

Monmouthshire Scrutiny

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee ~ Feedback to Cabinet of Meeting held on 3rd December 2024

Report Item 4: Risk Register Update

The Cabinet Member introduced the report, together with Richard Jones, Performance and Data Insight Manager.

Key points raised by the Committee Members:

Discussion took place, with the following questions and key points raised by the Committee for consideration by the Cabinet Member:

- Members asked about the high number of risks rated as high and whether the mitigations are effective or overly cautious. They also inquired about unforeseen risks and their management in departmental risk registers. The officer explained that risk levels are assessed pre-mitigation, and post-mitigation scores reflect the anticipated impact of mitigation actions. While some risks remain high, the Council is cautious and bases its assessments on evidence, with Directorate Risk Registers introduced for detailed risk management.
- Members also asked if unforeseen risks would be added to each directorate's risk register. Officers confirmed that foreseeable and evidenced risks would be included, emphasizing that risk is ever-changing, and the Council aims to stay updated.
- The committee questioned financial sustainability and service delivery amid financial pressures, overspending in social care, and educational deficits. Officers referred to a medium-term financial strategy, a new budget monitoring process, and a programme of change as key mitigating actions. Questions about workforce challenges and retention, particularly in social care and education, were raised. Officers mentioned a new people strategy focused on recruitment and retention, including a new recruitment portal and proactive approaches in social care to recruit qualified social workers.
- Members raised concerns about the rising demand and complexity of social care cases for children and adults. The Cabinet Member detailed initiatives like a new strategy for children's placements, investment in recruiting foster carers, and a new commissioning strategy for domiciliary care. The challenges of an aging demographic and the need for long-term projects to extend healthy life expectancy were also discussed.
- A member asked if children in care are always managed to stay in their area and school. The Cabinet Member responded that while the aspiration is to keep children local, it is not always possible due to a lack of placements and foster carers. Each case is assessed independently to determine the best interest of the child, sometimes necessitating relocation.
- The Chair asked if the Welsh Government's policy to eliminate profit from the care of looked-after children resulted in market instability, as predicted. The Cabinet Member responded that the policy is being embedded in the new Health and Social Care bill, with extended implementation timelines

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to ensure market stability. The Council is establishing in-house children's homes and post-16 supported accommodations and recruiting more in-house foster carers by reviewing fees and allowances. The situation is continuously monitored with no major impacts observed.

- The Chair also asked how risk levels can be lower despite the Council's deteriorating financial situation. The Cabinet Member explained that ongoing changes to high-risk services take time to implement. The risk level has been reduced from 16 to 12 due to factors like the autumn budget's positive outlook for public service spending and ongoing budget recovery measures. The risk assessment considers current and future mitigation actions, with continuous monitoring and review.
- The committee questioned the capacity within the Social Care department to manage service delivery model reorganization while handling daily tasks. The Cabinet Member responded that management capacity has been squeezed, but a new service manager for the children's placement program has been recruited, providing additional capacity and freeing up the management team.
- A member raised concerns about the increased risk and sophistication of cyber-attacks, particularly in the social care supply chain. Officers responded that the Council employs a head of cybersecurity who supports other public bodies in Southeast Wales. When entering contracts with new suppliers, their information governance arrangements are assessed. The Council provides support and guidance for suppliers and has information governance groups and backup systems to minimize cyber-attack risks.