

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA with remote attendance on Tuesday, 14th May, 2024 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor Alistair Neill (Chairman)
County Councillors: Paul Pavia, Peter Strong, Ann Webb and Su McConnel

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Will McLean, Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Richard Jones, Performance and Data Insight Manager
Hannah Carter, Performance Analyst

APOLOGIES: County Councillors Jill Bond, Laura Wright and Catherine Fookes

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

No public present.

3. Additional Learning Provision/Specialist Resource Bases

Cabinet Member Martyn Groucutt and Dr Morwenna Wagstaff introduced the report on the outcome of a review of the Specialist Resource Bases and provided an update on progress towards the review's recommendations prior to answering Members' questions with Jacquelyn Elias and Hayley Page.

Key Points raised by Members:

- The report refers to some inconsistencies across the SRB's highlighted through the review, so how it is being addressed to ensure learning is applied across SRB's, avoiding a postcode lottery.
- What is the differential between the evaluation that you see in front of you today undertaken by the team and the review undertaken by Estyn?
- There's a concern about rising numbers of young people with additional learning needs requiring complex ALN provision. It would be interesting to hear your thoughts on why there are increasing numbers and what effect that will have on our need to provide for increased need.
- Please can you explain how the partnership agreements between the local authority and host schools work and what they aim to achieve.
- Please can you expand on the capacity issues for Pembroke Primary School and Monmouth Comprehensive School and the impact on the pupils.

- In relation to the improvement needed in provision at a particular school, the Committee sought reassurance that the local authority is working with SRB's where improvements are expected. The Chief Officer advised that undertaking a self-evaluation allows the local authority to understand any issues that may need to be worked on with schools so that they can be supported.
- Can you expand upon the capacity and anticipated demand for the specialist resource bases across the county and the financial implications for the local authority.
- How do the SRB leads collaborate to produce a core version of documentation?
- There was a query about the wording of the catering arrangement in the report.
- What is the impact of COVID-19 on the SRB provision and the support for learners and staff?
- What are the transition arrangements for learners moving from SRB to mainstream or post-16 provision?
- How involved are parents and carers in the review and the feedback process?
- Please explain the alignment of the SRB provision with the ALN reform and the new code of practice.
- What are the plans for future development and improvement of the SRB provision?
- What is meant by the variability in finances and accountability in the report.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair welcomed the report and praised the work of the SRB team and the schools. He thanked the officers for their presentation and their responses. He concluded that the report on the review of the specialist resource bases was moved with the recommendations, and that some questions and points raised by the committee members would be addressed in a follow-up report in 12 months. More information is requested on the capacity and affordability of the SRB model, the consistency and quality of the provision, and the Committee seeks reassurance that there are no individual schools with broad and consistent failings.

ACTION:

The Committee requested further detail on the financial implications of the increasing demand for SRB provision and the low, medium and high scenarios.

4. Supporting Vulnerable Learners - Scrutiny of Vulnerable Learners' Support (trauma-informed approaches, Emotional Literacy Assistant programme, MCC specialist teaching service).

Cabinet Member Martyn Groucutt and Dr Morwenna Wagstaff provided an update to the Committee on to the effectiveness of a number of our approaches to support the needs of vulnerable learners in our schools and settings, prior to taking Members' questions.

Key Points raised by Members:

What is the common ground and connection between vulnerable learners and additional learning provision and does the funding link as well?

You mentioned children having suffered traumatic childhood experiences and the training offered, does this include parents and carers and what is the practical provision that enables children to build resilience?

Given that emotional literacy isn't easy to measure, you have referred to this being evidence based, but do we do we accept that to an extent you cannot measure the effectiveness of these schemes? Please explain what criteria you apply to measure the effectiveness.

What are the links between different agencies at the strategic and practise level to support children and families who have experienced trauma?

Is there a risk that we will lose trained teaching assistants who provide emotional literacy support to vulnerable learners, and how will we mitigate that risk. With 16 schools potentially moving into a financial deficit this year according to the month 9 budget monitoring report, it raises a concern as to how schools will mitigate the risk.

Please can you explain the reasons for the waiting list for the specialist teaching service?

One of the identified risks you have spoken about is the reliance on grant funding. How will you manage that and have you secured funding for ongoing years? Do you have sufficient educational psychologist resource?

I was interested to see that the figure of 500 of the MCC staff have accessed the whole staff training and that seems a large number. Have all of our teaching staff undergone that training?

Chair's Summary:

The Chair thanked Dr Wagstaff for attending and presenting a significant amount of information in both reports and asked her to relay the Committee's thanks to the team.

ACTION:

Members requested an update on the waiting list for the specialist teaching service and how it is being managed.

5. Risk Register Update - To update members on the Council's Risk Register and to agree any future areas for scrutiny.

Richard Jones and Hannah Carter presented the Committee with the risk register, which had been tabled to enable Members to identify key risks that they would like to further scrutinise, inviting the relevant Cabinet Member portfolio holders to a future meeting. They responded to key points made by Members.

Key Points raised by Members:

- The Committee were concerned that some risks remain high in the register, despite the mitigating actions being taken. For example, risk 11 referring to

decarbonisation is a concern because despite the actions being taken, it is not changing the risk level.

- Risk 7, refers to instability in the market for children at risk and risk 8 causing delays in service provision to older adults are both highly concerning. There isn't any reference as to what is occurring and how this is being monitored.
- How the Council is planning to address the risk of some services becoming financially unsustainable was raised as a key area for concern.
- The Committee queried the main factors that contribute to the high risk of significant harm to a child or adult due to a specific failure of safeguarding arrangements.
- The actions that the council is taking to reduce the high absence rates of vulnerable children is an area of interest.
- How the council is monitoring the progress of the decarbonisation plan and the impact of climate change on its services and assets was also highlighted.
- The challenges and opportunities that the council faces in relation to the new curriculum for Wales and the regional learning and skills partnership was identified as a key risk area for focus.

Chair's Summary:

The Committee has concern that approximately fifty per cent of the risks in the register remain high after mitigation actions and it isn't clear what further measure will be taken to address these risks. The Committee will forward the comments to the Cabinet and will liaise informally to shortlist specific risks for inclusion into the scrutiny forward work programme.

ACTION: To update work forward work programme with specific risks for detailed scrutiny.

6. Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Action List

To include future risk areas into the forward work programme and to discuss with the Chair of People Scrutiny Committee the scheduling of a joint scrutiny meeting on the 23rd July 2024 to scrutinise the Care Inspectorate Wales Inspection Report.

7. Cabinet and Council Work Planner

The planner was noted.

8. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 19th March 2024.

The minutes were confirmed.

9. Date of Next meeting:

18th June 2024.