

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Children and Young People Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk held on Thursday 9th July 2015 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT: County Councillor P. Jones (Chair)

County Councillors: P. Farley, D. Jones, R. Harris, S. Howarth and M. Powell.

Also in attendance Councillor E Hackett Pain

CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

K. Plow, C. Robertshaw, M. Fowler

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

S. McGuinness	-	Chief Officer, Children and Young People
S. Randall Smith	-	Head of Achievement and Attainment
S. Hall	-	Early Years Manager
M. Jones	-	Access Unit Manager
T. Thomas	-	Youth & Community Manager
R. Austin	-	Principal Officer Inclusion
T. Jelfs	-	Head of Children's Services
M. Howcroft	-	Assistant Head of Finance
N. Wellington	-	Finance Manager
T. Stokes	-	Finance Manager
T. Norris	-	Policy & Performance Officer
H. Ilett	-	Scrutiny Manager
S. King	-	Senior Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors P. Clarke, L. Guppy and M. Hickman, and Canon Dr. S James.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

County Councillors P. Farley, D. Jones, P. Jones, R. Harris, S. Howarth and M. Powell declared personal non prejudicial interests pursuant to the Members Code of Conduct as LEA appointed school governors.

3. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

No members of the public addressed the Committee as part of the public open forum.

4. MINUTES

Members confirmed and signed the minutes of the Children and Young People Select Committee meeting held on 21st May 2015.

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5. SCRUTINY OF FINANCE REPORTS

i) DRAFT REVENUE & CAPITAL OUTTURN 2014/15

Context:

Members scrutinised the Draft Revenue & Capital Outturn 2104/15 report, presented by the Assistant Head of Finance.

The purpose of the report was:

- To provide Members with information on the outturn position of the Authority for the 2014/15 financial year. The position is regarded as draft prior to external audit of Statement of Accounts.
- To provide summary information about the Council's reserve position as a consequence of year end movements and given recent reports in last quarter that have significant future implications.
- To be considered by Select Committees as part of their responsibility to,
 - assess whether effective budget monitoring is taking place,
 - monitor the extent to which budgets are spent in accordance with agreed budget and policy framework,
 - challenge the reasonableness of projected over or underspends, and
 - monitor the achievement of predicted efficiency gains or progress in relation to savings proposals.

Key issues:

Directorate accountants highlighted specific details contained within reports which were identified as:

- Revenue & Capital outturn report presented the replenishment of £152,000 to school balances and the transfer of bottom line surplus to Council Fund of £31,000.
- It was intended that further consideration was given to how grant considerations could be aggregated by the Authority, alongside general school accounts, so that the combined position was reported.
- The Children and Young People Select Committee were referred to appendix 7, which was directorate specific and included the remit of the select committee.

Member Scrutiny:

- A member raised a query regarding an overspend in Passenger Transport department for SEN pupils and asked whether there was dialogue between two directorates. The committee recognised that the issue had been raised by another select committee, which included the passenger transport remit and relevant officers had been invited to address the committee. The Children and

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Young People Select Committee were advised that the authority were responsible for transport of children.

- A member welcomed the positive approach in a notable change, which created the first cluster base reserve for the Chepstow area as a practical example of how schools intended to share ideas and resources.

Committee's Conclusion:

Chair's Summary:

The Children and Young People Select committee recognised the hard work that had been undertaken and commended the £31k surplus.

It was agreed that this would be conveyed to directorates and heads of services who had achieved savings.

The Chairman expressed thanks to Finance Officers, for the clear, concise and lengthy report.

Report Recommendation:

The report requested that the Committee agree the following recommendations:

- i) That Members consider the information contained within this report noting that the figures may be subject to adjustment through the external audit process.
- ii) That Members consider the position concerning revenue monitoring outturn resulting in the favourable replenishment of Council Fund reserves by £31,000 compared to the budgeted draw of £296,000.
- iii) That Members agree to the review of earmarked reserves resulting in the following adjustments:
Single status and Equal pay reserve - £1.052 million, redistributed to the following reserves:
 - a. Fixed Assets disposal reserve - £257k
 - b. Pension and Redundancy reserve - £600k
 - c. Schools library reserve - £195k to extinguish a deficit balance
- iv) That Members approve the redundancy payments identified in paragraph 3.1.6 included within the outturn figures
- v) That Members consider the position concerning school balances and the implications on 2015-16 school budgets.
- vi) Members note the progress concerning the delivery of the saving mandates in 2014/15 and seek further reports to identify alternate savings and virements proposed by Directors to replace original proposals to ensure further pressure on the 2015/16 budget is reduced.
- vii) That Members consider the position concerning outturn capital monitoring resulting in an overall underspend

