

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Thursday, 1st December, 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, Jane Lucas, 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, Christopher Edwards, Martyn Groucutt, Simon Howarth, Richard John, David Jones, Penny Jones, Malcolm Lane, Phil Murphy, Paul Pavia, Maureen Powell, Frances Taylor, Tudor Thomas, Armand Watts and Rachel Buckler

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

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 27th October 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 27th October were confirmed noting the following:

- County Councillor Rachel Buckler had been in attendance.
- Page 3 of the minutes. Remove the following line:
Upon being put to a vote the amendment was accepted and debate ensued.

2. Declarations of interest

County Councillor Su McConnel declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in relation to item 7.3 as she is employed by HMPPO.

County Councillors Frances Taylor, Tony Kear and Tony Easson declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in relation to item 7.3.

3. Public Questions

The Chair invited Mr. Woodfield to present his question to Council.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Thursday, 1st December, 2022 at 2.00 pm

Ahead of asking his question Mr. Woodfield highlighted the Council purpose of building sustainable and resilient communities, and value of openness and fairness. He went on to ask what about the levelling up application, second submission on behalf of Severnside, including any consideration of proposals for Caldicot Leisure Centre, that the Council was embarrassed about, including the denial of recognising the legal requirements under the Freedom of Information Act and providing tax paying constituents with a copy of the application.

Mr. Woodfield added that, after submitting the question, he has been given access to a redacted version of the second application. Appendices were to be made available following further redaction.

In response County Councillor Paul Griffiths recognised the significance of the question and agreed that the documents should be made available to the citizens of Monmouthshire and apologised for the fact that they had not been. He explained that the process of redacting commercially sensitive information was necessary and understood that it had taken too long. The new administration had received the prepared bids and they had worked with officers to submit in time for July 2022. He was pleased that they were now in the public domain.

4. Chair's Announcement

Noted.

5. Council Reports:

6. GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

The Chair welcomed the Chair of Governance and Audit Committee to present the Council's Governance and Audit Committee's Annual Report for 2021/2022.

The report confirmed that the committee had met its terms of reference over the year and highlighted a range of papers considered.

When asked to what areas the committee may make a bigger contribution, the Chair of the committee referred to people risk and workforce challenges. He referred to a People Strategy expected to emerge in 2023, and highlighted the importance of maintaining a line of sight over the people matters being dealt with.

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

That Governance and Audit Committee endorse this report and recommend its presentation to Council, as confirmed in the Committee's approved minutes of 14th July 2022.

That Council accept and endorse this report.

7. REPLACEMENT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (RLDP) PREFERRED STRATEGY

The Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for a Sustainable Economy presented the report in order to seek Council's agreement to the new Delivery Agreement and Council's endorsement to commence statutory consultation/engagement and stakeholder involvement on the new Preferred Strategy for the Replacement Local Development Plan and consultation on the Candidate Sites Register.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Thursday, 1st December, 2022 at 2.00 pm

Members expressed the importance of suitable infrastructure being in place before development of the plan.

It was recognised that this was a compromised plan and that 50% affordable was a great aspiration but may not be achievable. It was noted that there should also be a plan around employment.

The ward member for Portskewett felt unable to support the plan considering the idea to add a further 925 properties would be disproportionate. She added that Caldicot area needs vital investment.

The Cabinet Member for Inclusive and Active Communities explained that the plan sets the basis for growth in sustainable settlements and added that there is commitment to develop active travel links.

The Labour Group expressed confusion around the lack of support given that the previous Conservative administration had developed a plan with more housing areas proposed and the reality of rejecting the proposed approach is that there would be no new housing for a considerable amount of time.

In terms of a transport plan, we heard that the new framework is for a regional plan, but officers will provide a local plan in 2023.

The Leader of the Opposition felt that there had been a lack of communication on the Chepstow Bypass, being a key piece of infrastructure and requested further information on a council run development company.

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

To agree the revised Delivery Agreement for the Replacement Local Development Plan for submission to the Minister for Climate Change for approval.

To endorse the new Preferred Strategy for the Replacement Local Development Plan to be issued for statutory consultation/engagement and stakeholder involvement.

To agree to consult on the Candidate Sites Register, Habitats Regulations Assessment and Integrated Sustainability Appraisal alongside the new Preferred Strategy.

8. CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING POLICY

The Cabinet Member for Social Care presented the report to inform members of the revisions to the Corporate Safeguarding Policy and seek endorsement of the revised policy.

County Councillor Ian Chandler suggested that the policy be rejected due to lack of scrutiny. He noted that the policy referred to Select Committees and did not reflect the new structure of the Council.

