

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of County Council held
at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Thursday, 18th July, 2019 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor S. Woodhouse (Chairman)
County Councillor S.B. Jones (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: P. Clarke, D. Batrouni, J.Becker,
D. Blakebrough, L.Brown, D. Dovey, A. Easson, R. Edwards,
D. Evans, P.A. Fox, R.J.W. Greenland, R. Harris, J. Higginson,
G. Howard, S. Howarth, R.John, L.Jones, P. Jones, S. Jones,
P. Jordan, M.Lane, P. Murphy, P.Pavia, M. Powell, J.Pratt, R.Roden,
B. Strong, J.Treharne, J.Watkins and A. Webb

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Matthew Phillips	Head of Law/ Monitoring Officer
Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Frances O'Brien	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Mark Howcroft	Assistant Head of Finance
Cath Saunders	Children and Young People Directorate
Sharon Randall-Smith	Head of Achievement and Attainment

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors A.Davies, L.Dymock, M.Feakins, M.Groucutt, L. Guppy, D. Jones, V. Smith, F. Taylor, T.Thomas, A. Watts and K. Williams

2. Declarations of interest

None.

3. Public Questions

None.

4. Chairman's announcement and receipt of petitions

No petitions were presented.

5. Statement from Cabinet Member for Children and Young People - Investment in 21st Century Schools

Last month saw the official opening of the award winning Monmouth Comprehensive School, an event which perfectly showcased the talents of the school's pupils, but also the benefits of an outstanding, modern, versatile and digitally enabled school. This followed the official opening of Caldicot School last year.

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Today, I want to update Members on developments in the next stage of renewing our school estate, with particular reference to the funding options for Band B of 21st Century Schools.

In December last year, I brought forward a report to establish the small team that would work alongside members and other senior officers to develop Band B.

Our Band B proposal is the redevelopment of King Henry VIII Comprehensive School and Deri View Primary School to provide a new learning campus for children aged three to 19 in Abergavenny. This redevelopment will allow the transfer of Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni from its current location to the site of Deri View, enabling it to expand to two-form entry.

The initial decision taken by Cabinet in 2017 concluded that the traditional capital-financing route was the most appropriate – at that stage, there was a 50% funding intervention rate.

The Welsh Government has since changed its intervention rates for both its capital and revenue funding schemes (aka the Mutual Investment Model (MIM)). The Welsh Government intervention rate for traditionally financed schemes changed from 50% to 65%, while the rate for the MIM changed from 75% to 81%, giving us cause to undertake a fresh analysis of the potential advantages of the MIM.

Officers have been working with colleagues from Welsh Government over the past weeks and have determined that the most appropriate approach for Monmouthshire remains the traditional capital-financing route.

It affords the greatest flexibility whilst maintaining a lower overall cost profile for the local authority. Given the challenging budgetary period we face, especially given our position as the lowest funded local authority in the country, this flexibility was too significant a differential for us.

While the MIM would have ensured the new school is well maintained and returned to the authority in good condition at the end of the 25 year agreement, the MIM would have restricted some of the specific design and innovative teaching requirements that we were able to achieve in both Caldicot and Monmouth.

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My statement today reaffirms the previously agreed political decision and allows us to proceed with speed, accuracy and clarity into Band B.

Our 21st Century Schools Board visited the site on Monday as the work continues to identify the best location for the new school. I am grateful for the involvement of the headteachers and chairs of governors from the three schools, whose expertise when it comes to the visioning of the new school will be critical to the success of this project.

As we begin to develop the full business case for the new school, I will bring a report to full council in September to make permanent the role of 21st Century Schools Programme Manager and secure funding for the project team and feasibility studies including site investigations and ground surveys.

I would also like to announce today a £1million investment in our school estate as a consequence of a capital grant we received from Welsh Government at the very end of the 2018-19 financial year, for which we are grateful.

This investment includes a new classroom at Gilwern Primary School and upgrades to specialist equipment in our Special Needs Resource Bases.

We have decided to invest half a million pounds in Chepstow Comprehensive School to remodel the front pupil entrance including new windows, decorating the schools where required, replacing the ceiling where required and remodelling the reception area, however this will need planning and therefore will not be completed over the summer.

I hope this statement reaffirms our commitment to ensuring the best possible start in life for every young person in Monmouthshire and delivering a 21st century learning environment for every pupil.

6. Audit Committee Annual Report 2018/19

Mr. Phillip White, Chair of Audit Committee presented the Audit Committee Annual Report 2018/19. The report showed how the Committee had fulfilled its role as defined by the terms of reference.

The report was seconded by County Councillor Higginson, and accepted by Council.

7. Statement of Accounts 2018/19

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Council were presented with the report in order to volunteer a pilot change in the approval process for Statement of Accounts, recognising earlier publication deadlines are not conducive with existing meeting cycles.

Council was provided with a copy of the draft statement of accounts for the Authority for 2018/19, for member consideration during the audit process.

Members were assured that the change did not conflict with the current constitution.

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

That the draft Monmouthshire County Council Statement of Accounts for 2018/19, as presented for audit, be reviewed. (Appendix 2).

That for 2018-19 statement of accounts process, the final approval of the audited statement of accounts is delegated to the Audit Committee rather than requiring approval by full Council.

8. Members Questions:

8.1. From County Councillor R. Harris to County Councillor R. John, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and MonLife

Councillor John provided the following response:

For clarification, there are four main PLASC SEN categories

- Cognition and Learning
- Communication and Interaction Difficulties
- Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties
- Sensory and Physical Difficulties

Each of these categories is broken down into sub-categories, which describes in more detail the child's special educational need. For example, the category Cognition and Learning has eight sub-categories, which includes Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) Dyslexia, Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) and Profound and Multiple Difficulties (PMLD). I attach for your information a document which includes a description of all the PLASC SEN categories.

The ALN Statutory Team provides regular information on the numbers of children and young people with statements of special educational need across Monmouthshire. This information is analysed by special educational need category, national curriculum year group and gender. There are regular discussions any aspects of the information provided that would be a cause for concern.

Cllr Harris has asked for specific information about primary pupils with ALN in the north of the county. The information below has been taken from the January SEN PLASC and includes data from Cantref, Cross Ash, Deri View, Gilwern, Goytre, Kymin View, Llandogo, Llanfoist, Llantillio Pertholey, Llanvihangel Crucorney, Osbaston, OLSM, Overmonnow, Raglan, Usk and Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni.

- Cognition and Learning
- 49 Dyslexia – DYSL
- 3 Dyspraxia – DYSP
- 5 Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder - ADHD
- 193 General Learning Difficulties – GLD
- 75 Moderate Learning Difficulties – MLD

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- 11 Severe Learning Difficulties – SLD
- 6 Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties – PMLD
- Communication and Interaction Difficulties
- 146 Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties - SLCD
- 39 Autistic Spectrum Disorders – ASD This includes Asperger's Syndrome and social communication difficulties.
- Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties
- 108 Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties - BESD
- Sensory and Physical Difficulties
- 50 Hearing Impairment – HI
- 8 Visual Impairment – VI
- 3 Multi-Sensory Impairment – MSI Pupils with MSI will have a combination of visual and hearing difficulties
- 40 Physical and Medical Difficulties – PMED

The Principal Officer for ALN and Statutory ALN Officer have met with all primary schools to discuss their ALN population and have addressed directly with each school any areas of concern. Further work and training is planned in the autumn term which will support schools more effectively meet the needs of their pupils with ALN. This includes the identification of effective, specialist interventions and a training programme for Teaching Assistants. The number of children diagnosed with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder is growing so the ALN and Educational Psychology services have prioritised this as an area where more targeted training and support is required.

From September 2020 the Local Authority will be required to implement the statutory requirements outlined in the ALN and Educational Tribunal Act 2018, which includes a number of changes, including Individual Development Plans (IDPs) instead of a statement of special educational need, will present schools and the local authority with significant challenges going forward.

I wouldn't say these figures represent concerns as such, but they do set out the challenge of meeting the needs of a growing population of school pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties (SLCD) and with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and the challenge is based around earlier identification and support.

The data for ALN in the North of the county there is an increase in ASD, speech language and communication and behaviour needs. The last can be the presentation of children frustrated because their needs have not been diagnosed. SLCD may indicate ASD and therefore moving forward there is a need to improve timely assessments and support for these pupils. In many cases assessment is carried out by Health and we are working with these colleagues to improve these process and the time they take.

Inclusion colleagues have recognised the need to support schools with pupils presenting with behaviour and are in the process of developing a package of support.

We have met individually with all schools to discuss individual concerns and have agreed support for the coming year. This approach has been very well received by schools

As a supplementary Councillor Harris asked that should any detailed analysis of the statistics reveal a large variation in individual schools identified ALN needs, would it be appropriate to consider that professional support be distributed on a proportionate basis?

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Councillor John responded that there are four special needs resource bases which are particularly specialised. In terms of data and differences between schools, this data can be obtained to provide a further breakdown. He added that he would be happy to discuss this data, and what this means for ALN pupils.

8.2. From County Councillor L. Brown to County Councillor R. John, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and MonLife

Councillor John provided the following response:

Can I thank Cllr Brown for her questions and for engaging so diligently in the consultation on the future of Mounton House Special School. While it is physically located in her ward, Cllr Brown has followed the discussions surrounding the school's future very closely and has submitted a detailed and thorough response to the consultation.

