Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Public Services Select Committee held at Remote Microsoft Teams Meeting on Monday, 27th July, 2020 at 10.30 am

Councillors Present	Officers in Attendance
County Councillor T. Thomas (Chairman)	Matthew Gatehouse, Head of Policy and Governance
County Councillors: D. Batrouni, L.Dymock, S. Howarth and J.Treharne	Sharran Lloyd, LSB Development Manager
	Hazel Clatworthy, Sustainability Policy Officer
	Richard Jones, Performance Manager
	Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager

APOLOGIES: County Councillors P.Pavia and R.Roden

1. **Election of Chair**

   Councillor Tudor Thomas was elected the chair for the meeting.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

   No declarations of interest were received.

3. **Public Open Forum**

   There were no members of the public present and no notice of any requests to speak at the Select Committee meeting.

4. **Confirmation of Minutes**

   The minutes of the Select Committee meeting held on 11th March 2020 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

5. **Pre-decision Scrutiny of the Draft Public Service Board Annual Report**

   The Head of Performance and Improvement presented the PSB's second draft Annual Report which provided an overview of the performance of the board during April 2019-March 2020 on the objectives set in its wellbeing plan, in line with the requirements of the WFG Act legislation and statutory guidance. He explained that the report covered the steps the PSB had chosen to deliver its objectives and the reasons why those were set and also how the board had applied the 5 ways of working outlined in the WFG act in its working throughout the year. The officer explained that the report also provided an overview of progress on all 19 steps against the four wellbeing objectives the board had chosen and it included an in-depth case study of work undertaken by the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership to provide young people with the best possible start in life. It also summarised the scrutiny that has been undertaken throughout the

year and provided and overview of the regional working that has taken place and also the evidence and information that is used to measure progress such as national indicators outlined in the act.

The officer commented that public services have been at the forefront of efforts in responding to the covid 19 pandemic and some mention of the emerging evidence is provided in this report, however, more detailed evidence on well-being impacts will be provided in further reports. Members were advised that the report had been contributed to by all partners and would be approved by the Public Service Board at their next meeting prior to publication on their website.

The Partnerships Manager joined in the presentation of the report and explained that whilst the report is a light touch document, given how involved all partners are in responding to the covid 19 pandemic, hopefully it has still captured the headline information on behalf of the PSB and efforts can now be focussed on how the board can respond to the challenges collectively.

Key points to highlight are:

- The report only provides a snapshot of the work undertaken by town council partners and there is much more work which sits behind it, if members are interested in a more in depth understanding.

- One area of good practice is that over the last 12 months, the town councils that fall under the duties of the legislation have been included into the PSB structure, so representatives now sit on the programme board and are involved in early discussions on developing activities to responding to the challenges collectively.

- There has been extensive work being undertaken in town councils over a number of years which has come the forefront and this is their financial contribution and recognition of the work of the open access and fully inclusive play provision in the county. This is something that the PSB has invested in over a number of years, through grant monies and also officer time and town councils have contributed towards that work, recognising that value of the free open access play provision for some of the young people would not have the financial means to access summer play provision. We have grown the model and have 500-600 children attending included those with disabilities. During this year, we have also been able to provide free food during the summer to children who may not have had a meal if they weren't able to afford the summer play provision, so we are also addressing food poverty.

- Another area of practice is evidenced in the case study provided by the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership. This work has reduced silo thinking by agencies and there is greater correlation between the strands of work. For example, the work on Adverse Childhood Effects which underpins the need for every child to have a trusted adult needs to also take into account the importance of mental health and emotional well-being for young people as they grow older. This involves thinking about what models of care need to look like and how schools can become more outward looking to the heart of the community. The case study demonstrates the complexity involved, recognising that all partners

have a role to play. Through The case study, we have tried to work though the systems in public sector agencies to see how well the systems work in terms of preventing children falling between the gaps.

