

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Public Services Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Wednesday, 1st March, 2023 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor Armand Watts (Chairman)
County Councillor Penny Jones (Vice Chairman – in the Chair)

County Councillors: Jill Bond, Steven Garratt, Dale Rooke, Frances Taylor

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Sharran Lloyd, LSB Development Manager
Matthew Gatehouse, Head of Policy, Performance and Scrutiny
Richard Jones, The Performance and Data Insight Manager
Andrew Mason, Project Officer ASB
Christian Schmidt, Transport Planning and Policy Officer
John Crandon, Community Safety Officer

APOLOGIES: County Councillors Jan Butler and Malcolm Lane

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

No submissions were received.

3. Draft Gwent Wellbeing Plan

Officers presented the draft Gwent Well-Being Plan and explained that the plan had been revised following earlier scrutiny at the previous meeting.

and that each of the five Councils in the Gwent area were being asked to endorse it, whilst only Monmouthshire had chosen to scrutinise it prior to adoption.

Challenge:

- *This document reads like any other generic document and doesn't feel like it has any relevance to the Gwent region. It feels like a statement of strategic intent, because the objectives could be found anywhere.*
- *If this is a plan, why are there no actions or timescales included for us to monitor the delivery of the objectives? This feels very light in substance and it's questionable how it could be used to evaluate the performance of the board in meeting the objectives.*

- *To what extent have all officers in the partnership been involved in this and in terms of the governance process, where is this to be tabled and have the other councils scrutinised it?*
- *There isn't any reference to recent factors that are having a major effect on people, such as the rise in energy costs and the increased costs of living. When was this drafted? Will these factors be taken into account in order to make it more relevant and realistic?*
- *The eight Marmot principles are very significant, but to what extent does the plan encompass the spirit and ethos of them and on what basis will they be measured?*
- *How does this plan align with our Community and Corporate Plan, to ensure alignment of objectives and delivery?*

Officer Response:

Thank you for the feedback which we will feed back, understanding that you wish to formally convey this to the Leader and the PSB. The Marmot principles are part of a wider piece of work ongoing with the Institute of Health and Equity to understand the actions the board can take to improve equality in the region, so there will be specific recommendations arising from that report which should then be embedded into this plan. There will be further delivery plans which should take account of those recommendations with specific actions for the PSB to focus on. This Committee may scrutinise those delivery plans in order to hold the PSB to account for the delivery of this wider plan.

In reference to the questions around the evidence that has informed this plan, the Gwent Well-being Assessment which was developed by officers across the partnership and has been scrutinised, was used to inform this plan. The work being undertaken by Professor Marmot to address equity will bring the expertise and insight to the PSB to inform the delivery plans. The experts have been present in each of the counties speaking to people to use the intelligence to inform their work.

In terms of the extent to which there will be alignment between our Community and Corporate Plan and this plan, given that the evidence base for both is the Well-being Assessment, there should be a clear link between the actions in the Monmouthshire delivery plan with the objectives in our Community and Corporate Plan.

In respect of the governance process, this draft plan is being taken to each of the five Councils for them to endorse, however, Monmouthshire is the only Council that is conducting pre-decision scrutiny. It was also sent to all town and community councils

during the consultation period. Ongoing scrutiny via the regional PSB scrutiny function will be crucial and also scrutiny by this committee on the delivery of the Monmouthshire delivery plan.

Chair's Summary:

We have scrutinised this on two occasions and we are disappointed that the plan still reads as a generic plan in too little depth, that could apply to anywhere, with no sense of place or local context. We feel there is a lack of reference to the current economic climate and the difficulties faced by people due to the increase in energy costs and the cost of living crisis.

We are concerned about the extent to which this plan has been drafted by the partnership. This plan feels like a plan developed in isolation by one authority, as opposed to there being a collective agreement on the future strategic direction. We have concerns that if the plan hasn't been jointly developed by partners, there may not be joint ownership across the board and that may impact on the delivery of its objectives.

We are also highly concerned that it hasn't been subject to any scrutiny by the other Gwent partner authorities and has not been scrutinised by the Gwent Regional PSB Scrutiny Committee that has yet to hold its first meeting, therefore questioning the legitimacy of both the plan and the governance process. As the sole Scrutiny Committee undertaking pre-decision scrutiny of this plan, we feel it is too one-sided if we are the only check and balance, although we note that the five Councils will be asked to endorse it. In conclusion, we question the value of 'cooperation', if we are not in practice 'cooperating'.

The Committee agreed to write to the Leader to highlight the committee's concerns.

