

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Thursday, 16th January, 2020 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor S. Woodhouse (Chairman)

County Councillors: P. Clarke, D. Batrouni, J.Becker, L.Brown, A.Davies, D. Dovey, L.Dymock, A. Easson, R. Edwards, D. Evans, M.Feakins, P.A. Fox, M.Groucutt, J. Higginson, G. Howard, S. Howarth, R.John, D. Jones, L.Jones, S. Jones, P. Jordan, M.Lane, P. Murphy, P.Pavia, M. Powell, J.Pratt, R.Roden, V. Smith, B. Strong, F. Taylor, T.Thomas, J.Treharne, J.Watkins, A. Watts, A. Webb and K. Williams

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
Julie Boothroyd	Chief Officer Social Care, Safeguarding and Health

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors D. Blakebrough, R.J.W. Greenland, L. Guppy, R. Harris, P. Jones and S.B. Jones

The Chairman requested that Council observe a minute silence in remembrance of Samuel Barker, a pupil at Osbaston Church in Wales School, who had tragically lost his life in a road traffic accident.

1. PRE AGENDA - SIGNING OF THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT

The Chairman welcomed guests for the signing ceremony of the Armed Forces Covenant.

The pledge was signed by Cllr Sheila Woodhouse as Chairman of the Council and Lt Col JPR Gossage RE on behalf of the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers (Militia). Signing on behalf of the Town Councils were Chepstow: Cllr Tom Kirton (Mayor), Caldicot: Cllr Dave Evans (Mayor), Monmouth: Cllr Richard Roden (Mayor), Usk: Cllr Christine Wilkinson (Mayor), Abergavenny: Cllr Tony Konieczny (Mayor).

The Leader welcomed this important occasion where we recognise armed services families within our area. He thanked Joe Skidmore, the Communities and Partnership Development Lead for organising the occasion and looked forward to an ongoing powerful and strong relationship over the coming years.

3. Declarations of interest

None.

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4. Public Questions

None.

5. Chairman's announcement and receipt of petitions

Council received the Chairman's announcement.

There were no petitions.

The Chair welcomed Michelle Daltry of Disability Sport Wales who presented the insport Development Silver Accreditation to Council.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and MonLife thanked MonLife staff adding that he looked forward to ongoing work for MCC to achieve the gold standard.

6. Report of the Chief Officer for Enterprise

6.1. Caldicot Leisure Centre Refurbishment and Chepstow Gym and Cafe upgrade

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and MonLife presented a report to inform Members of the results of the Caldicot Leisure Centre Refurbishment Feasibility Study RIBA stage 2 and to update on options.

Members were also informed of the need to improve the offer at Chepstow Leisure Centre to ensure it remains fit for purpose and attractive to customers.

We welcomed consultants from Alliance Leisure, Paul Cluett and Julia Goddard.

Following the presentation Members were invited to comment:

Reservations were raised around the access to the site, having previously discussed the possibility of a tree lined façade. This is something that would still be welcomed by the community.

It was suggested that the surplus being made at Monmouth should be used to further support the Caldicot development.

Questions were asked around the size and functionality of the swimming pool and the use of demountable for the changing facilities.

Concerns were raised regarding the removal of the squash facilities, particularly in terms of facilities available to the older generation.

The introduction of the skate park was welcomed.

Reference was made to inadequate gym facilities at Abergavenny Leisure Centre.

It was noted that the final projection would be brought back to Council.

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

- To proceed to the next stage of cost certainty RIBA 4 on the proposed model of "Remodel the Existing Centre" as outlined in the report at an additional cost of £244,569.

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- To approve preliminary investigative and design work of £30,000 and proceed with a feasibility study for upgrades to the fitness facilities at Chepstow Leisure Centre and to remodel the café and reception areas depending upon cost.

Councillor V. Smith left at 15:20pm

7. Report of the Head of Policy and Governance

7.1. Diary of Meetings 2020 - 2021

The Cabinet Member for Governance presented the draft diary of meetings for 2020/2021 for Council approval.

Members recognised the need for flexibility, and a work/life balance, as well as the issues surrounding attendance at meetings, and were therefore keen to alternate times of meetings.

A Member urged that Senior Officers adhere to report deadlines, vital for effective scrutiny.

Reference was made to digital issues and the IT equipment. The Cabinet Member suggested that there is Capital Budget in place to improve digital systems, which should be taken advantage of.

The Cabinet Member proposed an amendment to the recommendations:

- That the diary of meetings for 2020/2021 be approved with the 8 full Council meetings remaining at 2pm.
- That the remaining committees resolve to set their meeting times at the first meeting of the Council year.

Upon being put to the vote the amendment was carried and approved.

