

# Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA with remote attendance on Tuesday, 16th July, 2024 at 10.00 am

## Councillors Present

County Councillor Alistair Neill (Chairman)

County Councillors: Jill Bond, Rachel Buckler, Meirion Howells, Paul Pavia, Peter Strong and Ben Callard

## Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager  
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer  
Peter Davies, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer, Resources  
Frances O'Brien, Chief Officer, Communities and Place  
Will McLean, Chief Officer for Children and Young People  
Richard Jones, Performance and Data Insight Manager  
Jonathan Davies, Head of Finance  
Ian Saunders, Chief Officer Customer, Culture and Wellbeing.  
Hannah Carter, Performance Analyst  
Stacey Jones, Senior Accountant  
Dave Loder, Finance Manager  
Nikki Wellington, Finance Manager

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors John Crook, Catherine Fookes and Ann Webb

### 1. Declarations of Interest

None.

### 2. Public Open Forum

None.

### 3. Self-Assessment 2023/24

Richard Jones and Hannah Carter introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Peter Davies and Will Mclean.

#### **Key points from Members:**

- Members sought further detail on the specific strategies being implemented to address financial pressures, and how the medium-term financial strategy will ensure long-term financial stability without an over-reliance on reserves.
- Members asked how the council plans to achieve its net zero targets, and what steps are being taken to secure the necessary public investment to support the environmental initiatives.

- Officers were asked what measures are being put in place to improve school attendance and support vulnerable learners, and how is the council addressing the needs of care leavers to prevent homelessness.
- Concerning changes that have been made, members queried whether users and stakeholders are consulted with as much as possible in order to best adopt the changes and implement new ideas.
- Further detail was sought about the decrease in train usage.
- Further information was requested on the increase in the number of rapes and school exclusions. The Committee sought confirmation that the council is doing everything possible to ensure that schools record incidents of sexual assault accurately and are developing strategies to address them.
- Members asked for further information about the council having the lowest gross revenue spend per head in Wales in 22/23.
- It was noted that it would be useful to have further comparison data in tackling inequalities other than income e.g. age inequality
- Staff and members were encouraged to complete the Carbon Literacy training.
- Clarification was sought about some of the report's graphs, and it was noted that data on bus journeys and other active travel would be useful in addition to car and rail
- Members asked whether reports from regulators, such as the Care Inspectorate Wales report, have a bearing on the overall ratings given and whether collaborative work such as working with the Future Generations Commissioner's office has been considered.
- The Chair noted that recognising areas that require improvements, and the solutions needed, bolsters a self-assessment's credibility, and that this could be built into service reports.
- Members questioned how frequently and to what extent, performance information is used in our services to drive performance improvement.
- Regarding the transformation of services to meet budget challenges, the committee observed that it is hard to find evidence of performance review or an assessment of transformations made over the last year, and asked why, noting the importance of any radical changes being monitored closely.

Officers present responded to all of the questions raised and the Committee was satisfied with the responses given.

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

The Chair welcomed the report and thanked the officers for its detail, and for having incorporated all-Wales comparisons, though he noted that more could still be done in that regard in order to give a fuller picture of performance. He also welcomed more service user feedback having been incorporated, as previously requested. The report was moved.

### **ACTIONS:**

Members suggested making changes to errors such as missing targets and other omissions, for which a list will be sent to officers, as well as changing contractions to more formal English.

The principal areas for further scrutiny that were identified by members were long-term financial stability, homelessness and care leavers, environmental stability, and monitoring change and transformations in council services. It was noted that the first is in hand with items already on the committee's work programme and the second is being covered by People committee on 17<sup>th</sup> July. The third area is being/will be covered by Place committee, and scrutiny officers will take forward the fourth area.

#### **4. Financial Update Report 2023/24 and 2024/25**

Cabinet Member Ben Callard introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Peter Davies, Jonathan Davies and Will Mclean.

##### **Key points from Members:**

- Members asked what specific measures are being considered to address the ongoing financial risks in various areas such as Adult Social Care, and what steps will be taken to ensure that overspends are addressed promptly.
- Questions were asked about measures currently being taken to improve efficiency and reduce overspends in key areas, and whether contingency plans are being developed to manage unexpected costs.
- Members queried whether staff and service users are being engaged to identify potential efficiencies, and if plans are in place to reallocate services from underspent areas to overspent ones.
- Members asked whether staff vacancies were putting pressure on existing staff, and if any well-being issues or problems with retention have resulted. Further, it was asked if vacancies have had an effect on the delivery of services to residents.
- Further detail was sought about task management in services and where best to fit resources.
- Regarding staff shortages, it was asked if any service areas are reaching a critical point in their capacity to deliver frontline services.
- Members asked about the current expectation on Health and Social Care, with 70% of its savings targets having been met, and whether further service redesign is needed. Members expressed concern over the extent to which the overspend in social care is being addressed.
- The Committee asked if it could be updated on the position of the 13 schools in deficit, surplus places, and whether companies carrying out maintenance are being actively monitored to ensure value for money.
- Questions were asked as to whether health partners are effectively delivering their responsibilities in terms of continuing health care and what more could be done to ensure there is a shared ambition for the services they deliver.
- It was asked if care charges still running high is due to a delay in payment or genuine cases of hardship, and what measures are being put in place to increase footfall to attractions such as Borough Theatre.
- Members asked if there was an update on units being let at Newport Leisure Park and Castle Gate.
- Members asked to what extent we are dependent on short term grants, and the level of uncertainty that they entail.

- Clarity was sought as to the level of radical change needed, as reported in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, and what will be done to make radical changes to bring costs under control.
- Members asked for further information about how the underspend in strategic initiatives offset the £4m overspend.
- Concern was expressed that the largest portion (£12.2m) of the predicted shortfall over the 24-29 period will occur next year.
- Further detail was sought about the reasons for slippages in key infrastructure projects.

The Committee was satisfied with the responses given by the Cabinet Member and officers present.

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

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for the report. The committee recognises the challenges faced by the council and understands that there won't be an immediate solution. The report was moved.

### **5. Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme**

Members were reminded that they are invited to attend the meeting of People Scrutiny on 23<sup>rd</sup> July, at which the Care Inspectorate Wales Inspection report and Home to School Transport policy will be scrutinised.

### **6. Cabinet and Council Planner**

### **7. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 18th June 2024**

The minutes were confirmed.

### **8. Next Meeting**

23rd September 2024 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 12.26 pm.