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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held
at The Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Thursday, 3rd
January, 2019 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor M. Groucutt (Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Jones, M. Powell and T. Thomas

County Councillor R. Harris, P. Jones and V. Smith attended the meeting by invitation of the Chair.

Mr. P. Strong NEU

Ms. L. Wakerley (Monmouthshire Association of School Governors)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Julie Boothroyd	Chief Officer Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Cath Saunders	Children and Young People Directorate
Jane Rodgers	Head of Children's Services
Richard Jones	Performance Manager
Sian Schofield	Management Information Officer
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Richard Williams	Democratic Services Officer

INVITED GUEST:

Ms. S. Radford - Service Manager South East Wales Adoption Service)

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors L. Brown, and S. Woodhouse

Mr. M Fowler (Parent Governor Representative)

1. Declarations of Interest.

County Councillor M. Groucutt declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest pursuant to the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of agenda item 5 – Partnership Agreements with schools, as he is a school governor at Llantilio Pertholey Primary School and King Henry VIII Comprehensive School.

County Councillor M. Powell declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest pursuant to the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of agenda item 5 – Partnership Agreements with schools, as she is a school governor at King Henry VIII Comprehensive School.

County Councillor T. Thomas declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest pursuant to the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of agenda item 5 – Partnership Agreements with schools, as he is a school governor at Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni.

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County Councillor D. Jones declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest pursuant to the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of agenda item 3 – Performance report on Children's Services and agenda item 6 – School Attainment, as he is a governor at Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni and Llanvihangel Crucorney Primary School.

County Councillor R. Harris declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest pursuant to the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of agenda item 4 – South East Wales Adoption Service and agenda item 5 – Partnership Agreements with Schools, as he is a County Council member of the Fostering Panel and a governor at Deri View and Llantilio Pertholey Primary Schools.

County Councillor P. Jones declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest pursuant to the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of agenda item 4 – South East Wales Adoption Service, as she is a member of the Gwent Adoption Panel.

Ms. L. Wakerley declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest pursuant to the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of agenda item 5 – Partnership Agreements with Schools, as she is the Chair of Governors at Trellech Primary School.

Mr. P. Strong declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest pursuant to the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of agenda item 6 – School Attainment, as he is employed at Caldicot School as an Exams Invigilator.

2. Performance Report - Scrutiny of the six month performance reports on Children's Services.

Context:

To scrutinise quarter 2 2018/19, performance of Children's Social Services.

Key Issues:

The report card explains Children's Social Services key process and performance during the first half of 2018/19 alongside benchmarking of performance in 2017/18. This comprises of data from the measurement framework introduced in 2016/17 as part of the Social Services and Well-being Act and further information that is used to evaluate performance.

The performance measures are a blend of quantitative and qualitative data which includes asking children and parents about their experience of social services and whether this has contributed to improving their well-being. The qualitative measures within the framework are derived from questionnaires to children and parents that social services are supporting. During September, questionnaires are posted to recipients and further responses are being encouraged to provide a higher return rate.

Welsh Government has not published local authority level performance data for 2017/18. Wales level means and quartile data for 2017/18 has been published and is

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included in this report. Qualitative benchmarking data for 2017/18 has not been published.

There are ongoing discussions and workshops on revising the standards and measures as part of the Social Services and Well-being Act performance framework in the future.

