

# Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

**Meeting of Public Services Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Tuesday, 8th February, 2022 at 10.00 am**

## **Councillors Present**

County Councillor T. Thomas (Chairman)

County Councillors: P. Jordan, R.Roden, J.Treharne, S. Woodhouse and P. Jones

## **Officers in Attendance**

Sharran Lloyd, LSB Development Manager  
Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager

Richard Jones, Performance Manager  
Phil Diamond, Service Manager, Gwent Regional Partnership Board

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors D. Batrouni and S. Howarth

### **1. To elect a Chair.**

Councillor Thomas was proposed by Councillor Roden and seconded by Councillor Jordan.

### **2. Apologies for Absence.**

### **3. Declarations of Interest.**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **4. Public Open Forum.**

No public submissions were received.

### **5. Population Needs Assessment**

Phil Diamond delivered the presentation and answered the members' questions, with additional comments from Councillor Penny Jones and Richard Jones.

### **Challenge:**

*Regarding Disabled Facilities Grants and their take-up, can you further explain the diagrams on p49?*

We have been guided by elected members to look at the regional impact of the DFGs, which are available to any resident to adapt their home to enable people to live in their own home longer. But the cost of building materials has increased, while their availability has decreased. We've also seen the effect of fewer Occupational Therapists,

who normally visit people in their own home to assess what modifications are needed. Again, this is an impact on the workforce; with fewer OTs available, we have seen increased waiting times for those assessments.

Recent Welsh Government guidance has introduced a financial assessment. Unfortunately, this is putting some people off – they feel that the assessment might affect them in other ways. But it is just meant to ensure that the right people have access to the DFGs. All of this compounds the issue and leads to a fear that fewer people will apply for the grants. It will be harder for those who don't apply to live in their own homes, possibly leading to increased falls and hospital admissions. Across the region we are linking in with the 5 commissioning leads within social services and looking at the Welsh Government funding available to us to help with the larger homes' adaptations i.e. those in excess of £36k. Because the pandemic is a backdrop to this work, other issues and challenges are likely to come to the fore over the next 12-18 months. Once mapping and impact analysis has been conducted across the 5 authorities, that could come back to this committee for a wider discussion.

*One of the emerging priorities in Item 6, under Mental Health, includes “an increased understanding and awareness of mental health among the public to reduce stigma and help to seek support earlier.” How do you propose to achieve this?*

Following publication of the PNA, we will be required to produce an action plan response, so all of the emerging needs will be highlighted and through an area plan we will set the actions to address them. The first place to start is children and young people – educating and informing at an early age about mental health. So, there is a huge amount of work going on in schools, particularly in Monmouthshire through the healthy schools agenda. In general, it is a case of public awareness. We have developed a website with the health board, called Melo, with information for the public about services and steps that they can take. Increasingly, people are more comfortable admitting that they are struggling with their mental health – a charity working with the Welsh Dragons is an example of a positive shift. We are working with schools and the third sector to get out as much information as possible and convey the message that help needed for mental health should be seen the same as help needed for physical health.

*For continuity, Monmouthshire is purple on the graphs in the reports, but not consistently.*

That's a very helpful observation, thank you.

*There is increasing pressure on carers, and demand for them, which seems to be unsustainable. How can Gwent cope in the future? Is funding similar in the 5 councils?*

Yes, it does seem unsustainable. There is a focus through Welsh Government, specifically, a £1m carers grant that is distributed across Wales each year that enables us to look at regional solutions. We have a regional carers board, chaired by a director of social services, on which sit representatives from health, community sector, and carers themselves. The key point is that in order to support carers, we need to listen to them. We know that respite for carers is critical, which will require investment. People want more adaptable and flexible solutions. For example, a carer might only need to step away for two hours. So, the voice of the carer is paramount, and respite is the number one issue that keeps coming up. Access to information is also important. A single individual providing care for over 50 hours a week is unsustainable, so it's a question of how we can support that. Welsh Government and the carers national strategy is very much focussed on this problem, as are regional boards, but it is not a problem that is likely to be solved in the immediate future.

*Is there a possibility to look for respite volunteers amongst the family and community of those with dementia, particularly for small amounts of time?*

Definitely. 'Befriending' is the term widely used for solutions of this sort and is something that the Alzheimer's Society has taken on, for example. Some communities do this automatically. Some who retire want to give back to the community, so we have an opportunity with our ageing population to increase volunteering. Peer-to-peer support with carers is also important: dementia-friendly cafes, for example, have previously provided this sort of wider support.

