

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Tuesday, 27th September, 2022 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor Laura Wright (Chairman)
County Councillor Ann Webb (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: Tony Kear, Catrin Maby, Jan Butler, Ian Chandler, Sara Burch, Alistair Neill, Su McConnel, Mary Ann Brocklesby, Fay Bromfield, Emma Bryn, Peter Strong, Meirion Howells, Paul Griffiths, Jackie Strong, Rachel Garrick, Maria Stevens, Steven Garratt, Angela Sandles, Ben Callard, John Crook, Tomos Davies, Dale Rooke, Catherine Fookes, Sue Riley, Jayne McKenna, Jill Bond, Louise Brown, Lisa Dymock, Tony Easson, Martyn Groucutt, Richard John, David Jones, Penny Jones, Malcolm Lane, Phil Murphy, Paul Pavia, Maureen Powell, Frances Taylor, Tudor Thomas and Armand Watts

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Matt Phillips	Chief Officer People and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Peter Davies	Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer, Resources
Jane Rodgers	Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Frances O'Brien	Chief Officer, Communities and Place
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy and Governance
Mark Hand	Head of Place-making, Housing, Highways and Flood

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors Christopher Edwards and Simon Howarth

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 21st July 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st July 2022 were confirmed as an accurate record.

2. Declarations of interest

County Councillor Sara Burch declared a non-prejudicial interest in relation to agenda item 7.1 as she had been Manager of the Gateway Credit Union and remains a supporter of the board.

3. Public Questions

None.

4. Chair's Announcement - Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

Council held a minute silence to mark the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Members also took this time to mark the recent passing of County Councillor Bob Greenland.

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The Chair welcomed Members to express messages of condolence and fond memories of Councillor Greenland.

5. Reports to Council:

5.1. PROGRESSING MONMOUTHSHIRE'S REPLACEMENT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (RLDP)

The Deputy Leader presented the report to seek Council's endorsement of the proposed way of progressing the Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP), ensuring that the RLDP delivers on the Council's objectives and addresses key local issues, in particular affordable housing, demographic balance and the climate and nature emergency. In doing so, he expressed appreciation to the relevant officers.

A question was raised to why the planning for housing at Raglan had been rejected by Welsh Government, and it was hoped that WG would grant permission for this development.

There were concerns that if pre-requisites did not materialise the plan could fall through. It was thought that the current financial climate could result in a re-prioritisation of the plans.

Reference was made to the spatial aspects and phosphate emissions in the Wye catchment area, and reassurance was sought that Council will, in the progression of the RLDP, push as hard as it can for a technical solution to dealing with phosphate emissions in the Wye so that developments in the Monmouth area can proceed in due course.

A suggestion was made that Penperlleni be considered as a possible strategic growth area.

Issues raised at a recent scrutiny meeting related to concerns that affordable housing should be across the County and not in specific areas.

To give this planning approach credibility it was suggested that new Administration commit to the WelTag Stage 3 on the Chepstow relief road which would show residents of South East of the County that there is a long term plan to deal with infrastructure challenge.

There were concerns around deliverability and the heavy burden on the revenue budget and consequently frontline services.

The Cabinet Member clarified matters around the phosphate issue, explaining that in relation to the River Usk the phosphate reduction work would be completed by the fiscal year 2025/26. There is also work underway on the River Wye but this is a more complex process.

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

That Council endorses the proposal for progressing the RLDP, noting that a report will be brought to Council in December 2022 seeking endorsement to consult on a new Preferred Strategy.

6. MOTION FOR THE RIVERS AND OCEAN

The Cabinet Member presented the report to outline the challenges facing our marine and river environments and set out how Monmouthshire County Council can play its part in realising clean, healthy and productive rivers and oceans, in order to see all the biodiversity, economic and health and wellbeing benefits that this will bring.

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A suggestion was made that Council should receive a more robust plan in 6 months, with 6 monthly updates on progress.

The Leader of the Opposition reflected on the importance of education around the unique properties of the Gwent levels, and expressed support on the work on flood defences.

There was suggestion that the levels area of the action plan should be strengthened particularly as this is a complex area of roles and responsibilities. Also, Welsh Government should be lobbied to ensure that NRW is fit for purpose.

The Cabinet Member thanked the Sustainability Policy Officer for her work and noted that an internal working group on climate and nature is hoped to start in the near future.

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

To agree to the actions outlined in the Motion for the Rivers and Oceans Action Plan (see Appendix 1)

7. MONLIFE TACKLING POVERTY AND INEQUALITY SUMMER PROGRAMMES 2022 REPORT

The Cabinet Member presented the report to provide an update to Council on programmes and interventions delivered by Monlife through the summer, aimed towards tackling poverty, inequality and access to doorstep services.

Council were informed of positive feedback from the summer programme.

The MonLife team are to produce a comprehensive report covering the summer and initiatives contained within this report.