Member Scrutiny:

- With regard to Children on the Child Protection Register, there are variances in numbers of children coming onto the register. The Authority is undertaking some focussed work for families early on with a view to obtaining early identification of any potential risks. There has been an increased number of contacts. There are fewer children coming into the system but these children tend to have more complex needs and often have vulnerable issues that need to be addressed. The correct support is then identified and provided to these children.
- Children coming onto the Child Protection Register or who require Looked After services, generally, there tends to be more complexity with the family dynamic of these children. It can take some time for these children to recover from the trauma that they have experienced. Specialised services and finely tuning the services required helps the children in their recovery but recovery can take some time.
- There are some Looked After Children in the system that have parents who were also Looked after Children or had been in receipt of services provided by Children's Social Services. When assessments are undertaken of Looked After Children, this is one of the issues that is also investigated.
- Monmouthshire's Looked After child rate remains low across Wales and the Authority is in keeping with other comparable local authorities. The general trend across Wales is increasing in rate. Greater Gwent is a region within Wales where the rate has outstripped other regions.
- In terms of Monmouthshire's Child Protection rates, there has been a significant increase in the rate. However, this can be a temporary situation and such 'spikes' can occur at various stages with an overall upward trend. Large sibling groups can affect the data from month to month.
- Monmouthshire's Looked After Children numbers remain below the Wales average. However, Child Protection numbers have increased above the Wales average.
- In response to a question raised regarding whether the Directorate has adequate resources to deal with the increases identified in the report, it was noted that there are enough resources to respond to the requirements coming through. However, this can have an implication with a view to resources having to be stretched at times. Statutory responsibilities are met and the Directorate responds to where the highest need is required.

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- On behalf of the Select Committee, the Chair congratulated staff within Children's Services for improving the number of assessments completed on time up to 90%.
- The process that underpins the work undertaken by Children's Services with children and families is multi-agency focussed. Children's Services is one of the key partners around two regional boards that look at wider inter agency work, e.g., The Children and Families Partnership Board and the South East Wales Children Board.
- With regard to kinship foster carers, if there is a kinship arrangement in place, the kinship carer will go through the same assessment and panel process as a generic foster carer.

Committee's Conclusion:

- The Select Committee noted the report and thanked officers for sharing the complexities of looking after children within the County.
- Reassurance was noted that adequate resources are in place within the Children's Services Department.

3. South East Wales Adoption Service - Report on performance 2017/18 and briefing on regional financial policy.

Context:

To scrutinise the performance of the South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) and the National Adoption Service (NAS) for 2017/18. The report is required in line with the Regulations as set out in The Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2005.

Key Issues:

The National Adoption Service (NAS) was launched in November 2014 with a remit of expectations to:

- Eradicate drift for children in care.
- Eliminate waiting lists for training and assessment of adopters.
- Improve the matching process for children.
- Allay adoption breakdowns by improving adoption support.
- Streamline the process to ensure better linking for children.
- Provide a wide choice of placements through increased use of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA).
- Ensuring consistent delivery across Wales.

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The key aims of the National Adoption Service are essentially that children are found adoptive homes that meet their needs and the adoption process is completed in a timely manner to avoid drift for children. The emphasis on collaboration is working well and the five regions in Wales are becoming a constructive network to improve performance and promote best practice. Performance has improved across all the regions and although not always consistent due to extenuating circumstances, regionalisation is improving outcomes for children.

The South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) is one of the larger regions and has a high level of demand for services. Overall, the Looked After Children population for the region rose by 19% in recent years, with significant increases in Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent a contributory factor. The ethos of SEWAS reflects that of the National Service, in that the overarching goal is to improve outcomes for children. There have been improvements in some of the performance measures, but clearly more work to do.

Member Scrutiny:

- Many children referred to the SEWAS in recent years have complex needs, often with a history of trauma. Preparation work has to be undertaken and support provided before these children can be placed with their adopted parents.
- The assessment process is very stringent. The assessing social worker will outline the criteria with prospective adopters to ascertain which child would be suited to their family life.
- Matching meetings are held which also follow a very stringent process to ensure that the most suitable adopter is identified for the child. The child's social worker is invited to these meetings to provide input.
- The regional service being provided is working very well and has been a considerable benefit to Monmouthshire in driving up standards and practice and in understanding the needs of adopted children and parents.
- The final decision regarding placement of a child will come to Monmouthshire County Council.
- The Adoption Panel comprises of a variety of people with the relevant experience within this field. The process is very detailed and robust covering every aspect with a view to ensuring the correct match is made for the child.

