

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Thursday, 11th April, 2019 at 2.30 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor P. Clarke (Chairman)
County Councillor S. Woodhouse (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Batrouni, J.Becker, D. Blakebrough, L.Brown, D. Dovey, L.Dymock, A. Easson, R. Edwards, D. Evans, M.Feakins, P.A. Fox, L. Guppy, R. Harris, S. Howarth, R.John, D. Jones, P. Jones, S. Jones, S.B. Jones, P. Jordan, M.Lane, P. Murphy, P.Pavia, M. Powell, J.Pratt, R.Roden, V. Smith, B. Strong, T.Thomas, J.Treharne, J.Watkins and A. Webb

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Matthew Phillips	Head of Law/ Monitoring Officer
Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Peter Davies	Chief Officer, Resources
Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Frances O'Brien	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Deb Hill-Howells	Head of Commercial and Integrated Landlord Services

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors A.Davies, R.J.W. Greenland, M.Groucutt, G. Howard, L.Jones, F. Taylor, A. Watts and K. Williams

2. Declarations of interest

County Councillor A. Webb declared a non-prejudicial interest in relation to item 8a as a Board Member of Monmouthshire Housing Association.

County Councillor M. Feakins declared a prejudicial interest in relation to 9a as a Shadow Board of Monlife.

County Councillor V. Smith declared a non-prejudicial interest in relation to Monmouthshire Housing Association.

County Councillor D. Batrouni declared a non-prejudicial interest in relation to item 8a as a Board Member of Monmouthshire Housing Association.

3. Public Questions

None.

4. Chairman's announcement and receipt of petitions

Councillor M. Powell announced that with regards to ongoing concerns around the lack of bridge to the downline at Abergavenny Station, we have been successful in our bid for funds and we look forward to the progression of the scheme.

Councillor L. Brown presented an online petition on behalf of Stop Mounton House School Closure. To date the online petition has been signed by 2333 people and it was requested that

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this be formally accepted as part of the consultation process, and referred to Cabinet on 5th June 2019. The petition and supportive comments can be accessed at <https://www.change.org/p/monmouthshire-council-stop-moun-ton-house-school-closure>

5. Notices of Motion:

5.1. From County Councillor D. Batrouni

The Leader of the Opposition brought this motion forward given the recent results published on Stats Wales around the performance of our children at GCSE level, but particularly our free school meals pupils.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Thomas who added that if other authorities have developed strategies to help these children, MCC should also have strategies that are equally effective in place. He stated the only way out of a low income background is through education, and we must hold EAS to account.

It was confirmed that debate around Moun-ton House School will take place following the consultation process.

Councillor Watkins called Council, and its officers, to work with those authorities who are achieving better results.

The Cabinet Member responded that we must recognise that the percentage of Monmouthshire pupils eligible for free school meals securing at least five a* to c grades, including English and Maths, is not high enough. The gap between free school meals and non-free school meals is too wide and remains a key priority.

The Leader of the Independents agreed with the discussion, and stated that EAS should be questioned if they are doing their absolute best. The whole system should be reviewed.

The Cabinet Member for Social Justice stated that the Administration remains totally committed to supporting and giving all children and young people the best possible start in life. She referred to areas being addressed through the Social Justice Group including development of an Early Help Panel; working with ACES; emotional resilience and mental health; work with housing and homelessness.

Council voted on the motion and in doing so the motion was defeated.

6. Monmouthshire Citizens Advice Bureau Annual Report

The Cabinet Member introduced Shirley Lightbound of the Citizens Advice Bureau who was in attendance to update Members and present The CAB Annual Report.

Highlighted statistics included:

- Saw just over 4000 clients in the last 12 months, bringing on average two issues each.
- Most clients are in the welfare benefits and tax credits area
- Bring back into the community just over £2m in gains through the work with clients.
- Expanding the digital service, 27% of clients contact CAB through the telephone, and 9% through the internet.
- Majority of clients are over 45, and CAB would like to attract younger people.
- New service to help claimants apply for universal credits.

Members expressed thanks to Ms. Lightbound and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

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7. BREXIT PREPAREDNESS

Council received an information only update regarding the Council's Preparedness for Brexit.

A Brexit Working Group made up of Officers from key service areas has been established, which is now meeting fortnightly and led by Frances Williams, Chief Officer Enterprise. Political Leads are Councillor Peter Fox (Leader) and Councillor Phil Murphy (Cabinet Member Resources) whilst Paul Matthews (Chief Executive) represents Greater Gwent on the Welsh Government EU Preparedness Group.

