Officer introduced his briefing note, drawing member's attention to the key points:

- Condition of the building ~ The 21st Century Schools Programme is focussed on providing sustainable buildings for the future, i.e. net zero carbon. Despite some works being undertaken at Chepstow School, the building is not energy efficient and significant work is required to bring it to the standard expected for a 21st Century school.
- Capacity ~ The current capacity is 1282 places, with 738 pupils on roll resulting in 544 surplus places – 42%. It is unlikely that numbers will change dramatically over the next 6 or 7 years with no significant growth through live births or housing development expected. The school is also currently seeing a movement of pupils to Wyedean, whilst the Headteacher and Chepstow School have worked closely with the primary schools in the cluster to encourage a greater number of children to transition to Chepstow.

- Work will commence in the next 12 months to look at primary and secondary education in the whole Chepstow area to ensure that the education estate is fit for purpose and delivers value for money.

The chair thanked the officer for his update and invited questions from the committee, as follows:

Member Challenge:

- Do we know if the costs of updating the building to meet the required sustainability standard are going to exceed the cost of a new building and when would any decision be made? Can you clarify the band funding rates referred to in the note?

You are right and this has been shown with the other two schools, so a detailed survey is needed to ascertain whether the building can tolerate that level of renewal. The band funding intervention rate for next time is not something I'm currently sighted on at the moment, as it's still being worked through, so we'll await clarity and update you when we have this.

- I appreciate the focus is on developing Abergavenny School at the moment, but I am pleased to see that work is being undertaken to put Chepstow on a position to be able to bid for that band C funding when it becomes available, recognising it's a long way off in 2024-25. I'm delighted to see the improvements that have been made throughout the summer to enhance the learning environment with new lighting and reducing the carbon footprint. We hope that despite budgets being stretched, that we can continue the investment in the school. My question is what more can be done now so that Chepstow students receive equal learning environment standards as their peers?
- *We are always reviewing capital finance available to us but it's always a balance in terms of meeting the needs of all schools but we will continue to see what scope there is to continue to improve the school, that is something we can commit to.*
- I also would like to suggest a survey of pupils leaving primary school to see why they are choosing Wyedean rather than Chepstow.

A survey would be a good idea to understand the challenges. Chepstow is one of the smallest clusters, much smaller than Abergavenny for example. Some of the messages we hear anecdotally is that the opposite occurs 20 miles north in Monmouth with English students wanting to join, but asking the parents is a good idea as a survey could provide a more quantitative evidence base upon which to draw conclusions.

- The report refers to looking at the primary school condition also, given that there are still portable buildings being used, recognising that would depend on available capital funding.

I take on board your point. It may be that the cost of replacing the portable building may be too great, but we can see if there are any section 106 monies or other funding streams that could be used to make improvements.

- The brief suggest pupil numbers are expected to remain the same, but with proposed housing developments at High Beech roundabout and also at Sedbury, would it be worth discussing this with the Forest of Dean and have you taken full account of future housing developments along the border?

This is a good question. Unfortunately, we can't take account of development in England and similarly our own schools that border neighbouring Welsh authorities, but we are aware there may be knock on implications in terms of fewer of our residents sending children across the border given the increased demand for schools where development is taking place, so we will ensure we are aware of this and take account of it in that regard.

Chair's Conclusion:

I'd like to thank the officer for the update on this issue. The focus of Welsh Government on the net zero carbon is noteworthy and whilst we recognise the costs of retrofitting the school, we must commend you on the improvements made so far which have been very impressive. We would like to see ongoing investment in the school, given that 2024-25 is some time away and current pupils need to benefit. We understand the capacity issues, being a border school and that there are limitations as to what we can do about that. We feel a questionnaire would be helpful to gain some quantitative data on reasons rather than relying on hearsay. The report has been very useful, and we will look to revisit this later in in 2022.

