

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK on Tuesday, 23rd January, 2024 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor John Crook (Chairman)
County Councillor Jackie Strong (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: Fay Bromfield,
Christopher Edwards, Simon Howarth,
Penny Jones, Maureen Powell, Sue Riley,
Maria Stevens

Also in attendance: County Councillor Ben Callard,
Cabinet Member for Resources, County Councillor
Martyn Groucutt, Cabinet Member for Education and
County Councillor Ian Chandler, Cabinet Member for
Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health
Services

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Peter Davies, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief
Officer, Resources
Jonathan Davies, Head of Finance
Matthew Gatehouse, Chief Officer People,
Performance and Partnerships.
Will McLean, Chief Officer for Children and Young
People
Frances O'Brien, Chief Officer, Communities and
Place
Jane Rodgers, Chief Officer for Social Care,
Safeguarding and Health
Tyrone Stokes, Accountant
Ian Saunders, Chief Officer Customer, Culture and
Wellbeing.

APOLOGIES: None

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

None.

3. Scrutiny of the budget proposals

Cabinet Member Councillor Callard presented the budget proposal for the upcoming year and answered the members questions with Cabinet Member Ian Chandler, Cabinet Member Martyn Groucutt, Jane Rodgers, Tyrone Stokes, Peter Davies, Will McLean and Jonathan Davies. Councillor Callard explained that the proposals include a decrease in the Mon Life budget by 3.2% and an increase in the resource budget by 6.3%. He confirmed that the draft budget contains a proposal of increasing Council tax by 7.5% and that the Council is currently in the public consultation phase.

Key Points raised by Committee Members:

Education

- In relations to schools' efficiency savings of £854k, questions around what this look will look like realistically for our schools, Members asking for examples of how schools will look to make these savings.
- Members asked whether the Cabinet are concerned with the cessation of £21.3million from the Welsh Government to Teachers Pay fund, combined with efficiency savings, and whether we could potentially lose teachers therefore and how many. The cabinet member was asked if they had lobbied Welsh Government to reinstate the teachers' pay fund for this coming year to alleviate the burden on schools. Members questioned whether class sizes may be increased due to staffing pressures, and whether children may be disadvantaged as a result of these proposals.
- Members asked whether the Cabinet Member has any concern that the efficiency savings could negatively impact the quality of produce school have to procure, resulting in schools opting for cheaper options.
- Members questioned what mitigations would be made in relation to any inequality concerns highlighted.
- In relation to the funding to the Education Achievement Service, Members questioned the effect of the reduction of the core contribution to EAS on Monmouthshire schools.

Social Care

- Questions were asked around redundancies and vacancies - how many, and whether they will be filled.
- Clarification sought on whether assessed need is being reduced and how we can evidence that replacing staff will still meet statutory obligations.
- Some concern as to whether social care assessors will have the adequate qualifications and supervision to be able to do carry out the role, given that signposting to services is different to conducting an assessment, and questions around whether there will be any impact on registered qualified social workers.
- Regarding Budden Crescent, Members sought reassurance that part of the reconfiguration is to redesign the service and ensure shared lives.
- A question relating to the additional finance for care and support, and whether those people will have access to welfare rights advice.
- In relation to foster care, given that we rely heavily on independent foster agencies, Members asked how will the disparity of costs be addressed? How will we attract foster carers to the county and whether a reduction in council tax contribution could be considered?

Gwent Music

- Members questioned the impact for Gwent Music of the loss of the subsidy and their feedback on the proposal. Questions were asked on how many schools would be able to fund whole school music tuition and whether the proposal could negatively affect the most disadvantaged pupils and lead to inequality of opportunity.
- Officers explained that Gwent Music receive funding aside from subsidy that has been offered by the Council. A Member advised that individuals can also support Gwent Music and asked that a reminder be sent to Councillors.

Additional Learning Needs

- Members asked what considerations have been given to minimise the impact of budget proposals on children with additional learning needs and whether the additional monies would follow the child that's been recognised as having additional learning needs.

Other Questions

- Some concern about changes to leisure centre opening hours, especially on the weekend and explanations sought for the reduction.
- Questions were asked around vacant posts and redundancies and the impact on existing staff and service provision.
- Questions of clarification were asked about Council tax, charges and levies and the Police and Fire Authority precept.
- There was a request for a breakdown of schools cost per annum (**Action: Will McLean**)
- Questions were asked around the capital programme, particularly in relation to the impact of funding on continued maintenance of Chepstow School. Members asked for reassurance that Chepstow School and others won't lose out on any necessary maintenance whilst awaiting capital investment.
- Questions were asked around Community Transport and whether there will be changes to Grassroots.

Chair's Summary:

We have fully scrutinised the implications of the budget proposals on the services that fall within this committees remit and asked many questions around schools, domiciliary care, social care pressures, leisure, Gwent Music, foster services and additional learning needs, and many others. The committee has expressed its concern that people are not

disadvantaged by the budget proposals and we ask the Cabinet Members to reflect on the points raised in taking forward the Council's budget for 2024 to 2025.

4. To note the People Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Action List

The Care Inspectorate Report will be added to the work programme.

5. To confirm the minutes of the following meetings:

- 1st December 2023 (Special)
- 14th November 2023 Joint Performance and Overview and People Scrutiny Committees

Councillor Powell proposed and Councillor Edwards seconded.

6. Next Meeting:

Special Meeting 6th February 2024.

The meeting ended at **12.06 pm**