

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK on Tuesday, 8th October, 2024 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor Alistair Neill, (Chairman)
County Rachel Buckler, Councillor (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: Jill Bond, John Crook, Steven Garratt, Meirion Howells, Paul Pavia, Peter Strong, Ann Webb, Simon Howarth, Penny Jones, Maureen Powell, Sue Riley, and Jackie Strong

Also in attendance County Councillor:
Ian Chandler, Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health Services

Officers in Attendance

Jane Rodgers, Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Diane Corrister, Head of Children's Services
Jess Scarisbrick, Safeguarding and Early Help Service Manager
Jenny Jenkins, Head of Adult Services

APOLOGIES: None

Note: Minutes do not serve as a verbatim record of the meeting but provide a summary of the Committee's discussion. For the full discussion, please access the recording of the meeting:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOqolimCObE&list=PLlmqn4nAaFJDsC93C-EKJZrFkDEQBdiXK&index=23

1. Apologies for Absence

None.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Development of Children's Placements Policy

Cabinet Member Ian Chandler and Jane Rodgers introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Diane Corrister.

Key questions from Members:

- A member asked about the public consultation process in relation to locations for residential care homes and sought reassurance that due diligence is applied. The Cabinet Member clarified that while there is no public consultation for specific property acquisitions, local elected members are consulted. Once a property is acquired, engagement sessions with immediate neighbours are held to ensure good relations.
- The delays in the development of children's residential placements was raised, with members asking if there is any hope of bringing forward the completion dates. Officers explained that while there have been delays, the properties will be ready by their respective deadlines. The transition work for supported accommodation has already commenced.

- The reliance on grants was raised, with members asking about the potential impact if a grant is not approved. Officers clarified that the money for the Caerphilly technical team is already encompassed within the original grant, so there will be no detrimental effect if the new grant is not approved. Grants are pursued for capital purchases, but revenue is not reliant on grants. Future projects may involve prudential borrowing if grants are not available.
- Questions were asked about the structure for purchasing properties. The criteria for property purchases were explained, including physical requirements and location considerations, and value for money in relation to business cases was stressed.
- Members queried the transition of risks from for-profit to in-house provision. Officers explained that transition risks include workforce recruitment and the challenges of setting up in-house residential teams. Partnerships with experienced providers and regional colleagues help to mitigate these risks.
- The mentorship for care leavers was raised, with members strongly supporting the need for ongoing support. Officers explained that mentorship for care leavers is provided through personal assistants and peer support groups. Efforts are made to integrate young people into their communities.
- It was asked what role and powers the council has if a private provider were to open a home somewhere that we would consider inappropriate. Officers responded that the council has little control over that, with the registration process undertaken by Care Inspectorate Wales, who have their own regulations and requirements.
- There were questions about the technical elements needed for developing in-house residential care placements and workforce recruitment risks. Officers explained that workforce recruitment is challenging, but the council aims to attract workers through unique selling points and good terms and conditions.
- Clarity was sought on the regional not-for-profit market and members queried the opportunities for potential future partnerships. Officers explained that the appetite for not-for-profit providers to expand is constrained, but efforts are ongoing to build partnerships.
- A member sought reassurance that we are not considering bringing back young people into the county who are in settled and successful placements elsewhere. Officers explained that each case is considered individually, and the best long-term interests of the young person are prioritized. Some children with complex needs might not be brought back.
- A question was asked about additional capacity being included in the original business case. Officers clarified that the additional costs of a service manager was built into the first two business cases as part of the ongoing revenue cost.
- Members asked how much input young people have had in the development of the properties, and what the potential career development is for workers in the new service. Officers explained that young people have been involved in recruitment and visiting properties, while residential care is a great entry point for careers in social work, and Monmouthshire has a history of growing its own talent.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair extended his thanks, on behalf of members, to every member of staff across the whole of Adults and Children's social care, emphasising that members are conscious of the fact that these reports are about individual people and the great work and efforts made by all the staff. The report was moved.

4. Chief Officer for Social Care Annual Monitoring Report

Cabinet Member Ian Chandler and Jane Rodgers introduced the report. Jane Rodgers answered the members' questions with Jenny Jenkins.

Key questions from Members:

