

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Special Meeting of Monmouthshire County Council held in the Council Chamber at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 23rd April 2015 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: County Councillor J. Prosser (Chairman)
County Councillor B. Strong (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Batrouni, D. Blakebrough, G.C. Burrows, P.R. Clarke, J.E. Crook, D.L.S. Dovey, D.L. Edwards, D.J. Evans, P.S. Farley, P.A. Fox, L. Guppy, E. J. Hacket Pain, R.G. Harris, P.A.D. Hobson, G. Howard, S.G.M. Howarth, D.W.H. Jones, P. Jones, S.B. Jones, R.P. Jordan, J.I. Marshall, P. Murphy, M. Powell, F. Taylor, P. Watts and K. Williams.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr P. Matthews	Chief Executive
Mrs K. Beirne	Chief Officer Enterprise
Mr S. Burch	Chief Officer Social Care and Health
Ms. S. McGuinness	Chief Officer Education
Mr W. Mclean	Head of Policy and Engagement
Mr M. Gatehouse	Policy and Performance Manager
Mrs J. Robson	Head of Finance/Section 151 Officer
Mr R. Hoggins	Head of Operations
Mr P. Davies	Head of Commercial and People Development
Mrs T. Harry	Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services
Mr R. Tranter	Head of Legal Services/Monitoring Officer
Mrs S. King	Senior Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

These were received from County Councillors R.F. Chapman, G.L. Down, A. Easson, R. Edwards, J. George, R.J.W. Greenland, R.J.C. Hayward, M. Hickman, R.J. Higginson, S. Jones, V.E. Smith, A.E. Webb, S. White and A. Wintle.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE MONMOUTHSHIRE STAFF SURVEY – PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Cabinet member presented Council with the analysis of the staff meeting and confirmed that this was to be a joint item with the People and Organisational

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Development Plan, which had been informed through extensive consultation. Outcomes of the staff survey were included and the aim was to ensure that staff were powered to deliver solutions to increasingly complex problems.

We welcomed the Chief Officer, Enterprise and were presented with details of the final version of Monmouthshire People.

We debated the key points within the report:

- We thanked officers for the report and welcomed the information presented.
- Council were informed that schools had been engaged during the process, which included non-teaching as well as teaching staff.
- Members recognised that there was a need for staff to be prepared for future challenges and thanked officers for work that had been undertaken.
- There was a need to build on engagement with young people and undertake more work with schools.
- We recognised the document as a positive strategy moving forward, in terms of changing approach, culture and attitudes.
- Information was requested regarding the number of apprentices that had been employed. There were aspirations for young people to be encouraged into the organisation and further work was required in relation to this aspect.
- A question was raised regarding benchmarking of data, it was confirmed that this was not being done at present as there was not like for like data to compare.
- We recognised that staff were an asset and commended the strategy as a way forward.

We resolved that recommendations be agreed:

1. To endorse *Monmouthshire People* as our chief framework for People and Organisational Development. To support its role in ensuring the organisation is equipped with the collective capacity, capability and mind-set to meet financial and improvement challenges and respond to opportunities;
2. To receive and consider the findings and outcomes of the recent Staff Conference and Staff Survey 2014/15;
3. To approve the resultant actions and priorities stemming from the above, as part of the first medium-term Workforce Delivery Plan – the implementation and evaluation component of the Strategy.

4. ESTYN MONITORING VISIT LETTER (MARCH 2015)

The Chief Executive presented the Estyn Monitoring Letter, which provided the outcome following the inspection of education services for children and young people in November 2012, the authority was identified as requiring special measures.

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Estyn had recently attended Monmouthshire County Council and the Children and Young People Select had considered issues. We had been assured by information presented and were positive in terms of future progress.

We were advised that inspectors were confident that the authority was aware of actions to be taken and that these were to be implemented.

Demonstrable improvements had been identified in relation to the Education Achievement Service (EAS) working relationship. The final visit would be held in the autumn and a judgement would be formed whether the authority would be released from special measures.

During debate we noted:

- Council welcomed the letter and were reassured following information presented, however, understood that further work was required in terms of access to information, alongside improvement and attention to detail.
- The Leader of the Council reaffirmed the importance of the autumn inspection visit and was optimistic that the authority was moving forward in the right direction.
- We recognised the importance of the role of the Recovery Board and thanked all who had contributed to the whole process.
- The Council had acted upon messages conveyed by Estyn, which had involved more consistent and transparent processes and this had occurred within timelines set by the inspectors.
- The Cabinet Member, Schools and Learning, was encouraged by the response from Estyn and welcomed comments that that authority had moved forward with significant progress.
- Progress had been made in a number of ways, which included holding schools to account, improved sustainability and consistency.

