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Councillor Richard John  
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People  
Monmouthshire County Council  
County Hall  
Usk  
Monmouthshire  
NP15 1GA

11 January 2019

*Dear Richard*

Thank you for your letter of the 9<sup>th</sup> January written on behalf of every elected member of Monmouthshire County Council (MCC). I welcome the opportunity to put on record the relevant facts as there has been considerable misinformation circulating on this topic. I follow these facts with an observation about the MCC motion.

The service to be provided to Newport children:

Newport City Council will provide a service to Newport children equivalent to that currently provided by the Gwent Sensory and Communication Support Service (SENCOM). Contrary to claims that have been made in the media, Newport is not anticipating reducing services to individual children.

The service to be provided by SENCOM to children in the four remaining Local Authorities:

In an email sent by the Head of SENCOM, Roger Thurlbeck, on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2018, to Cllrs Batrouni and Watts of MCC Roger states:

**“... the service will continue to provide the level of support required to meet the needs of children with significant levels of need.”**

**“Developments in how we support schools to be able to effectively manage these children with confidence will continue through the development of our training packages and monitoring and liaison processes with schools. This will help us in ensuring we can continue to give the right levels of support to children with greater or more complex needs for the four remaining local authorities we serve as we move forward from next April.”**

It is difficult to interpret this as anything other than an unequivocal statement by the Head of SENCOM that the service to children in Monmouthshire and the other three Local Authorities concerned will continue unaffected. As the remaining SENCOM service will have a budget of circa £1.65m this is easy to understand.



City of Newport

Given the statements quoted above it is difficult to understand the basis upon which MCC debated the motion, which states, "... **and deeply regrets the level of uncertainty created around this essential support network.**" Roger Thurlbeck has provided a clear statement of assurance to MCC Councillors.

The cost of the service:

Newport City Council knows the SENCOM service well, given it has been a long-time partner. As a duty to those who pay Council Tax in Newport the Council has to constantly search for more cost effective ways of delivering services.

Newport City Council is able to deliver an equivalent Service for circa £250k less than its forecast annual contribution to SENCOM. Rather than challenge Newport's approach it might be beneficial to consider the efficiency implications for SENCOM.

The above addresses the substantive points within your letter. For information, I attach a recent Newport City Council press release regarding the establishment of the new Newport Service and a newsletter issued in December to all Newport parents with children currently supported by SENCOM.

I also provide below the address of the Newport City Council budget page, which provides details of the 2019/20 budget proposals, including that of withdrawal from SENCOM:

<http://www.newport.gov.uk/en/Council-Democracy/About-the-council/Budget-consultation-2019-2020.aspx>

Comments can be made at:  
[changing.services@newport.gov.uk](mailto:changing.services@newport.gov.uk)

Regarding the MCC motion, I am concerned that it was thought appropriate for one Local Authority to question and challenge the sovereign decision of another. This concern is made more acute by the apparent non-assembly of appropriate views before the debate and the lack of facts within it, notably the reassurance provided by Roger Thurlbeck.

Yours sincerely  
Debbie

Cynghorydd / Councillor Debbie Wilcox  
Arweinydd / Leader  
Cyngor Dinas Casnewydd / Newport City Council

Copy to: Cllr Gail Giles, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills