

Minutes



Performance Scrutiny Committee - People

Date: 15 July 2024

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors D Fouweather (Chair), B Davies, S Marshall, D Jenkins, T Watkins, D Mayer, D Harvey, J Cleverly and C Townsend

In Attendance: Samantha Schanzer (Scrutiny Adviser), Rhian Brook (Service Manager - Children's Teams), Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director - Transformation and Corporate Centre), Sarah Morgan (Chief Education Officer), Natalie Poyner (Head of Children Services) and Rhianydd Williams (Service Manager - Integrated Family Support)

Cllr D Davies (Cabinet Member for Education and Early Years)

Apologies: Councillors M Pimm

1 Apologies

Cllr M Pimm and Sally Ann Jenkins

2 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Marshall declared an interest in the Children's Services End of Year Report and left before this item was considered. Cllr Davies declared an interest as her daughter is a social worker.

3 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held 11th June 2024 were **agreed as a true and accurate record.**

4 Service Area Plan End of Year Reports 2023-24

Education Services

Invitees:

Rhys Cornwall – Strategic Director for Transformation and Corporate
Sarah Morgan – Head of Education
Cllr D Davies – Cabinet Member for Education and Early Years

The Head of Education (HE) and the Cabinet Member for Education and Early Years presented the report.

Questions:

- The Committee asked what Welsh Government support had been provided to promote Welsh within schools. The HE noted grant schemes including the Welsh sabbatical scheme and a stream of grants to promote Welsh language professional learning for teaching staff as seen in the EAS business plan.
- The Committee queried the length of the waitlist for the sabbatical scheme. The HE agreed to provide this information.
- The Committee queried when the new Millbrook school would be completed. The HE advised that there were no changes to the opening date despite delays.
- The Committee asked whether educational attainment had been impacted due to the Millbrook closure. The HE noted there was no evidence to indicate this.
- The Committee questioned how the financial restraints and capital finance within the budget would be addressed. The HE informed Committee that there were consistent reviews to assist in mitigating costs and overspends. The HE noted the People Capital Board, which mapped the progress of projects and fed back to direct management meetings. The HE assured Committee that discussions and troubleshooting took place at Corporate Management Meetings (CMT) and capital projects are included in monitoring reports which were presented to Cabinet.
- The Committee asked what support was given for projects in listed school buildings. The HE explained that feasibility studies are conducted prior to works to unravel the complexity of large programmes. The Committee asked whether this would change with any maintenance providers or contractors utilised. The HE agreed to take this back to the governance board.
- The Committee asked whether works in the Bassaleg School car park had been completed. The HE noted all works were due to finish but the increased timeframe was a result of works location and considerations around community impacts.
- The Committee asked whether the local authority (LA) was resourced in order to meet all Additional Learning Needs (ALN). The HE noted that no LA was fully equipped and that a long-term approach needed to be adopted. They informed Committee that a consideration tool had been reintroduced to allow children to access appropriate support. The HE also noted the development of teachers' professional learning in early years to improve support for children with ALN. They highlighted that Newport has the highest number of placements in learning resource bases in Gwent and gave an example of Llanwern resource base, which was expanded to 16 places this year.
- The Committee queried what partnerships were utilised to assist in alleviating challenges. The HE highlighted Flying Start and shared educational psychologists as some partnership successes.
- The Committee asked what initiatives were in place to support wellbeing for vulnerable groups. The HE highlighted the drive for all schools to become "communication friendly schools" and networks for ALN Co-ordinators (ALNCo) and Headteachers. They informed Committee that a cross-LA ALNCo network is run to meet specialist advisors to discuss challenges and receive support, in addition to ALNCo cluster school meetings and a variety of professional learning offered for all

school staff.

- The Committee asked what strategies were in place to support disadvantaged communities. The HE noted the importance of establishing a baseline. They highlighted that a new Community Focus Manager would soon start in post to better understand school needs. They also noted parent workshops to support parents with numeracy skills, work being done with food banks to better understand needs, school visits to cascade best practices and the Raising Attainment for Disadvantaged Learners project as seen in the service area plan. They highlighted the success of universal free school meals and breakfast club provision.
- The Committee questioned what support was offered to staff and children with mental health issues. The HE noted mental health was a priority nationally. They highlighted the Whole School Approach (WSA) to mental and emotional wellbeing which looked at communities, teachers and children's wellbeing. They highlighted that there was universal school-based counselling in primary and secondary schools, with children able to self-refer. They noted the healthy schools programme, and the advocacy for professional learning around childhood trauma to better understand children's experiences, behaviours and needs. They also noted that they had a duty of care for teachers and highlighted the new and robust support programme for staff which includes counselling live chats and regular check ins.
- The Committee asked how the LA are addressing recruitment challenges for child psychologists and waitlists. The HE noted that positions are offered to students in their final year of their doctorate and assured Committee that they had a full cohort including a Wesh-speaking educational psychologist.
- The Committee questioned whether further funding would be available to assist with mental health support. The HE highlighted that some funding does already exist, and the LA maximises any funding opportunities.
- The Committee queried how the LA planned to reduce unauthorised absences and improve attendance. The HE noted attendance data post-Covid demonstrates that Newport is aligned with or higher than the national average. They highlighted that there is a range of activities to support this, and that attendance was consistently improving.
- The Committee questioned how they were addressing the trend of children being taken out of school for holidays in term time. The HE highlighted that Fixed Penalty Notices were not set by the LA.
- The Committee asked whether a briefing could be provided on how technology is used within education. The Strategic Director for Transformation and Corporate noted an all-members seminar could be provided.

