

Monmouthshire Scrutiny

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee ~ Feedback to Cabinet of Meeting held on 3rd June 2025

Report Item 5: Additional Learning Provision / Specialist Resource Bases

Members sought clarity on the role and funding of the ALP and partnership lead, the evidence supporting report statements, and the number of children in SRBs (currently 194 out of 229 spaces). They requested access to supporting documents, which may be shared externally. Questions were raised about the £2.3 million annual spend on out-of-county placements, the quality and consistency of Individual Development Plans (IDPs), and the funding models for SRBs, which are under review. Members asked for the number of pupils in out-of-county provision (currently 55), and raised concerns about the use of acronyms and potentially stigmatising language, which the team is addressing. Clarification was sought on placements in England and Monmouthshire's role in hosting pupils from other counties. The impact of travel on well-being, capturing learner and family experiences, and compliance with the ALN Act were also discussed. Members asked about efforts to reduce out-of-county costs through local investment, progress on previous recommendations, and how budget pressures on ALN staff are being mitigated. The Council's response to increasing social, emotional, and neurodevelopmental needs was explored, including the use of the Autism in Schools programme. Criteria for SRB placements were clarified – typically requiring a statutory plan and panel decision. Members also asked whether the model reduces the need for appeals (currently none are ongoing), and whether Monmouthshire plans to develop its own specialist provision. The Council considers its SRB network as its special school model, aiming to keep children within their communities.

Chair's Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and their responses to the committee's questions, and wished to extend the committee's appreciation for the team's valuable work.

Report Item 6: Supporting Vulnerable Learners

Members asked for more detailed qualitative and quantitative data on the 68 to 70 placements that have been sustained through support, and the team confirmed it is working to enhance reporting in this area. Concerns were raised about schools' capacity to implement changes due to staffing pressures, the need to align with new emotional well-being frameworks, and the over-reliance on short-term grant funding. In response, the team highlighted its ongoing support through professional

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development and its efforts to build a sustainable in-house training model. Members also enquired about specific support for children looked after, and it was confirmed that these children are prioritised across services, supported by a dedicated officer and access to specialist teams. Finally, questions about educational psychology provision were addressed: despite a national shortage, Monmouthshire has a full team, supports trainee placements, and offers a range of preventative and consultative services to schools, including link psychologists and flexible access options.

Chair's Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and their responses to the committee's questions, and reiterated the committee's appreciation for the team's work.

Report Item 7: Risk Register Update

Members asked for more detail on how risks are categorised by impact and likelihood (e.g. major, moderate, likely, unlikely), which is guided by the Council's strategic risk management policy – this can be shared for clarity. Questions were raised about how consistency is ensured across assessments, which are developed through service business plans and reviewed by the senior leadership team. Members enquired about the use of a risk matrix for specific risks like adult social care provider failure, which are tracked through the risk radar and can be escalated to the strategic register if necessary. There were calls for more detail in the forward work plan to better understand resident impact and scrutiny priorities, and a request to include risk criteria summaries in reports for public accessibility. Concerns were raised about the level of detail on mitigation actions; while the strategic register includes key mitigations, more specific actions are found in directorate-level plans. The link between risk and budget was also discussed, with confirmation that financial risks inform budget decisions and reserve strategies. Climate and nature emergency risks are integrated into the register and aligned with the Community Corporate Plan. The de-escalation of legal challenge risks was explained as a reflection of improved internal capacity to manage them at the directorate level. Financial risk grading was questioned in light of increasing pressures, but the Council noted improved risk management practices justify the reduced grading, with more detail to follow in the outturn report. School deficits are addressed within broader financial risks, and risk prioritisation – such as comparing Net Zero targets with school attendance – depends on impact, likelihood, and the Council's capacity to influence outcomes.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair thanked the officers and Cabinet Member. He emphasised the importance of the risk register in identifying and managing strategic risks to the organisation. He

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highlighted the need to understand the risk environment, the progress of mitigations, and the potential need to refer issues to other committees. He noted the key changes in the risk register, including adjustments to workforce risk, reduction in school attendance risk, division of climate risk, and de-escalation of two risks to directorate risk registers.