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- viii) That Members approve the slippage schedule as identified in Appendix 2, building upon the recommendation at month 9 to review these at outturn.
- ix) Members approve the planned capital financing position as reported in para 3.7.
- x) That Members approve the use of the capital outturn underspend to fund the capital priorities identified in 3.5.6 and therefore obviate the need for 2015/16 capital budgets to be top sliced.

ii) **REVENUE AND CAPITAL MONITORING 2015/16 PERIOD 1 OUTTURN FORECAST STATEMENT**

Context:

Members scrutinised the Revenue and Capital Monitoring 2015/16 Period 1 Outturn Forecast statement report, presented by the Assistant Head of Finance.

The purpose of the report was:

- To provide Members with information on the forecast revenue outturn position of the Authority at the end of period 1 which represents month 2 financial information for the 2015/16 financial year. Revenue and Capital forecasting is being brought forward by a month against the usual timescale to provide members with relevant financial information before summer recess.
- To be considered by Select Committees as part of their responsibility to,
 - assess whether effective budget monitoring is taking place,
 - monitor the extent to which budgets are spent in accordance with agreed budget and policy framework,
 - challenge the reasonableness of projected over or underspends, and
 - monitor the achievement of predicted efficiency gains or progress in relation to savings proposals.

Key Issues:

Directorate accountants highlighted specific details contained within reports which were identified as:

- £742k potential overspend continued to be mitigated by anticipated net Council Tax receipts and favourable treasury considerations.
- School balances had exhibited a fluctuating trend, with some schools showing a continued reduction in school balances. Officers had worked in conjunction with schools in deficit position, and with schools in a surplus position, this ensured that budgets were used correctly.

Member Scrutiny:

- The committee recognised and welcomed the timely presentation of the report.

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- It was requested that figures contained within the report were simplified and consistent, in terms of presentation. Officers confirmed that this would be addressed in future.
- A member enquired as to the amount that was acceptable for school reserves. In response, Welsh Government guidelines had stated £50k for Primary and £100k for Secondary. Previous guidelines had stated 5%.

Committee's Conclusion:

Chair's Summary:

The Chairman expressed thanks to Finance Officers and welcomed the timely nature of the reports.

Report Recommendation:

The report requested that the Committee agree the following recommendations:

- i) That Members consider the position concerning the first period of revenue monitoring in 2015/16 (£252,000 deficit) and seek assurance of the action Chief Officers are taking to address the over spends in their service areas.
- ii) A caveated use of reserves is sought in relation to redundancy costs incurred by services this year totalling £13,000, whilst services will continue to find compensatory savings additional to the mandates to mitigate the net cost pressure by end of financial year.
- iii) Members consider the position concerning period 1 capital monitoring with a revised budget of £58.406 million for the 2015/16 financial year.

6. SCRUTINY OF THE PERFORMANCE OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE DIRECTORATE - CHIEF OFFICER'S ANNUAL REPORT

The Chief Officer, Children and Young People presented the annual report.

Member Scrutiny:

1. **Your self-evaluation suggests that you feel there was a degree of complacency three years ago and highlights the progress made on the journey thus far. How would you describe the position now and how do you evidence this?**
 - Officers were confident that results would reflect progress. There was external validity, which was previously not in place and the directorate was constant scrutiny. The department had clear direction, robust processes and procedures in place, strategic planning is good, practices were proactive rather than reactive.

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- Relationships had developed with schools, outcomes had improved and members were better informed, through challenge.
- Changes had occurred in terms of school leaders, cultures and accountabilities.