- The Active Citizenship work referred to in the report has involved trying to bring communities closer to the work of the PSB, embracing them in the challenges we have faced and during the pandemic, they have demonstrated their strength and resilience, so we want to respect them by involving them and working together rather than 'doing to them'.

Challenge:

- Accepting that the PSB's 6 key priorities were drafted pre-pandemic, do you think that Post-covid, these will need to change?
  I think the priorities will still be relevant, but what the pandemic has done is to amplify some of the things we knew we needed to address. Covid has negatively impacted on many people and for many people who needed to access support prior to covid, their need is now greater. The challenges previously identified are still there, but there will be further challenges in addressing poverty, loneliness and mental health.

- Recognising there are likely to be new challenges, will previous commitments to carbon emission reduction by moving to electric vehicles still be priorities? Have we delivered on this so far?
  One of the discussions taking place with communities is how we transition from the pandemic to longer term priorities. So whilst we've reopened town centres and provided enhanced pedestrianisation and we have had a positive response from our communities, this also aligns to longer term priorities to achieve a carbon neutral future by 2030. The money has been secured and 11 out of the 15 electric vehicle charge points are in now in situ, but there have been additional benefits, such as Gwent Energy using some of their resources to install a defibrillator next to the charge points, so yes, the 'sustainable futures' work remains a priority.

- The report reads a little disjointed. Recognising there are different inputs and it is difficult to write a report of many partners, it needs some editing to ensure flow.
  It's a collaborative effort and has many contributions, so there was no sole author Ordinarily and in future, an editorial board would collate the report into its final draft, but the circumstances have been difficult and time did not allow for this.

- I'm unclear what actions the regional board have taken that have made a discernible impact. I'm unsure whether we are simply recording things we were doing previously. If so, what is the added value of the board? What are the key differences made by having the board? For example, how would we account for the impact by the board in reducing carbon emissions as opposed to the actions people as a result of environmental changes as a result of lockdown?
  The point you make is fair. We will be able to measure the Monmouthshire contribution on carbon emission reduction by comparing the Monmouthshire data with UK trends, but I recognise that it's difficult to unravel the impact. The kind of

issues that the board has prioritised are complex societal issue that need multi-agency approaches to resolve them, but I accept your point. Coronavirus may mean that the priorities need to change.

- Some areas of this report need updating. For example, the Business Network and the GovTech positions, because we are nearly 1 year on from the implementation and there is no sense of whether it's delivering as there are no key indicators. Has there been a delay?
The work on GovTech was funded by UK Cabinet Office and a decision was taken in March to pause that work during the pandemic, so whilst officially paused, some of the research around transport and loneliness has continued, but it is a fair point and could be referred to in the report.

- The 'Thriving Places' data is for 2020, but there is no comparator for 2018 or 2019. Also the data headings themselves have changed, for example, measuring 'well-being equality' data in 2018/19 but in 2020 that has changed to 'employment equality' data, so I'm unsure what these mean and can't draw comparisons. I appreciate this is work in progress, but I can't see any consistency.
The 'Thriving Places' data derived from a piece of work undertaken by the 5 Gwent authorities on 'Happy Places' between 2018 to 2019/20. Each of the headline scores are based on a Local Authority indicator that sits beneath it, so it is important in understanding these scores, what the indicator is and to recognise that the issues are complex and there is far more evidence and data needed to fully understand the picture. We will need to understand how wellbeing will be impacted upon going forward as a result of covid, so the report only starts to address it and this will be something the PSB will need to continue to measure. In term of measuring the economic well-being, there's some remodelling required on these and this will need updating.

- Members need to be kept abreast of updates on matters such as GovTech, as many weren't aware the work had been paused and would have been expecting further progress.
This point is accepted and we will do this from hereon.