8. Report of the Chief Officer for Resources

8.1. Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2020/2021

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented the report, the purpose being:

- To advise of the arrangements for the implementation of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and to approve it for 2020/21
- To affirm that, in the absence of any revisions or amendments, annual uprating amendments will be carried out each year.

The Head of Revenue and Benefits for Monmouthshire and Torfaen confirmed that 5675 were currently receiving the council tax reduction, being around 15% of households in Monmouthshire. This is a slight increase since the introduction of the scheme in 2013.

Welsh Government contribute £22m across Wales towards the council tax reduction scheme. Monmouthshire County Council receives about £6.8m, within which is a supplement that would

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be contributed Welsh Government to maintain the 100% as the benefit had been restricted to 90% when transferred by DWP.

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

- To note the making of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Prescribed Requirements (Wales) Regulations ("the Prescribed Requirements Regulations") 2013 by the Welsh Government on 26 November 2013.
- To adopt the provisions within the Regulations above ("the Prescribed Requirements Regulations") and any 'annual uprating regulations' in respect of its Scheme for the financial year 2020/21 including the discretionary elements previously approved as the Council's local scheme from 1st April 2020.

9. Notices of Motion:

9.1. Submitted by County Councillor Batrouni

The Labour group believes inequality and poverty are major problems in Monmouthshire and the council should campaign for an Income Inequality grant.

In seconding the motion Councillor Groucutt referred to the strategy submitted with the motion and shared a view that Council are fortunate to have a social scientist among Members who has undertaken the analysis provided.

The Cabinet Member for Social Justice, Councillor Sara Jones proposed an amendment that *'This Council believes that inequality and poverty are major problems in Monmouthshire and this Council should campaign for an income equality grant'*.

The amendment was duly seconded.

The Cabinet Member went on to explain that she understands and appreciates the scale of the problem and acknowledges the challenge being faced. She outlined current commitments and wished to make it clear to residents and Members that this Council is totally and utterly committed to tackling poverty and the challenges that inequality presents within our communities.

The Leader of the Independent Group welcomed the analysis and the time invested in the report. She added the timeliness of the motion given the introduction of the socio-economic duty in April 2020, meaning when we make any decisions, we will have to consider socio-economic factors as well as the other protected characteristics under the Equalities Act.

Councillor J. Pratt left at 16:10pm

The Leader of the Liberal Democrats supported the amendment and welcomed the opportunity to work cross-party. She commended Councillor Batrouni on the background work supporting the motion.

Councillor F. Taylor left at 16:23pm

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The Chair of Strong Communities Select Committee supported the amended motion and welcomed all Members to attend the meeting of the committee on 23rd April 2020.

Upon being put to the vote the amended motion was carried.

9.2. Submitted by County Councillor Batrouni

That this Council is disappointed that the Tory administration decided to close Mounton House, especially without any future plan for the site as a whole or for the long-term provision of educational services for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Moving forward, the Council will:

- 1. Place restrictions on the site of Mounton House that requires any future use or redevelopment to be allowed only for educational or local community purposes in order to ensure the site is not sold for housing by the current or any future administration;*
- 2. Bring forward plans in this calendar year as to the long-term plans for SEBD children in the county.*

The motion was duly seconded by Councillor Tudor Thomas, in doing so he added his support agreeing this is a valuable site in a sought after area. He expressed disappointment that the school is closing and was concerned of the long-term plan for pupils. He sought clarity on the future of staff and pupils.

The Chairman reiterated that this was not an opportunity to revisit the consultation on the closure of Mounton House.

The Chief Officer explained that with regards to the future of the Pupil Referral Service, funding discussed at Cabinet is to support our four secondary schools to manage children who are at risk of exclusion in a mainstream setting. It does not relate to any child at Mounton House. Children at Mounton House are being carefully supported through the ongoing annual statementing process. There are likely to be differing solutions depending on the age of the child. Children in key stage 3 are likely to be placed in a specialist school, one child in key stage 4 will have a bespoke curriculum created for them and managed by the PRS.

Reassurance was sought that the building would be used for an educational or community use.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded that they have been clear throughout the process that the decision was made on the basis of the best interests of children with additional learning needs in Monmouthshire. At no point did the consultation documents or discussions include the notion of disposal of the land for housing. He confirmed that no consideration has been given to selling the land for housing.

The Leader moved the motion and upon being put to the vote the motion was defeated.

Councillors S. Jones and L. Jones left at 17:05pm

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9.3. Submitted by County Councillor P. Fox

This Council:

Notes with frustration that Monmouthshire County Council consistently receives the lowest per head funding of any local authority in Wales from the Welsh Government.

Recognises the significant financial pressures on local authority services, particularly in demand for social care and additional learning needs.

Expresses extreme disappointment that in 2020-21 Monmouthshire is set to receive the worst settlement of any council with a rise of just 3% compared to 5.4% in neighbouring authorities.