Reference was made to the Food and Fun initiative, which proved to be of huge value in highlighting the importance of good nutrition to children and their families.

Council resolved to accept the recommendation:

To note the Summer of Fun investment of £140,000 from Welsh Government, a one-off payment that enabled collaboration across partners and contributed to the bespoke opportunities made available through the summer holidays. The service also received funding from Town and Community Councils, the Welsh Museums Federation and annual Welsh Government funding a total of £338,563.

8. MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL SELF-ASSESSMENT 2021/22

The Leader of the Council presented the report to seek Council approval of the Self-Assessment report 2021/22 in line with requirements outlined in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and to ensure that members have a clear and transparent assessment of the Council's performance in 2021/22.

With regards to an increase in staff turnover, the Leader stated that there were a number of factors relating to this and agreed to follow this up following the meeting.

Scrutiny and a Member Workshop had identified that there are no measures prior to school years, and that the first years are important. It was suggested that we need to listen to academic expertise and ensure we help people be the best parents they can be.

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There were frustrations around the reflective nature of the report, and that there was a need to focus on the business of this Council, its staff and how it is delivering for our communities.

The pressures in Social Services were recognised, and the staff were commended on coping with the pressure and continuing to provide support.

The officers were thanked for their work on the self-assessment.

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

That the Monmouthshire County Council Self-Assessment 2021/22 be approved.

9. Motions to Council:

10. Submitted by County Councillor Ian Chandler

This Council notes that:

The Declaration of a Climate Emergency passed by Council on 16th May 2019 included the commitments:

- That this council will continue to review the Corporate Plan, Well-being plan, Local development plans and other relevant plans and policies to support the above.*
- Work with partners across the county and other councils and organisations to help develop and implement best practice methods in limiting global warming to less than 1.5 degrees C.*

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act places a requirement on public bodies to embed sustainable development principles in all its practices.

This Council further notes that:

The Council is required by legislation to hold at least £10 million in cash reserves and, in order to manage its fluctuating cash flow, generally holds between £10 million and £16 million in cash reserves that it invests.

The Council is the Investment Custodian of other bodies including the Welsh Church Fund and the Monmouthshire Farm School Endowment Trust, whose combined investment assets exceed £5 million.

The Council is part of the Greater Gwent Pension Fund that holds investment assets of over £3.7 billion.

This Council resolves to:

- a) Investigate how responsibly the Council invests its cash balances*
- b) Develop a sustainable investment policy that is compatible with the Council's Declaration of a Climate Emergency and the Well Being of Future Generations Act*
- c) Work with the Greater Gwent Pension Fund to adopt a similar sustainable investment policy*

Seconded by County Councillor France Taylor.

Council resolved to accept the motion.

11. Submitted by County Councillor Frances Taylor

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That this Council calls on Welsh Government to review their policy and approach to Non-Domestic Rates for small businesses. From the 1st April 2022, the Non-Domestic Rate Business Relief Scheme has been amended reducing the level of relief that small businesses can now receive, to a maximum of 50%. It means that businesses previously paying nothing under the small business rate relief scheme, will now have to pay 50% of their rates bill after all other reliefs have been awarded. In recognition of the perfect storm facing small businesses in terms of costs, energy and supply issues and with many continuing to recover from the Covid19 pandemic, this Council will write to the Minister for Finance and Local Government requesting a review of the current policy.

Seconded by County Councillor Fay Bromfield, in doing, so she stated that WG had committed to a review of business rates and is currently consulting with partners. She continued that it was unlikely that there would be any tangible outcomes for businesses before next April, and as such the Minister should rule out any rises in business rates in the forthcoming budget. She added that MCC should lead in a response that without change this will continue to get worse, business rates are already at a 23 year high and if we don't act now to safeguard businesses and communities there won't be any left to contribute to our economy. She asked that the Cabinet Member write to the minister to encourage a freeze on business rates for eligible businesses in her forthcoming budget.

The Cabinet Member for Resources proposed the following amendment.

From the 1st April 2022, the Retail, Leisure, and Hospitality Rate Relief Scheme has been amended reducing the level of relief that small businesses can now receive, to a maximum of 50%, after all other reliefs have been awarded. In recognition of the perfect storm facing small businesses in terms of costs, energy and supply issues and with many continuing to recover from the Covid19 pandemic, this Council will write to the Minister for Finance and Local Government requesting a review of the current policy.

Suggestion was made that in addition to writing to Welsh Government, we write to all other 21 local authorities with the template, to urge that a debate be held in WG.

The Cabinet Member stated that she would consider the suggestions put forward by the opposition.

The Leader stated that the review taken by WG will take into account the opinions of the business sector and will be based on evidence, and until we see the outcomes of the review we do not know what WG will take forward.

Upon being put to a vote Council resolved to accept the motion.

12. Date of next meeting - 27th October 2022

Noted.

The meeting ended at 5.55 pm