Comments were made regarding concerns around the political input of the working group coming solely from the Conservative Group.

The Chief Executive explained that is a technical agenda entirely in the officer domain, largely risk based assessment. He did not consider a need at present for a cross-party working group.

8. Report of the Chief Officer for Resources:

8.1. Proposed Development Company - Initial Appraisal

Council received a report in order to consider the outcome of an initial appraisal into the feasibility and need the Council to set up its own trading company to undertake residential and commercial developments.

Full Council instructed officers to undertake an initial appraisal of the feasibility of the creation of a residential development company to tackle a concern around the lack of market and rental affordable housing. In the intervening period, officers have undertaken research on and met senior officers and advisors with comparable trading entities to establish the lessons learnt, legal frameworks, financial considerations and assess evidence of demand.

The Cabinet Member for Social Justice provided further information around the structure of the development of the company. She added that we should be aiming to build homes and communities, and encouraging the re-emergence of local SME supply chains, direct jobs and apprenticeships; we should be aiming for carbon positive developments which we have a stake in over time; we should be attacking the issues through the potential we have such as energy poverty and active travel.

Further clarification on the detail of the report was sought, in terms of who had been consulted, and the social justice agenda. To address concerns the Head of Commercial and Integrated Landlord Services explained that the intention is not to compete with RSLs, and to look at social justice in its widest context.

Reference was made to the benefits of Community Land Trusts, and Community Interest Companies. It was suggested this could open opportunities with extra funding streams, and new partnerships.

The Chief Executive clarified that this is not yet a business case, but rather trying to create a liberating framework to enable us to consider anything that is on the market that can advance priorities of this Council.

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The Cabinet Member for resources added that this vehicle, when fully developed, would give far more influence in the market than we currently have through the planning system. By developing sites with joint venture partners we can influence the market and control the amount of profit made, and use for the public good.

Upon being put to the vote Council resolved to accept the recommendation:

To approve the findings of the initial appraisal and agree to the undertaking of a detailed business case to establish the proposed trading structure, financial viability and social outcomes.

9. Report of the Chief Officer for Enterprise:

9.1. MONLIFE - Update

Council received the report to advise Members that the preferred model for ongoing delivery of Tourism, Culture, Leisure and Youth Services is an in-house model with commitment to a fundamental programme of renewal and transformation.

The Leader presented the report on behalf of Councillor Greenland, and in doing so commended staff for the huge amount of work undertaken on this work.

He proposed a further recommendation that this Council write to Welsh Government asking that they exempt all council owned leisure centres from NNDR.

Upon being put the vote Council resolved to accept the recommendations, including recommendation 2.7:

2.1 Council agrees not to progress with externalising Tourism, Culture, Leisure and Youth Services but to retain services in-house with a commitment to a fundamental programme of renewal and transformation.

2.2 Council recognises a requirement for a wide ranging policy review process to be conducted to create an operating environment that optimises the MonLife service group capability of moving to a sustainable model for delivery. This work to be concluded by the Cabinet Member with portfolio by the summer of 2019.

2.3 Council agrees to adopt the Ealing ruling and treat our VAT on sporting facilities as exempt.

2.4 To acknowledge the Cabinet Members intention to establish an external Advisory Board working with him to continue to bring fresh insight to the service area. Existing members of the shadow board established to take MonLife forward will be invited to join this Advisory Board to continue their valuable engagement with the service area where they wish to do so.

2.5 To recognise that the Chief Executive will be giving consideration to senior officer reporting arrangements to ensure that the service group has heightened exposure to and involvement in whole organisation decision-making.

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2.6 To be aware of the Cabinet Members intention to commission work to develop a multi-year capital investment strategy for the service group for future consideration by Council.

2.7 To write to Welsh Government asking that they exempt all Council owned leisure centres from NNDR.

10. To confirm the minutes of the meeting of County Council held on 3rd March 2019

The minutes of the meeting of County Council held on 3rd March 2019 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

11. To note the minutes of the following meetings of Democratic Services Committee:

11.1. 3rd December 2018

Noted.

11.2. 7th January 2019

Noted.

12. To note the minutes of the meeting of Audit Committee held on 31st January 2019

Noted.

The meeting ended at 4.30 pm