- In terms of measuring progress, if there is no data for the previous year and also this year, when we have data next year, will the data be meaningful?
Some of our conventional performance measuring will no longer apply. We will need to look at this in a new way, which provides many challenges, but also opportunities. So for example, sports activities will be difficult to measure but the Active Citizenship work has shown how many people have volunteered and contributed to help others during the pandemic, so the growth in people wanting to make a difference is activity we can capture. We wouldn't have had such data in the past to draw comparisons on, but you are right, we need a conversation as to how we move forward when we can't measure in the same way. We will need to reflect and think differently.

<u>Chair's Conclusion</u>:

We have discussed issues about the flow of the report and the disparity of the various inputs, also the need for elements to be updated. We highlighted issues around updating members on matters such as GovTech. We have raised concerns around performance measurement post-covid and we recognise some of the measures will need to change. Members of this committee have concern for those who may have been on the brink of managing until now and the pandemic may have pushed them over the edge. We cannot underestimate the enormous pressure on families in poverty, on households with reduced income, who have had to cope with the burden of home-schooling and on the other end of the spectrum, on those who live on their own and suffer loneliness and isolation exacerbated by the pandemic. We recognise the work being undertaken and we appreciate the drafting of this report was not an easy task and thank you for your efforts and ask that our feedback be noted.

6. **Scrutiny of a Performance Report on COVID-19 Risks and Public Service Emergency Response Structure**

The Committee were presented with a report detailing the risks relating to the coronavirus pandemic in the county, outlining those that may require a public service response in addition to a response to by the Council together with an overview of the regional multi-agency structure for emergency response and recovery. Members were asked to consider whether they felt that the key risks have been identified, that risk levels were proportionate and whether the right mitigating actions were in place, making any relevant recommendations to Cabinet or the Public Service Board.

Just to set the context for why the committee is receiving the multi-agency response today. Members will recall that we changed the terms of reference of this committee last year to enable this committee to look at broader multi-agency responses to matters faced by our residents. It is not the role of this committee to scrutinise the structure per se, as these are set up as part of national civil contingency legislation, however, it is important that the committee understand those structures. In terms of the risk assessment itself, given the range of partners involved, it felt pertinent to involve you in this prior to Cabinet considering it.

The report provided an overview of the emergency response arrangements in place and Appendix 1 provided a diagram of the reporting structures. Prior to May, it was explained that there was an Emergency Response Team in place, however, these usually deal with short term emergencies, so it felt appropriate to stand this group down and establish the Covid 19 Coordination group which comprises the Chief Officer for Resources, the Emergency Planning Lead Officer and the Head of Resources who report to the Senior Leadership Team and feed into the Gwent Strategic Coordinating Group. There are further appendices on the risks and the two plans on a page, which have been widely shared in the organisation by the Chief Executive and the letter from the minister Julie James who has asked the PSB to reconsider their objectives in light of the covid pandemic. These will be considered by the PSB at their meeting, but we are bringing this to you in advance to ask you whether this feels right and whether you have any feedback to pass on to the PSB.

Members attention was drawn to Appendix 4 where risk 3 was highlighted in terms or the risk to the economic well-being of the county, risk 6 in terms of harm to vulnerable children and adults, risk 8 in relation to the risks in failing to meet the needs of learners including vulnerable learners. Attention was also drawn to the four specific risks numbered 15-18 as being specifically related to the pandemic, risk 17 having an economic impact resulting in job losses and risk which referred to the risk of the virus increasing poverty in communities.

Challenge:

- In terms of risk 8 and learning, something that has arisen through discussions I've had with constituents and family and friends is the disparity between the support provided by Monmouthshire schools for children. Is there some way if we were to experience a second wave of the virus, that we could ensure the same level of support is provided to all?   Another issue highlighted to me through a meeting with the Welsh Amateur Boxing Association community meeting in relation to a discussion on street games, was that no messages were given to the 16-25's. It was felt that messages were aimed at adults or at parents for primary school age children.
  In terms of schools' support, this has proved a huge challenge to the education department and schools and this has provided us with a lot of lessons learnt through the first wave. If we were to experience a second wave, a phenomenal amount of learning and reflection will ensure we are better placed. The second question you raised is really important and I recognise the comments. This age group are socially active and how we communicate with them is something that's really important and is something we need to reflect on.