Committee's Conclusion:

- The Select Committee noted the report.
- Select Committee had been made aware of the complexities involved within this service and congratulated the Service for the positive work being undertaken.

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- Good collaboration existed between the local Authority and the South East Wales Adoption Service.

4. Partnership Agreements with Schools - Scrutiny of the partnership agreement required under the Education Act between the Local Authority and the governing body of schools which agrees their respective functions.

Context:

To scrutinise the development of the Statutory Partnership Agreement and influence the way in which the Council works with schools and governing bodies.

Key Issues:

The Partnership Agreement includes those statutory functions that must be included, which are:

- How the local Authority will promote high standards and support schools, in particular, those giving cause for concern, in special measures or requiring significant improvement and the factors the local Authority will take into account in identifying schools giving cause for concern.
- The support the local Authority will provide for governing bodies where the authority has exercised its powers of intervention or suspended the right to a delegated budget, and in instances where an inspection of a school causes concern or the local Authority appoints additional governors.
- Responsibility of the local Authority to provide governors with support.
- The reports which the governing body provides to the local Authority on discharge of its functions.
- The responsibility of the school and local Authority for Health and Safety matters and their duties to employees and other persons in respect of these matters.
- The responsibility of the school and local Authority for the control of school premises and their maintenance and repairs and how the governing body may exercise its powers to provide community facilities.
- The local Authority duties regarding the defrayment of expenses and maintaining schools.

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In addition, for schools providing primary education the Agreement must include:

- The exercise by the local Authority and governing body of functions that will promote high standards and secure effective transition of pupils from Key Stages 2 to 3.
- Local Authority target setting in relation to education plans and governing body target setting in relation to pupil performance and absence.

For schools providing secondary education the Agreement must include:

- The exercise by the local Authority and governing body of functions that will promote high standards and secure effective transition of pupils from Key Stages 2 and 3 and from key Stages 3 to 4.
- Local Authority target setting in relation to education plans and governing body target setting in relation to absence.

Head teachers and the Monmouthshire Association of School Governors have been consulted on the Partnership Agreement and views and comments will be included in the final document that will be submitted to Cabinet in due course.

Options Appraisal:

Option 1: Do Nothing:

This option had been discounted, as it is a legislative requirement to have a partnership Agreement in place.

Option 2: Local Authority drafts Partnership Agreement for Governing Bodies to agree.

This is the preferred option, as it is a legal requirement to have a Partnership Agreement in place as defined by the Education Act 2002.

However, if the local Authority fails to reach an agreement with a school governing body, the local Authority may draw up a statement establishing how it and the governing body are to discharge their respective functions in relation to the school.

Member Scrutiny:

- The Maintained Schools Partnership Agreement was a positive document which was needed as it establishes the expectations of schools and the local Authority. However, there were some concerns raised by the Monmouthshire Association of School Governors regarding the responsibility outlined in the document for governing bodies and the lack of acknowledgement of the professional staff within schools in some areas.
- The relationship between school governors and head teachers / senior leadership teams is important. It was considered that the document required

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some further work to incorporate the views expressed by the Monmouthshire Association of School Governors.