4. Welsh Education Strategic Plan

The Head of Service for Children and Young People was invited to present a brief update on the conclusions drawn from the consultation process which included face to face events with stakeholders and headteachers. The officer highlighted the following points:

- Five formal responses had been received to date, but more are expected before the deadline.
- One key conclusion is that there is generally support for the growth of Welsh Language across Monmouthshire.
- There is some disappointment in our seedling school not being open from 2022, however, from 2023. Also some concerns from the English medium schools on the impact that will have on them, and how we ensure our plan is robust enough to meet the Welsh language development in all our schools, Welsh or English medium.
- We have discussed the plan fully with Estyn and are awaiting their response.
- We have taken action around the seedling school which was discussed at your previous meeting, aiming to establish a seedling school as soon as possible, but recognising there are some significant challenges in achieving this quickly with the need for a full consultation process and an election in May 2022, however, we are confident that we can have that in place for September 2023. For children who were looking to attend that school from September 2022, we will look to provide a seedling to cover reception and year 1 in the interim and will

look to communicate that to parents as soon as possible so that they can make their plans.

- The draft WESP will need to be approved by the Cabinet and then Welsh Government.
- I'm pleased to update you that the council has established a 3 year pilot for late immersion provision which is up and running with a few pupils attending and it is seeming to have quite an impact already on Ysgol Y fin and applications for 2023, so this is a huge increase on what we have seen to date. I'm pleased to advise you that to accelerate this work, the council has bid for and been awarded approximately £84,000 grant monies to support later immersion over the next 2 terms, based on additional staffing and resources and training techniques, which will help us with increased future demand.

The chair thanked the Officer for the comprehensive update and invited questions from members. Councillors Tudor Thomas and David Hughes-Jones declared personal but non prejudicial interests as governors at Ysgol Y Fin, Abergavenny.

Member Challenge:

- Recognising the best laid plans can be put off course by external influences, however in a recent governor report taken to the board of governors at King Henry, members understood that some students who had previously been receiving Welsh language provision in Torfaen had found their provision had been withdrawn and subsequently joining King Henry School, who were trying to support them. Is there any additional funding that could be made available to King Henry School to do this?

At the moment, the grant is for late immersion, not for those already speaking some degree of Welsh, however, secondary schools in other authorities have established late immersion provision so in their own counties. We work closely with partners and maybe in the future, there will be funding, but there is nothing that I'm aware of at this time.

Chairs Conclusion:

The chair thanked the officer for providing the update. Whilst it is disappointing the seedling school is to be delayed, the challenges are unavoidable and it's pleasing to see the pilot for late immersion which does seem to be working in terms of keeping children together in schools and continuing their learning.

5. Employment and Skills

The chair advised that this report had been scrutinised by the Economy and Development Select Committee and that it was being brought to this committee to on an information basis to update members on the activities being delivered by the Employment and Skills Team. The chair asked officers to briefly present the report, the main points highlighted being:

- The Team has undergone a restructure, with delivery now including Kickstart, InFuSe and the extended Communities for Work Plus delivery team.

- Kickstart is a UK Employment programme developed in response to Covid 19 and is part of the UK Government's Covid response within their 'Plan for Jobs', aiming to create thousands of new, fully funded jobs across England, Scotland and Wales. The scheme aligns with Welsh Government's Employability Plan in preparing for a radical shift in the world of work, responding to current and future skills gaps and providing a personalised approach to employability support. The Scheme aims to create fully subsidised, six-month work placements for individuals aged 16- 24 who are claiming Universal Credit and are at risk of long-term unemployment.
- InFuSe: this is the European Social Fund (ESF) public sector innovative future services programme, which aims to build skills and capacity for Innovation in public services across the Cardiff Capital Region. The programme enables employees to seek to tackle a range of real-world local challenges including Decarbonisation of Council fleets; Home energy efficiency; Opportunities for energy from dog fouling; Maximising supply chains through procurement; and Asset Based Community Development.
- The Employment and Skills Team are leading on/delivering projects with an estimated value of £2.4m in the 2021-22 financial year in line with project targets and outcomes.
- Inspire2Achieve, Inspire2Work and Skills@Work which are ESF funded projects, will end in December 2022 with the conclusion of this EU funding stream. This presents a challenge for the sustainability of the local authorities' NEET and unemployment figures. The loss of provision coupled with the experience, knowledge and skills set of these teams will negatively impact upon Monmouthshire residents.
- Torfaen County Borough Council are leading on an Employability Paper on behalf of the ten Local Authorities of the Cardiff Capital Region, which sets out the region's future employment and skills demands and explores how the Shared Prosperity Fund can support this going forward.
- The report that has been approved by the CCR Strategic Board will be taken through all the Local Authorities' Cabinets.
- In the interim, a regional Community Renewal Fund bid was submitted for short term funding between August 2021 and March 2022 in readiness for a subsequent bid to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in 2022/23.
- It is hoped that the bid will enhance the current service by:
 - Developing a Triage system – a mechanism to ensure referrals to the right support;
 - Employing a Wellbeing Engagement Worker
 - Enhancing the Digital and outreach engagement
 - Sourcing employment opportunities in Construction and Digital
 - Targeting employment support for homeless/at risk of homelessness