Council resolved to receive the Estyn Monitoring Visit 2-5 March 2015 letter.

5. WALES AUDIT OFFICE STAGE 2 IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2013/14

We noted that the Wales Audit had sent apologies and were not in attendance at the meeting.

6. COUNCIL IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2015/16

Council were presented with the Improvement Plan and Improvement Objectives proposed for 2015-17.

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The authority was statutorily required to set annual Improvement Objectives and produce an Improvement Plan, under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

The Improvement Plan was produced in two parts, the presented report was the forward looking section of the plan, focused on commitments and aspirations. It presented an opportunity to set the key activities that will deliver the priorities of education, support for vulnerable people and supporting enterprise and job creation and maintaining locally accessible services.

Five specific Improvement Objectives were contained within the plan. Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 5 are clearly aligned to the four objectives agreed last year. Objective 4 covered locally accessible services and had been introduced to reflect the corresponding priority introduced in the partnership Continuation Agreement published in March 2015.

Performance data for 2014-15 was included where appropriate and allowed members to understand the objectives for the year ahead in context of the most recent performance. The measures had not yet been subject to audit and therefore may change before being published nationally in September.

A number of changes were made to the plan in response to feedback from Wales Audit Office. This includes being more specific about how we will assess the extent to which objectives have been achieved and ensuring clearer links between activities and the measures. A short overview was included of the enabling strategies, such as the Medium Term Financial Plan, People and Organisation Development Strategy and Asset Management Plan.

Part two of the plan focused on what we achieved in 2014-15, this would be presented to Council in October when audited performance information from other councils was available, as well as up-to-date comparative data.

We debated the report, as follows:

- Council thanked the Improvement Team for the work that had been undertaken and the report that had been produced, which had improved and developed over the years.
- In response to a question raised regarding achievement at KS4 and the gap in terms of achievements, we were informed that Monmouthshire had the largest gap in Wales, however, performance was average and not the worst in Wales. It was recognised that the gap was too large and had to be addressed.
- Council were reminded that the authority conducted Cabinet Member appraisals and Performance Objectives for Cabinet Members, which enabled the Executive to be held to account. It was anticipated that annual reports would also be produced.

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- Council highlighted the importance of having percentages and actual figures included within the report.
- Members were assured that information within the report would be updated as detail became available.

It was moved and duly seconded that recommendations included that information would be added to the plan, as it became available.

Upon being put to the vote this was carried.

We resolved that recommendations were agreed:

1. Council approved the Improvement Plan 2015-17 including the five improvement objectives it describes and as information becomes available it would be added to the plan.

7. COUNCIL RESPONSE TO WALES GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER 'POWER TO LOCAL PEOPLE'

Council were presented with the draft response and invited to approve the submission, subject to any further amendments, to the Welsh Government White Paper 'Power to Local People'.

All council members were invited, by the Chief Executive, to attend a seminar to consider the WG White Paper, "Power to Local People":

- Members agreed to provide a whole council response only on areas of the White Paper where there was cross party/cross political group consensus.
- The attached document provides a summary of the outcome from the debate, as agreed, by the members who attended the seminar. Members also have the opportunity to submit an individual response to the document if they so choose.

Members contributed to debate and we highlighted points as follows:

- Members welcomed the report and were interested in many aspects of the White Paper.
- It was proposed and duly seconded that protection of employment and mitigation of job losses should be a statutory aspect. Upon being to the vote this was carried.
- Council requested that each member received a copy of the finalised report.
- It was proposed and duly seconded that the second paragraph in section 3.12 was removed. Upon being put to the vote it was carried and we resolved that the following be removed:

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'On balance we do not think that County Councillors should be members of Community Councils. The differing roles are sometimes difficult to marry with, on occasion, members potentially acting more like delegates from a Community Council than as representatives of an electorate.'

Council expressed general support for the submission and it was proposed and duly seconded, that it was agreed with the noted amendments.

Upon being put to the vote we resolved that the submission was agreed, with the addition of noted amendments and submitted to the Welsh Government by the consultation deadline of 28th April 2015.

The meeting ended 4.20 p.m.