Calls on the Leader and Cabinet to continue to make robust representations to the Welsh Government for a funding floor to reduce inequality and commission a review of the local government funding formula, which fails to recognise the challenges.

The Leader of the Opposition proposed an amendment that the last paragraph should read:

Calls on the Council collectively to make robust representations to the Welsh Government for a funding floor to reduce inequality and commission a review of the local government funding formula, which fails to recognise the challenges.

Councillor K. Williams seconded the amendment.

The challenges around the demographics in Monmouthshire were highlighted.

Council voted upon the amendment which was defeated.

Debate returned to the original motion.

The Chair of Economy and Development Select stated that the Committee had asked at least twice for WLGA to attend and present a seminar to explain the funding formula.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was carried.

Councillors J. Treharne; R. John; A. Webb; R. Edwards left at 17:40pm

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10. Members Questions:

10.1. From County Councillor M. Groucutt to County Councillor R. John, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and MonLife

In light of the budget consultation item that schools budgets be reduced by 2%, what would be the direct financial impact of such a cut on the budgets of our four comprehensive schools? Has any consideration been given to the impact that this would have on standards and outcomes in these schools and the provision that they are able to offer, particularly for our most vulnerable and needy pupils?

The Cabinet Member responded by thanking the Member for his question. He explained that as the worst funded county in the country our budget consultation for 2020-2021 has proposed a reduction of 2% in the individual schools' budget. This excludes funding for additional learning needs. He added that he does not feel comfortable with the proposed reduction, but this is a consultation. We will continue to work closely with schools to identify where savings can be made to ensure there is minimal impact on standards. The grants for schools distributed through the EAS are not affected. Financial pressures faced by schools are recognised and we have proposed to introduce a loan facility which will allow schools to pay back their deficit over a longer period of time. Monmouthshire is not alone in experiencing such challenges in the school system with some authorities with significantly larger deficits. He urged Welsh Government to increase its pupil funding to narrow the funding gap between Wales and England which currently stands at £645 per pupil, in addition to adding a floor in the funding formula.

As a supplementary Councillor Groucutt asked if the Cabinet Member was aware that the Headteacher of King Henry VIII Comprehensive School had written an open letter to all parents stating that a 2% reduction would lose £75k from the budget and if approved would impact on the ability to maintain all aspects of current core provision. He questioned the financial logic around the proposals.

The Cabinet Member responded that he had not seen the letter and reiterated that he does not want to see the reduction of 2% take place. He is proud that, in spite of significant financial challenges in recent years, we have protected school budgets. He explained the financial pressures caused by the funding gap and hoped opposition members recognise that unless these pressures change we will have to take unwanted decisions.

10.2. From County Councillor M. Groucutt to County Councillor R. Greenland, Cabinet Member for Innovation, Enterprise and Leisure

Is the cabinet member concerned at the apparent lack of consultation between officers of this council and the BBNP over the proposals submitted by the Monmouthshire Housing Authority to build on land adjacent to the Lansdown ward lying within the National Park? This proposal includes 70% affordable housing and would be adjacent to wards which already have areas of considerable social isolation and poverty. Would such a development, in an area where current roads would make the development inaccessible by public transport and commercial traffic, create an 'out of sight, out of mind' community that would only make worse the social problems faced by large areas in north Abergavenny? Will he confirm that the council will oppose such development

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should the National Park Authority proceed beyond Stage 2 with the proposal still in its developing LDP?

The Leader provided the following response on behalf of Cabinet Member Councillor R. Greenland.

I can confirm that MCC Planning Officers have been in consultation with the Brecon Beacons National Park regarding the development of the National Park LDP Preferred Strategy. MCC Planning Officers will continue to engage with BBNP and work collaboratively during development of the LDP to ensure cross boundary objectives are realised. With regards to this particular candidate site, given the affordability challenges in the Abergavenny housing market, the objective to provide a high level of affordable housing is welcomed in principal. The Council has raised concerns with the National Park about access to the site and landscape impact. There are likely to be more sustainable developments in and adjacent to Abergavenny to meet housing needs that should be considered before developing in the National Park. It is now for them to consider our comments.

As a supplementary Councillor Groucutt asked if National Park planners give Monmouthshire Housing Association permission to build their proposed development of primarily social housing, will the County Council take into full account the difficulties of developing a suitable infrastructure and ways to support the social and economical needs of an enlarged population in North Abergavenny?

The Leader responded that MCC have raised concerns regarding the inclusion of the site in the National Park's LDP and we will have a further opportunity to comment at the deposit plan stage if the site remains in their LDP. We support the provision of affordable housing but believe this should be achieved in mixed, inclusive and accessible communities and will ensure that the National Park is aware of our position should the site remain in their emerging LDP.

11. To confirm the minutes of the meeting of County Council held on 24th October 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th October 2019 were approved and signed by the Chair.

The meeting ended at 5.50 pm