The chair thanked the team who had given their time to present to members on the breadth of their work and invited questions from members:

Member Questions:

- Can I clarify whether young people who take a year out of university are counted as NEET?

Yes, this would include anyone who is not engaged in any educational training, so this can include athletes and people who have many different reasons, so it's important that the team explores the figures in order to determine why people may not be in education or employment and if they would benefit from our services. Some young people are suffering anxiety and would benefit from our support and through the pandemic, it has become more evident. Some may be missing support they should be receiving from child and Adult Mental Health Services but key to this is understanding the reasons and helping to support them. The Early Help Panel is effective in providing that entry point and anchor for them, particularly if they are receiving continuing support.

- It's reassuring to hear 'Inspire to Achieve' is starting in year 6. If funding is due to end, can you elaborate on your future funding position?

We have been recently successful in interim funding ahead of the UK Prosperity Funding and we are working as 10 local authorities to determine what comes next in terms of a regional approach to a local delivery plan. We want to continue to provide support at keys stage 2 and through to 3 and we'd like to return in the summer with an update on that.

- Are you fully engaged with the 4 comprehensives?

We have a worker in each of the schools who are part of the staffing and that allowed support to be put in place very quickly, unlike in some other schools in other counties where the support is more on a 'drop in' basis. We see this as pivotal.

- Looking at Appendix 3 and the various schemes, I'm not sure whether participants are from Monmouthshire, so if in a further report, we could have a breakdown so that we can draw comparisons, that would be helpful.

The numbers are Monmouthshire specific, but I can provide numbers for wider Gwent if you would like to draw those comparisons.

Maggie Harris declared a personal but non prejudicial interest as a governor as a member of Deri View Primary.

- These support systems can go under the radar if not known about. These sort of systems such as the Early Help System enables them to drop in and out of children's lives as needed and is an invaluable support mechanism for young people. I fully support the work you are doing.

Chairs Conclusion:

The chair gave thanks to the team for their invaluable work in supporting young people at transition stage between key stage 2 (primary) to key stage 3 (comprehensive) and the interventions are critical for children whose parents may not be able to advocate on their behalf, The committee was reassured in terms the ongoing funding position to ensure these youngsters do not remain in a position of not in education or employment,

so the committee was heartened to hear that the support is provide to these young people in these circumstances. The committee agreed to invite officers to return in the summer of 2022.

6. Children and Young People Select Committee Forward Work Planner

The chair drew members' attention to the next meeting of the Children and Young People's Select Committee that would discuss the Youth Offending Service and Budget Monitoring Month 7. The committee agreed to call a Special Meeting on 31st January at 2pm to scrutinise the Council's budget proposals.

7. Cabinet and Council Work Plan

The committee noted the report but did not highlight anything needed particular scrutiny that hadn't been taken into account in developing the Select Committee's work programme.

8. To confirm minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed and seconded.

9. Date and time of the next meeting: 20th January 2022

The meeting ended at **11.20 am**