In your report, you identify key priorities for the forthcoming year such as;

- **to improve access to education for vulnerable groups**
- **to address key factors to underachievement**
- **to ensure greater challenge and accountability to schools**

Do you think your report is clear enough on the specific activities that will be carried out to deliver each of these?

2.
 - A number of actions were in place to address priorities e.g. collaborative arrangements, development of 21st Century Schools.
 - Vision is focused on the children and how schools are operated
3. **A key focus within your report is “closing the gap in attainment and opportunity” and Estyn have also highlighted the need to improve the performance of FSM eligible pupils. Your own report highlights that “the performance of FSM eligible pupils in the core subject indicator at the end of KS2 has declined over 3 years and is greater than Wales as a whole”. What specific actions will you be taking to ensure the gap is closed?**

Significant work being undertaken and looking at models of best practice.

4. **Your directorate’s closet partner is the EAS and you say that the relationship is “central to success in improving attainment and providing challenge to schools”. How well do you think the Quality Assurance Framework is challenging the EAS to improve achievement levels? How are you ensuring value for money from EAS?**
 - Recognised this as a crucial question, value linked to standards and outcomes.
 - Challenge was in place through SE Wales consortium directors, and challenge advisor meetings.
 - Evaluated against outcomes at end of Key stages.
 - Content and extremely pleased with service that we and children are getting from EAS.
5. **A key focus within your report is “closing the gap in attainment and opportunity” and Estyn have also highlighted the need to improve the performance of FSM eligible pupils. Your own report highlights that “the**

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performance of FSM eligible pupils in the core subject indicator at the end of KS2 has declined over 3 years and is greater than Wales as a whole". What specific actions will you be taking to ensure the gap is closed?

- Discussions held regarding tracking systems for pupils and work being undertaken to ensure teaching practice in primary and secondary schools are aligned.
- Work commissioned with the EAS to look at consistency and comparisons across the region.
- Tracking of children is fundamental aspect in understanding where they go next and where they come from, to ensure seamless approach for transition.

6. We still have 5 schools running at a financial deficit (a reduction in 1 from 6 to 5 schools). What actions will you and your directorate be taking to ensure schools are operating within a financially sound budget? What specific actions will you take to ensure schools are not carrying a surplus budget or operating with a deficit?

- The directorate had looked at raising standards and how SIMS would be implemented and rolled out in classrooms.
- Increased contributions from schools, which will increase training given through sims and will be prioritised to feature at front of programme of work.
- Pilot at Shirenewton school, issues with firewalls have been looked at by SRS. Hoping technical roll out will be quick, teachers will need windows 7 and it is part of priority and benchmark for all equipment in schools. Training will be required, to ensure that teachers are well equipped.
- Planning is an important factor to ensure that budgets would be financially sound.

7. The Select Committee have documented long-standing concerns about the need for an individual pupil tracking system in schools. This was also highlighted by Estyn who said "schools' access to management information systems is inconsistent". We now understand that there will be a capital investment to deliver SIMS via a Cabinet Member decision. Given that this has been a key concern for this Committee, can you explain how this will be delivered, who will lead on it and can you commit to a timescale for implementation?

- There is a minimum expectation that pupil progress meetings would be undertaken with parents at key points through the year.
- Transition meetings for primary secondary are robust and Welsh Government guidelines will be considered.
- Accurate identification of free school meal pupils are a focus point, challenging targets have been set.

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- Reports provided on pupil progress, specifically free school meals, pupil deprivation grant used and pupils identified much earlier. Pivotal to eligibility, is early identification at earliest possible age. Greater focus for free school meal children and focus through use of MySid (programme developed by the consortium), this would support teachers and demonstrate value for money.
8. **The Select Committee has recently scrutinised the Youth Service and their model of future service delivery and concluded that the service needs to provide robust financial detail to convince the Select Committee that the future model will be sustainable and will deliver the overall objective of the service. How confident are you as Cabinet Member that this will both:**
- a) **deliver the intended budget savings**
 - b) **provide a consistent and high quality service to young people**
- Action would be taken on over/underspend and accountability is alongside. Directorate continue to work hard and support settings. Robust measures in place and want to provide best possible support.
9. **How confident are you that the policy changes to the ALN service (based on the SLA with schools) will identify the appropriate pathways for intervention for young people with SEN?**
- Welsh Government guidelines provision to stop statementing children, implementing change in ALN policy. Revised policy transforms needs of children. Communication and engagement with parents and children to identify needs.
10. **The third Estyn visit highlighted that the quality of reporting still requires improvement if it is to sufficiently identify underperformance. The Select Committee has fed back to you directly that reports are not always helpful in terms of clarifying the key issues of concern. What are you doing to address this? How will you ensure there is consistency and quality of reporting within your directorate?**
- Reporting issues were being addressed and Estyn had highlighted that some reports required improvement.
 - Training had been rolled out to the CYP directorate in relation to report writing.
 - Approval for content and quality is considered at each stage of reporting. Work undertaken in collaboration with the policy and performance unit, where advice has been provided.
 - Improvement in process has been recognised, it was anticipated that this would be developed into satisfactory reporting.