Comments and recommendations:

- The Committee requested further information about the length of wait times and the number of those on the waitlist for the Welsh language sabbatical offer.
- The Committee requested regular updates on progress at Millbrook and St Andrew's schools.

Children's Services

Invitees:

Natalie Poyner – Head of Children’s Services
Louise Quartermass – Residential and Resource Service Manager
Rhian Brook – Children’s Teams Service Manager
Jay McCabe – Operations Service Manager
Rhianydd Williams – Integrated Family Support Service Manager

The Head of Childrens Services (HCS) presented the report.

Questions:

- The Committee asked what why two out of the five children’s homes were without a “good” score. The Residential and Resources Service Manager explained that they hadn’t been inspected at the time of the report but one now had received a “good” score with one area for improvement.
- The Committee asked whether age checks occur for unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The HCS assured Committee that age assessments do occur and noted most over 16s were typically placed in facilities rather than with foster families. The Operations Service Manager noted assessments were conducted by 2 NCC qualified staff members. The HCS noted that other authorities ask Newport to age assess on their behalf.
- The Committee asked for an update on the Stanley Road care leavers. The Operations Service Manager explained that there were delays in relocating a resident but this had been raised with the relevant boards and teams to progress.
- The Committee asked what was being done to prevent children losing respite care due to being taken into care on an emergency basis. The HCS reminded Committee that the LA has a statutory duty of care to children but recognised the challenge with complex needs. They highlighted that they were building provision within the LA, enhancing short breaks facilities and consulting with parents to develop accommodation options.
- The Committee asked what assistance was available for families with children in full time care. The HCS highlighted there was a transition officer to assist in the move from Children to Adult Services in advance of the change. The Integrated Family Support Service Manager highlighted independent living skills groups.
- The Committee asked how the care provision development was progressing. The HCS noted by April 2027, all children had to be out of for-profit provisions. They explained that Newport had been exploring properties under the Council’s prevue that could be developed to care for those children. The Committee asked what support from Welsh government had been given. The HCS informed Committee that they had been advised funds would be made available, but no specific figures had been given. They highlighted that they were reliant on capital grants. They agreed to update Committee on this in future.
- The Committee asked whether the LA had a responsibility to house young people being released from detention centres. The HCS noted there was a duty of care to under 18s, but over 18s would fall under Housing for provision. The Operations Service Manager assured Committee that there was not an issue in Newport and that multi-agency risk management and planning occurred prior to release so clear pathways are in place. The Committee were concerned about the risk to young people where more people would be released early and there was no structure to support this on a larger scale. The Operations Service Manager agreed to raise this

potential trend with the Youth Justice Board and provide a response.

- The Committee asked whether there was an increase in children being in prison systems. The HCS noted there was an increase in children on remand and that the LA were concerned with this as well as the increase in knife crime. The Operations Service Manager noted the delays within the court system and highlighted support for young people to raise awareness and reduce risk.
- The Committee asked about the percentage of children Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The Operations Service Manager highlighted a report being developed on a pilot scheme for traineeships provided to NEETs and agreed to provide the report to the committee. They also highlighted alternate education provision.

Comments and recommendations:

- The Committee requested a response following discussions between Children's Services teams, regional groups and the Youth Justice Board regarding potential trends for individuals leaving the justice system early and the support that can be offered.
- The Committee requested an update on the Eliminate programme's funding/costs and in-house care home provision.
- The Committee welcomed the report regarding Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) engagement, alternative education and traineeships pilot.
- The Committee highlighted the importance of engaging with young people and children and preventing negative outcomes with a range of offers.

5 **Scrutiny Adviser Reports**

a) Actions Arising

The Scrutiny Advisor noted that there were a few actions outstanding. They noted the two information reports received by Committee.

b) Forward Work Programme

The Scrutiny Advisor highlighted the addition of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan to the March 2025 meeting. They also noted the date of the next meeting as the 30th July 2024.

c) Outcomes Monitoring.

The Scrutiny Advisor noted the responses.

The meeting terminated at 11.38 am

This page is intentionally left blank