4. Stagecoach Bus Services

The chair advised that unfortunately Stagecoach had declined to attend meetings of the Public Services Scrutiny Committee. The Chair advised that as the Scrutiny Committee's role was to serve the community, with Stagecoach are providing services to the community, it was very disappointing that they weren't willing to have an open conversation about the challenges being faced by a commercial provider in providing transport in a rural county amidst decreasing funding by Welsh Government. It was noted that Stagecoach was happy to answer any questions in writing and the committee agreed that they will pursue this option.

The Transport Manager for Monmouthshire Council advised members that there were both short and long-term issues with transport provision, the short-term issue being that the additional funding provided to them by Welsh Government during the pandemic to fund services was due to end and the longer-term issue being that Monmouthshire as a rural county had transport concerns even prior to the pandemic. The officer agreed to prepare a report for a future committee meeting to inform the Committee so that they could subsequently convey their concerns to Stagecoach in writing (**Action: Christian Schmidt**).

5. Hate Crime in Monmouthshire

The Community Safety Team presented the data for hate crimes committed in Monmouthshire, highlighting that:

- There has been a slight decrease reported hate crime this year on comparisons with last year.
- Our data shows fewer reported crimes in comparison with neighbouring authorities
- In terms of the areas where the crimes are taking place, there is an even spread across the county.

Officers provided additional context to the figures given, explaining that they are relative to the overall population figures in each of the counties, so for example, whilst the population of Monmouthshire is 93k and Torfaen is 92.3k, our reported hate crime numbers are half of those reported in Torfaen, despite having similar population levels and in comparison with the other Gwent authorities, our numbers are relatively low.

The Community Safety Team explained that monthly meetings are held with a wide range of partners, ranging from education, safeguarding, police, probation, the South Wales Ambulance Trust and many others and that the Police haven't highlighted hate crime to be an emerging issue. Also at their weekly meetings with crime and reduction officers, it hasn't been raised as a concern. They acknowledged however that the data alone does not give the full picture, due to underreporting of hate crime due to fear of retribution and a lack of awareness as to what constitutes a hate crime. They advised that an awareness event is due to be held for taxi drivers, who may be experiencing hate crime but are not aware of the need to report it or how to report it. They also explained that hate crime often doesn't sit on its own but sits alongside other offences.

Challenge/Discussion:

I am interested in how we can evolve the conversation around this and increase awareness as well as gain more specific context as to where incidences are happening.

If the figures only show the hate crimes that have been reported and we know some people are not reporting, then we don't have a full picture. What are we doing with schools to ensure they are reporting it?

We work with schools on the bullying agenda and how they record incidences and hate is one of the categories, so we can work with schools to understand what is happening and support them in tackling it.

Do you think there is significant underreporting of hate crime, in your opinion?

It's difficult to say that specifically about hate crime, as you could argue there is underreporting with all crime. When we speak to the community, we ask if they are speaking to the police about incidences and they ask "what's the point?" so public engagement with the police feels like a theme. The data presented is merely showing the people who had the courage to report it, so the chances are that hate crime is very underreported.

I understand that people may be frightened and want to be anonymous. If you look at other areas like Newport, that are more culturally diverse, it would be interesting to see the percentages of the population in different groups against the hate crime data.

We can see if there is any additional data we can provide for Monmouthshire, but we wouldn't have data on transgender groups or religion, unless people told us that when they reported it and bearing in mind that some people may not have identified as a particular gender or race, we'd need to bear in mind of accuracy of the data **(Action: Andy Mason, Sharran Lloyd)**.

What else are we doing aside from talking to schools?

Just for you to be aware, the work we do with schools, we also do with youth settings, covering young people up to age 25. We also do intergenerational work, and try to reach out to businesses, taxis etcetera to see how we can support them, but as elected Members, if you feel there are areas we could reach out to, please let us know.

Youth services, business solutions, taxis, so trying to reach out where we can but it's work in progress as it's if people are reaching out to us through you, get in touch.

Are the Police helping repeat reporters and supporting repeat victims sensitively?

There is a 'Victims Code of Practice 2015' and those reporting are entitled to an enhanced service from the Police.

I have concerns about radicalisation of young people via online activity. What preventative measures are in place if we think there is an issue?

There is a 'Prevent and Channel Panel' of Police who are dedicated to delivering that programme, working individually with people, also utilising expertise from St Giles Trust for suspected gang related radicalisation and County Lines activity.

Chair's Summary:

We have posed some good questions today and had really good responses, but I think we need to pose similar questions to the Police, so we will invite them to our next meeting to discuss hate crime as well as County Lines and invite the St Giles Trust in addition.

Action: Andy Mason to send the committee information on the 'Prevent and Channel Panel'.

6. Public Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Action List

The work programme was noted and invitations for the next meeting were agreed for County Lines and Hate Crime.

7. Cabinet and Council Work Planner

noted.

8. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 28th November 2022

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

9. To note the date and time of the next meeting: 24th April 2023

24th April 2024

The meeting ended at **11.14 am**