- The rationale for the significant increases in pressures and numbers requiring services in Monmouthshire was questioned, in particular, how the team is coping with the increased demand for services. The Chief Officer explained that the pressures are felt across the service, with the most notable increase at the front door of children's services. Factors include the long-term impact of Covid on children's development and family functioning, pressures within partner organizations, and societal issues like the cost-of-living crisis. A deep dive analysis is being conducted to understand and address these pressures – **ACTION (to provide this deep dive analysis for the committee once it is ready)**
- In terms of the decommissioning of Budden Crescent, whether the council has achieved an equivalent level of service satisfaction after the decommissioning, with members asking what progress has been made to improve the offer for those with complex needs. Officers acknowledged that while the decommissioning of Budden Crescent was difficult, the current respite offer includes direct payments, shared lives carers, and spot purchasing, which have not led to overall negative impacts. However, there is still a need to improve options for people with more complex needs.
- In relation to foster carers, it was asked whether increasing our offer to foster carers would result in savings by recruiting more foster carers and reducing reliance on independent fostering agencies. Officers discussed the challenge of balancing financial incentives with practical and emotional support. While increasing financial offers might help, it could lead to a competitive cycle with independent agencies. They are considering reviewing the financial offer to find a balance.
- Members asked how they can publicly share the good news and achievements of the social care team to the public in a sensitive manner. The discussion highlighted the importance of involving communications teams to share the positive news and achievements of the social care team with the public.
- Whether there are enough resources to deliver the ambitious priority actions was raised and whether we are working closely with the health board to reduce the need for resources. Officers explained that while more resources are always needed, they are working with what they have.
- Members asked if it would be possible to get more detail about the approximately 20% who disagree to the questions in the questionnaire – **ACTION (Chief Officer to collate outcomes and try to get more detail)**
- A member asked whether a detrimental financial impact on foster carers is factored in officers responded that that will be taken into consideration as part of what's offered.
- Officers were asked what has been working particularly well and what has been of concern. They responded that Reablement and the amazing practitioners working with families in need are areas that have worked well, while implementing oversight and controls at a whole service level has provided valuable insights into need, demand, and practice, enabling more tailored support for the workforce. Furthermore, developing a training module to support social workers in having complex conversations about care charges and financial situations has been effective. Particular concerns include the increased demand in the numbers and complexity of cases, the ageing demographic, and the need to do more to support unpaid carers.
- A member asked about the current state of waiting lists and reablement beds at Severn Park. Officers explained that there has been significant progress in reducing waiting lists, with the focus on strengthening the front door response to avoid putting people on waiting lists. Additionally, there is 'further faster funding' which is being used to add extra resources to the front door, as part of a broader project around the reablement transformation pathway.

- Regarding learning disability, members asked about the practice solutions report and timescales involved. It was explained that the report was agreed 15 months ago but there have been delays in its implementation. The Overmonnow base is now complete and currently being furnished but the base in Melville Theatre has been more complicated to bring forward but there is now a timescale for its completion.
- Regarding children's services, a member asked how much risk is still held with partners and what the impact is on them. Officers responded that despite expanding family support services, there are still high levels of risk. Intensive support services and monitoring arrangements are in place to manage these situations. When dealing with high-risk cases, a tight core group of partners works together, with the lead agency ensuring the safety and welfare of the child.
- Members asked how Severn View Park care home is doing now it's up and running and whether there are plans to open similar homes. Officers explained that the transition to Severn Park Care Home was successful, with extensive work done to familiarise residents with the new environment and allow them to choose their rooms. The feedback from staff has been positive, noting how smoothly the transition went and how quickly everyone adapted. There are no plans to open anything similar in the short term.
- Members asked for the caseload numbers in Children's care, and the number of newly qualified social care workers – **ACTION (to provide the figures)**
- The Chief Officer clarified the difference in the figures of FTE workers in the report: 600 total in the workforce and 471 in Adults Social Care.
- The Chair noted the discrepancy between Life Expectancy and Healthy Life Expectancy, proposing that a future meeting focus on what more can be done to build prevention and resilience – **ACTION (To programme in FWP)**

Chair's Summary:

The Chair thanked the Chief Officer for the report and encouraged residents to read it in order to appreciate the team's work and to understand where the majority of the council's expenditure goes. The report was moved.

5. Safeguarding Annual Report

Cabinet Member Ian Chandler and Jane Rodgers introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Diane Corrister.

Key questions from Members:

- The source of the definition 'what good looks like' was queried and how it is determined. Officers explained that the definition comes from a range of sources, including legislation, corporate safeguarding policy, and experience working at a whole authority level. The cornerstone approach has been developed over many years and is informed by tools used in the past around effective safeguarding boards.
- Members asked how dependent we are on training for driving improvement, and when the Thingi training will be in place. It was explained that the transition to the new national standards for safeguarding is ongoing. Thingi has been implemented within social care for over a year and across the Council. The full implementation, including safeguarding modules, is expected to be completed in six months.
- How the Council supports the development of parental understanding and skills around different impacts was questioned. Officers explained that there is a range of services from prevention to intensive provisions aimed at supporting families and parents. Building Stronger Families and other services work to achieve good safeguarding outcomes for children by supporting parents.

- Whether there are there any improvements related to addressing issues of misogyny or extreme misogyny in schools. A joint bid has been submitted for a grant to address misogyny and relationship violence in schools. This pilot project will involve social care and education working directly in schools.
- It was asked how the Chief Officer feels about the delivery of her action plan, given that many actions are marked as ongoing or amber. Actions marked as amber are brought forward into the current year. The activities are whole authority efforts, not just social care, and are worked on continuously.
- Members enquired about the level of support in place for adult safeguarding concerns, particularly for domiciliary care workers who may face complaints or accusations. It was explained that the process for professional concerns includes a multi-agency panel that ensures the welfare and well-being of the staff involved. Support structures are in place to offer assistance, including mental health and emotional well-being support.
- The Chair raised concerns around self-assessment as a method of measuring the performance of services, querying the frequency of inspections was held, and reiterating the suggestion of bringing in other authorities in to give their opinion and to share learning. It was explained there is no specific regulatory report for whole authority safeguarding, but it is assessed during other inspections. The most recent inspection in February 2024 suggested strong safeguarding arrangements across the council.

Chair's Summary:

On behalf of the committee, the Chair wished to again pass on the committee's enormous appreciation to all staff. The report was moved.

6. Next Meeting - 15th October at 14.00

The meeting ended at **12.48 pm**