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The Chief Officer informed the committee that work would be continued with the EAS, which would evaluate quality and importance of challenge advice.

Committee's Conclusion:

Chair's Summary:

The Chairman expressed thanks to the Chief Officer and recognised that key priorities had been highlighted, which were to be addressed.

The committee welcomed receipt of the updated report, when presented to Council.

Concerns were highlighted regarding performance and the select committee recognised the work being undertaken to improve aspects within Monmouthshire County Council, such as ALN strategy on reduced statements and out of county placements.

The committee were reassured that the directorate had an action plan in place and looked forward to future reports, which specifically defined actions that would be addressed.

Recommendation:

We agreed to recommend:

1. Performance data be reviewed alongside EAS and prior to Estyn review.
2. Officer to be invited to discuss delivering SIMS, progress and transition.

7. SCRUTINY OF PERFORMANCE REPORT: 2014/15 IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOME AGREEMENT

Context:

The Policy and Performance Officer presented the 2014/15 improvement objectives and outcome agreement, the purpose of the report was:

- To present the end of year data for 2014/15 on the Improvement Objective and Outcome Agreement themes under the remit of the Children and Young People's Select Committee:
 - Improvement Objective 1: We will provide an improved education provision for Monmouthshire
 - Outcome Agreement theme 1: Improving school attainment
 - Outcome Agreement theme 3: Tackling Poverty
 - Outcome Agreement theme 5: Improving early years' experiences

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- To present the wider set of key performance measures and targets under the committee's remit as published in the Council's strategic performance plans.

Key issues:

Children and Young People had adopted a more structured regime in its meetings to manage the directorate's business. This has ensured a more robust approach to business planning, monitoring and reviewing performance and securing intervention in services as needed.

Performance on education was identified as accurate, it was noted that the score had been cautious due to the period of special measures.

The committee were invited to scrutinise all performance information provided and raise any concerns.

Member Scrutiny:

- The Chair thanked officers for presenting the report.
- In response to a query regarding why targets had not been achieved. Members were assured that target setting processes were increasingly robust and were considered in conjunction with the Education Achievement Service. However, some targets had been aspirational. The committee were informed that the refinement of processes had informed further refinement in targets. Further information was available, if required.
- The committee were informed that the Outcome Agreement was with the Welsh Government for a three year period and the council were required to deliver on performance activity and associated targets. The current agreement covered 2013-2016, the council was awarded funding each year based on the performance achieved.

Committee's Conclusion:

Chair's Summary:

The Chairman expressed thanks to the Officer.

It was recognised that the committee had discussed and scrutinised many of the subjects.

We welcomed the detail within the report and commended officers for the work that had been involved in the document being developed.

Report Recommendation:

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The report requested that the Committee agree the following recommendations:

1. That members scrutinise the information to assess progress and performance against the objective and themes.
2. That members identify any areas of concern in relation to future activities and seek clarity from those responsible on whether performance can improve.
3. That members consider the accuracy of the evaluation scores based on the evidence provided.
4. That members scrutinise the targets and any revisions to those originally set on key performance indicators.

8. WORK PROGRAMMING

We received and noted the Children and Young People Select Committee work programme.

9. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

We noted the next Children and Young People's Select Committee Meeting would be held on 17th September 2015 at 10.00am

The meeting ended at 4.30 pm