- It's important to ensure we communicate with the young age groups because the emerging data is suggesting that whilst they are least impacted personally, they are contributors to driving the spikes. The US data particularly shows long term effects.
  You are right, it's important we continue to look globally and consider the evidence.

- I don't feel that risk 8 reflects the gravity of the situation, which I consider to be patchy. Online teaching is going to be really vital if we experience a second wave and I don't feel this risk is adequately captured. I have asked the question of the cabinet member as to whether we know which schools were doing well at this and which weren't but I haven't had a satisfactory answer. We rapidly need to roll out good practice.

- I also feel that risk 1, rated low, which refers to not having a sustainable delivery model is at odds with risk 15 which relates to service delivery and post mitigation is rated high and then medium. This seems to be a disconnect to me and number 1 needs to be reassessed in my view or integrated into risk 15.
  The logic as to why the scores are assessed as they are, particularly in terms of risk 1, we feel the risk that the authority could not continue is low, but in terms of risk 15, we know some services are stretched and we have had to step down

some services such as the household waste and recycling centres and introduce booking systems. So this is the reasoning and logic behind the scores. This is a live document to reflect a dynamic changing environment. If the committee feels that risk level attached to risk 1 is too low, similarly with risk 15, they can recommend that it is reassessed and this can be fed through to Cabinet.

- *The risk level pre-mitigation for risk 1 is fine, but I recommend that the post-mitigation 2020 and 2021 level is raised from low to medium, as I feel there are too many uncertainties.*

- Would it be possible for officers to provide the detail as to how they arrived at the risk levels?
  The full version of the risk assessment has greater detail and is generally taken to the Audit Committee but I appreciate the point that it's hard for members to gauge without a full understanding of how the risk has been arrived at. Officers are happy to take forward any recommendations on the risk level to cabinet, similarly whether the committee feels the risks are adequately captured.

Chair's Conclusion*:*

Issues have been raised about the consistency of online teaching and learning by schools and this is something that was raised in the Children and Young Peoples Select Committee, who raised this with the Education Achievement Service, who are preparing with schools for a blended learning approach from September onwards. Members also had concerns for children who will return to the exam system next year for children whose parents are not that adept at home schooling or are working long hours and are not able to provide that level of support to their child's education. The committee was reassured that every child was being provided with an I pad. Finally, this committee has reached consensus that the risk level for risk 1 post-mitigation should be raised from low to medium, as discussed.

7. **Discussion on early thinking on a Regional Public Service Board**

This report was brought to the committee to inform them that discussions have been taking place on the feasibility and desirability of moving to a Gwent-wide Public Service Board. The Public Services Select Committee had in previous meetings supported the idea of a regional PSB to reduce duplication of efforts, to improve governance and to ensure a consistent approach for services operating under a regional footprint.

Members heard that there are clear advantages in terms of economies of scale for partners who would only need to attend 1 PSB, as well advantages for the delivery of shared projects such as the Gwent Green Grid and other projects such as those around obesity. There would also be advantages in terms of shared regional priorities on issues such as violence and domestic abuse, however, there would be a need to see tangible outcomes locally. A key thing to consider would be how to retain sight of the things that matter most to Monmouthshire and how to champion the local agenda. We would also need to consider how officers would be deployed across a regional structure and at programme board level. There isn't a significant amount of detail on this proposal at present, however, the report had been brought to the committee to ensure members

were kept abreast of discussions taking place on a collaborative arrangement and to offer the opportunity to offer any feedback if the committee wished to do so.

Chair's Conclusion:

There was support from the committee for the move towards a regional PSB for the reasons explained in the report's introduction. Members requested a list of collaborative projects that are overseen by the Public Service Board, accepting that there are many other services delivered collaboratively and recognising that these are likely to be overseen by the other select committees.