*Has the evidence been fed into the Gwent Well-being Assessment? How will it be used by the PSB to determine future priorities?*

We have worked very closely for a number of years to ensure that there is alignment and synergy between the assessments. For example, the needs of carers will come up through the well-being assessment engagement exercises, but there's no need for the WBAs to include information on carers because there is a statutory duty in the PNA to look at their well-being. But there will be signposts in the documents for where the information can be found, rather than duplicating it. The collaborative approach should lead to a collaborative response, so that overlap and duplication of efforts are minimised. In the PNA, there are highlighted boxes to signpost relevant areas in the well-being assessment. The colour schemes and font etc. are also consistent between the two so they are almost two parts of the same document. Comments from today will be fed into the final PNA when it goes to Council for sign-off. How we respond to the

issues identified will present opportunities to work between what is now the Gwent Public Services Board and Gwent Regional Partnerships Board.

### **Chair's Summary:**

Thank you for the comprehensive presentation on an important piece of work. Education in schools to remove stigma from mental health issues is key. There has already been a great improvement compared to previous decades. Councillor Penny Jones reiterated the importance of this work and called attention to the Carers Strategy group that works across all agencies and supports carers. Welsh Government is now much more aware of their role. More respite facilities are clearly required. The increase in the age groups of the over 65s and over 85s is surprising and will engender much more support being delivered. The care issue is ongoing, bringing a huge strain on providers. Career structure and pay are key drivers for whether people choose to enter that profession.

### **6. Gwent Well Being Assessment**

Richard Jones and Sharran Lloyd delivered the presentation and answered the members' questions:

#### **Challenge:**

*Monmouthshire's rurality makes it different from the other 4 counties. In Appendix 3, in Q3, "What things are important for you and your family", broadband is a low priority. Does this indicate that there should be separate rural and town data, reflecting different priorities?*

While the Gwent assessment will look at well-being across Gwent as a whole, there is also the duty to assess local areas within Gwent. Hopefully, how we have assessed the five areas within Monmouthshire, and assessed well-being in the county as a whole, will give some assurance that we are considering evidence at a more local level. This can influence and feed into how the PSB takes that into account in its Gwent well-being assessment and taken into account, where needed, within the local delivery group and partnerships that have been mentioned. A key reason behind completing the Monmouthshire level assessment was to understand those differences between and within communities for well-being.

We know that broadband is an issue. Although we worked very hard to get as many engagement responses as possible, we recognise that there were some limitations. We got over 500 responses, which is a strong evidence base, but it's important that we

consider them alongside other feedback, evidence, data and information that we have about the county. So, people's views are important, but in the case of broadband we will also look at things like what the coverage is, who has access to super-fast broadband, in what areas, etc., which we can put alongside what people are saying. In the assessment we have looked in more detail at this matter.

*The least important thing in Q3 is Welsh, which is remarkable, given the 10% spoken rate across the county as a whole (higher in particular areas such as Abergavenny). Why does the data not reflect the efforts made with the language in Monmouthshire? Does the way we gather the data need to change?*

While the great deal of work that has been done to promote the language has not come through so strongly in the responses to Q3, there were some responses relating to it when asked what they would like their community to look like in the future, for example. Again, we will sit the evidence from this exercise alongside feedback from other consultations with community groups and other organisations working in the county. In the assessment you will see that we have drawn on other evidence and data concerning the role played by the Welsh language in our communities, and the role it could play in the future.

### **Chair's Summary:**

Thank you for the work that has gone into this. Welsh is slowly increasing, with 16% now in Abergavenny (some of whom moved in from elsewhere) and the school burgeoning. It takes time, and the third school coming in Monmouth will move things along further. I would have expected more about broadband too, given that it is now a fundamental requirement. It is difficult to gather the information at county level but particularly then at lower regions, given the county's diversity. Its size makes public transport a pressing problem. It is good to see that officers are picking up information at a more local level and feeding it in to the regional PSB. This is then very difficult, given the difference in needs between someone in Monmouth and Newport, for example.

We need to tackle the causes of health inequality, which is a major concern, and to recognise that poverty and inequality are different things – a clear distinction is needed. It would be good to achieve carbon-neutral initiatives on a regional scale, such as the Gwent Green Grid. Monmouthshire no doubt has a higher carbon footprint because of the reliance on cars, as well as farm vehicles. Substance abuse is a major problem, as are mental health problems and domestic abuse, which is very high in certain areas. We need to think about how well-placed the CAMHS service is to deal with demand which has increased since the start of Covid. Social Care reform also needs consideration; the

focus has been on the Real Living Wage but it's broader than that. It is very hard in children given the stark dichotomy between those on high and low incomes, for example in Abergavenny.

**7. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 5th July 2021.**

The minutes were confirmed and signed as an accurate record, proposed by Councillor Roden and seconded by Councillor Woodhouse.

**8. To consider the Select Committee's Forward Work Programme.**

**9. Date and time of the next meeting: to be confirmed**