County Councillor Penny Jones highlighted that the policy had been scrutinised by the inspectorate and was found to be in good order.

A question was put to the Cabinet Member to whether he believed that the policy should be re-evaluated with reference to recent local and national reviews.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Thursday, 1st December, 2022 at 2.00 pm

The Chief Officer for Safeguarding and Social Care explained that through regional safeguarding arrangements officers routinely look through reports and understand how practices or processes need to be adjusted and explained that the annual evaluation was brought into safeguarding and taken through scrutiny and Full Council in October 2022.

County Councillor Frances Taylor repeated the request that an action be raised to identify the scrutiny plans around the report.

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

That Council endorses the revised Corporate Safeguarding Policy.

9. Motions to Council:

10. Submitted by County Councillor Penny Jones

This Council notes the longstanding concerns about road safety between the Raglan A40 Public Document Pack roundabout and the A40/A449 interchange. Agrees that the appropriate cabinet member will write to the Welsh Government to urge Ministers to expedite a fully funded road safety study in 2023/24 and commit to delivering any recommended road safety improvements without delay.

County Councillor Jayne McKenna seconded the motion and in doing so she referred to a tragic accident that had occurred 30 years and expressed disappointment that we are still discussing the same issues. This section of the A40 remains unsafe and is not fit for purpose for the traffic that uses it. She expressed concern at the lack of data.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment shared the concerns around safety and committed to write to WG to urge that the funding is made available to press ahead in 2023/24

Upon being put to a vote the motion was carried.

11. Submitted by County Councillor Jackie Strong

MCC notes the threat to the continued operation of the Main Post Office in Caldicot due to the surrender of the lease by the Morrisons supermarket company which currently hosts the post office business. MCC understands the importance of maintaining a Main Post Office service in Caldicot. It welcomes the work already undertaken to protect this service and commits itself to taking steps to support the continuation of this service in the town.

County Councillor Tony Kear supported the motion, and whilst adding his support he asked that the following line be added to the motion:

That MCC commits to the long term future of the UK's only council run Post Office in Usk.

The Cabinet Member for Resources highlighted the budget challenges being faced but did not see a reason to not support the amendment.

Debate ensued on the motion as amended.

County Councillor Tony Easson declared an interest as a member of Caldicot Town Council.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Thursday, 1st December, 2022 at 2.00 pm

Upon being put to a vote the amendment was accepted. Debate ensued.

County Councillor Tudor Thomas left at 16:51

County Councillor Ian Chandler left at 16:56

There were comments that the authority does have a role to play but not a financial one. This could be a role for Town and Community Councils.

There was recognition of the vital provision and service the Post Office delivers in Caldicot.

A comment was made that the Council's role in supporting the service may not be a financial one, and it would be difficult to expect the authority to be in a position to subsidise and fund the running of all post offices.

The Cabinet Member for Resources considered it essential for residents, small businesses, and community groups to have access to the Post Office service.

Upon being put to a vote the motion was carried.

12. Submitted by County Councillor Richard John

This Council has the utmost respect for the work of our partners in Gwent Police in keeping our communities safe. Expresses shock and dismay at media reports alleging a culture of misogyny, racism, homophobia, and corruption in the Force. Resolves to write to Gwent's Police & Crime Commissioner to express this Council's alarm and request that he attend a Monmouthshire select committee to address members' concerns.

Seconded by County Councillor Lisa Dymock

County Councillors Tony Kear and Tony Easson declared personal, non-prejudicial interests as members of the Gwent Police and Crime Panel.

The Leader fully endorsed the motion, agreeing that this was shocking, but not surprising. She noted that within the Council there is zero tolerance to sexual harassment, and to any form of abuse against anyone regardless of gender. The Chief Constable and Police and Crime Commissioner had been invited to address Council through a Member Seminar.

It was expressed that this is a problem in male dominated institutions and The Leader of the Opposition was commended on bring the motion to Council.

County Councillor Tomos Davies left at 17:25pm

There were concerns that figures were under reported.

It was highlighted that an independent review of Gwent Police is being undertaken by Wiltshire Police.

Upon being put to a vote the motion was carried.

13. Members Questions

14. From County Councillor Paul Pavia to County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Thursday, 1st December, 2022 at 2.00 pm

Will the Cabinet Member make a statement on the progress the Council is making to develop the WelTag Stage 3 business case for the Chepstow Bypass?

The Cabinet Member explained that the County Council had submitted a bid to Welsh Government for the Local Transport Fund Grant for this financial year to progress a detailed business case for the Chepstow traffic relief road. Unfortunately, this aspect of the funding bid was unsuccessful. As set out earlier in the meeting by County Councillor Paul Griffiths, the traffic relief road is just one part of a range of solutions needed to address the current and future travel pressure through Chepstow.