- Concern was expressed that some prospective school governors might consider the document to be overwhelming in its current form with regard to the responsibility requirements outlined and therefore, might decide not to pursue taking up the role of a school governor.
- In response to a question raised regarding suspension of staff when child protection / safeguarding issues are raised, it was noted that in these circumstances, all head teachers will contact the Local Authority Lead for Safeguarding and Education to discuss the incident / referral / allegation that has been made. It is important that the Authority takes care of any allegation made of a professional nature. This would then escalate up into a process set down by the All Wales Child Protection schedules. Therefore, the Authority has to work via this process.
- In response to questions raised in respect of the Partnership Agreement, it was noted that:
 - The responsibilities in consultation with Senior Leadership Team was included in the document. This was also on the recommendation of some head teachers. Head teachers are clear on what they have to report to the governing bodies.
 - The document outlines the responsibilities for governing bodies and the local Authority.
- The Partnership Agreement is drawn up on the basis of Welsh Government guidance and is being used by local Authorities across the Education Achievement Service (EAS) region. However, there is a need to explore accountability.
- It is the governing body who runs a school and the head teacher is employed to do this.
- This document is a significant re-fresh of the original Partnership Agreement.
- Work is required with a view to ensuring that governing bodies understand the depths of their responsibility as school governors.
- Monmouthshire's Partnership Agreement is in accordance with other nearby local authorities' Partnership Agreements.
- The Partnership Agreement also needs to be proof read before being finalised.
- It was noted that there is one trade union representative seat on the Schools Budget Forum. The Chief Officer for Children and Young People stated that he

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would check to see whether a trade union representative is regularly attending this meeting. Also, whether the procedure for election and re-election is being undertaken.

Committee's Conclusion:

- The Partnership Agreement required further work in light of the views expressed.
- Governing bodies have statutory duties to uphold.
- Statute is clear that governing bodies need to establish positive relationships with their respective local authorities.
- It was proposed that a meeting be established between Officers and Monmouthshire Association of School Governors, which will be chaired by County Councillor M. Groucutt with a view to reviewing the Partnership Agreement.

Upon being put to the vote, the following votes were recorded:

In favour of the proposal	- 4
Against the proposal	- 0
Abstentions	- 0

The proposition was carried.

We resolved that a meeting be established between Officers and Monmouthshire Association of School Governors, which will be chaired by County Councillor M. Groucutt with a view to reviewing the Partnership Agreement.

5. School Attainment - To receive the final school results at key stage 4 (include Fisher Family Trust data which maps progress from the end of key stage 2 to the end of key stage 4).

Context:

To scrutinise pupil performance at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5.

Key Issues:

The Select Committee received a presentation and report in respect of pupil performance within Monmouthshire at Key Stages 4 and 5.

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Member Scrutiny:

- Btec qualifications will still be counted but only 40% of a pupil's overall qualifications that needs to be achieved to get to the thresholds can be a Btec qualification.
- Moving to a two year linear examination process is more onerous on students who are having to perform in an examination environment at the end of the two year study period. Previously, classroom based assessments with coursework made it easier for schools to support FSM children with their studies.
- With regard to the trajectory of Monmouthshire's FSM cohort from foundation phase through to Key Stage 4, the gap between FSM children and non-FSM children is around 10% at Foundation Phase and is 47.9% at Key Stage 4. Therefore, something significant happens during this period which needs to be addressed, not only in school but via a multi-agency approach outside of school.
- The Authority is working closely with schools to ensure that they are providing all learners with the opportunity to follow a curriculum that meets their needs.
- With regard to the Level 2 inclusive, in the previous four years Monmouthshire has been the highest performing Authority for three of those four years.
- With regard to students residing in Monmouthshire but receive their education via Welsh medium or faith schools out of County, the outcomes of these children are not captured as this information is compiled at a school level within that local authority.
- In response to a question raised regarding issues around the language of teaching and the effect that this might have on some children, in particular FSM children, it was noted that, on occasions, there can be a middle class bias in terms of the teaching in secondary schools. The emergence of the new Excellence in Teaching and Leadership Framework helps to structure and provide professional development in a more systematic way.

Committee's Conclusion:

- The data shows that Monmouthshire's secondary schools are addressing the needs of a wide ranging group of young people.
- However, there are issues that require further attention and it was being demonstrated that the Authority is in the process of addressing issues that require further attention.

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- The Authority is ensuring that its schools hold themselves to account and is working with schools.

We resolved that the School Attainment report be presented to Cabinet and that the Authority does not overlook the areas of weakness outlined in the report.

The meeting ended at 4.12 pm.

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