As you say, we had been due to make a decision on the future of Mounton House Special School at our cabinet meeting on 5th June 2019. At that meeting I explained that as of the end of the formal consultation on 29th April, we had not received responses from a number of key stakeholders, including both neighbouring and placing authorities. I also received a request from the Leader of the Opposition to make a late submission, as he not done so during the consultation period.

The statutory process concerning the proposed closure of a school is one that is set within the Welsh School Organisation Code. We must set out how we propose to proceed within 26 weeks of the closure of the consultation, in this particular case, by 28th October 2019.

I asked officers to change the timetable to ensure that responses from these key partners could be taken into account. As we are in a statutory process, we have not extended the consultation period or initiated another one. I have simply stated that we will accept late submissions from these key partners and these will be able to be considered by officers and Members and will appear in the formal report but will be marked as late receipt.

At the cabinet meeting on 5th June, I explained why we had decided to delay the decision. I explained that I did not feel it would be fair to make a decision during the summer months while staff and pupils are away, so I stated that we would consider the matter at a cabinet meeting in mid-September. This meeting will take place on Wednesday 18th September. This allows time for reports to be published during term time - I envisage this to be on 10th September.

Key consultees are being informed of the new decision date.

I also indicated that if we were to proceed with closure, we would consider a closure date of 31st August 2020, not 31st December, minimising disruption for pupils, particularly those in Year 11.

As a supplementary Councillor Brown asked what the consultation report summary date would be. In response it was envisaged that the report will go into the public domain on 10th September 2019, with a Cabinet date of 18th September 2019.

8.3. From County Councillor L. Brown to County Councillor R. John, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and MonLife

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The report will summarise the responses received to the consultation, but in line with previous consultations, a copy of the full responses received will be made available to Members in the library area.

8.4. From County Councillor J. Watkins to County Councillor J. Pratt, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Neighbourhood Services

County Councillor Pratt responded that following a motion at May Council officers were instructed to begin work on developing an action plan which will set out how we aim to reduce the authority's carbon emissions. The Cabinet Member hoped to take this to Strong Communities Select Committee in September and to Council in October to ensure all Members have a chance to debate and endorse the actions that will deliver this policy commitment.

In order to reduce our emissions, we first need to understand what they are currently. Emissions for the whole County have dropped from about 900,000 tonnes per year in 2005 to around 650,000 tonnes per year in 2016. This is consistent with national trends as more renewable energy is generated and the use of coal reduces. At that rate it would take more than 30 years to achieve the sort of change we need.

51% of the emissions are from transport, reflecting the rural nature of the County. 24% from domestic emissions, and 25% from industrial and commercial emissions.

Looking more specifically at our own organisation we emit around 8700 tonnes of carbon a year from static assets such as buildings and street lighting and another 3000 tonnes from vehicles used by officers and Members in the course of their work.

On 19th June officers held a workshop to begin thinking about how we need to respond to the Climate Emergency. They considered work already underway towards reducing emissions such as solar farm, installation of electric vehicle charging points and LED street lighting.

Officers began identifying a wide range of actions looking at transport, energy, waste and procurement, land use and green infrastructure. Consideration was given to what the carbon impact of these different actions would be, estimates of financial costs and timescales.

Four separate workshops have been held to continue the process of prioritising which actions will form part of the action plan, which will then be worked on in more detail.

We hugely value the enthusiasm, energy and expertise of the residents of Monmouthshire who contribute to tackling the Climate Emergency. In line with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act we plan to collaborate with communities and partners to work together on the action plan. The Community Climate Champions meeting will take place on 31st July 2019 to begin the process.

Policies have been amended in light of the Climate Emergency. A new Issues, Vision and Objectives paper for the LDP has been approved. The Corporate Plan objectives will be subject to a mid-term review and will incorporate more detail on the Climate Emergency.

Sincere thanks were offered to officers for their commitment to the climate change emergency despite other pressures. Council has not taken the matter lightly and assurance was given that commitment and urgency will be sustained in the weeks, months and years ahead.

As a supplementary Councillor Watkins stated that she had always felt proud of Monmouthshire for investing in a solar farm, and asked if the Council is also looking to invest in renewable energy?

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In response the Cabinet Member explained that 99% of our buildings use renewable energy. She added that we are looking at an additional solar farm, and part of the process due to take place over the summer will include looking at what investments can be made.

9. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 20th June 2019

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 20th June 2019 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

10. To note next meeting date as Thursday 19th September 2019 at 2pm

Noted.

The meeting ended at 2.40 pm