A day earlier, the Leader and Deputy Leader met with their opposite members at Gloucestershire County Council to talk about shared challenges and objectives around the cross-border travel and will be working closely together to lobby for the necessary improvements.

The Cabinet Member was pleased to inform Council that the proposals for the Chepstow Transport Hub had secured funding for a WelTag 3 detailed design this financial year and this work has now been completed, putting us in a strong position to bid for funding next year. This will allow implementation of a suite of travel options and help to alleviate some of the traffic problems.

County Councillor Pavia thanked County Councillor Maby for her response and expressed disappointment at the outcome of the business case and asked if she could share correspondence with WG following the meeting to understand the rationale.

15. From County Councillor Paul Pavia to County Councillor Martyn Groucutt, Cabinet Member for Education

Will the Cabinet Member make a statement on the administration's plans to further develop early years provision in Chepstow?

The Cabinet Member responded that the childcare sufficiency assessment had been completed by MCC earlier in the year and was considered and agreed by Cabinet on the 2nd March 2022. The study did not identify any significant gaps in childcare in the Chepstow area. The take-up of early education places is monitored termly and in the last summer term was 85% which is when it is at its highest. The main gap is in relation to childminders and this issue is a County wide problem. They are working closely with the Professional Association for Childcare and Early years, an umbrella organisation which specialises in childminders, to try to recruit new childminders and support existing childminders to help retain them.

The roll out of Flying Start childcare for two year olds is likely to increase demand for places, however there are currently surplus places at the Flying Start setting in Chepstow. There is also a day nursery in the Chepstow area that has recently increased their number of registered places and can offer more places to two year olds.

The Cabinet Member confirmed that they would continue to monitor the situation and develop additional childcare places to meet demand if required.

As a supplementary Councillor Pavia asked what proactive steps the administration is taking to pave the way to establish nursery provision in the medium of Welsh Language.

In response the Cabinet Member stated that he is committed to supporting provision in Monmouth and could look to strengthening support for Welsh medium in Chepstow also.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Thursday, 1st December, 2022 at 2.00 pm

16. From County Councillor Christopher Edwards to County Councillor Martyn Groucutt, Cabinet Member for Education

Could the Cabinet Member for Education inform council of any proposed future investment that the current administration intends to make in Chepstow School while we await progress with the 21st Century Schools programme?

The Cabinet Member explained that in the last five years the Council has spent over £3m on Chepstow Comprehensive School enhancing the facilities. These developments have been reported previously to Council. Alongside the remodelling and refurbishment work money has been spent of maintenance items such as doors, windows and fire alarms.

Maintenance and improvement works will continue at the school such as phase two of the works for the quadrangle which is scheduled for the upcoming financial year. This funding sits alongside the investment that MonLife has made to the facilities that the school is able to use, and ensures that the building continues to be fit for purpose for pupils attending the school.

The Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme is the new 21st Century Schools initiative and is a more agile programme. We must review and resubmit our programme by March 2024. This is to encourage a smooth transition, removing the stop start actions associated with the current fixed term investment programme.

As a supplementary, Councillor Edwards asked if the Cabinet member agreed that more could be done in relation to transforming more classrooms in Chepstow School to make them a better learning environment as was carried out in previous years, and could he ensure that this is carried out in any current programme of improvements of Chepstow School.

The Cabinet Member has had conversations with the Headteacher and finance officer and they are more than happy with the scale of the investment that the authority has made. Discussions have included what the nature of the provision might look like as we move forward.

17. From County Councillor Christopher Edwards to County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

Could the cabinet member inform council of progress with the grant funding bid to Welsh Government in 2022/23 for a safer routes in communities scheme for road safety improvement works for St Lawrence Road (between Kingsmark Lane and Racecourse roundabout), Chepstow.

The Cabinet Member shared the concerns around road safety and explained that the funding bid for improvements to the Welsh Street and St. Lawrence area had been unsuccessful. Officers are now considering how best to deliver the improvements and propose to make a second application for grant funding in the coming financial year. Officers are also looking at what other actions can be taken to support the RLDP application at Bayfield and to ensure that the new development is well connected to the town centre and train station.

As a supplementary Councillor Edwards asked if the Cabinet Member would join him on St. Lawrence road to witness the issues and hopefully move the work up the priority list or allow him to see any feedback from WG on the unsuccessful funding bid.

In response Councillor Maby was keen to talk and work together to aim to improve the future bid and discuss in more detail what other improvements could be made.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of County Council held
on Thursday, 1st December, 2022 at 2.00 pm**

18. Next meeting - 19th January 2023

Noted.

The meeting ended at 6.00 pm