

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK on Thursday, 2nd March, 2023 at 10.00 am

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

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 and Armand Watts

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Jonathan Davies	Head of Finance
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, Performance and Scrutiny
Ian Saunders	Chief Operating Officer, MonLife

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION and REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS FOR 2023/24

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented the report which included recommendations designed to comply with Statutory Provisions. The recommended resolutions also drew together the Council Tax implications of precepts proposed by the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent and Town and Community Councils, thereby enabling the County Council to establish its headline Council Tax levels at the various property bands within each Town or Community area.

We heard of the £26m predicted shortfall in our budget and cost pressures were highlighted.

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Opposition Members were unable to support the budget proposals and the following comments were made:

- Both families and businesses are in financial difficulty and many of the proposals would add to this difficulty.
- Officers need to be clear on the priorities of the administration.
- A driving principle must be that we do all that we can to protect frontline and community services where they are most needed.
- It was proposed that the administration look at putting local community services on a sustainable pathway by developing a plan for some community asset transfers.
- The development of charitable foundations could be a positive way forward way for Gwent Music and the wider arts.
- It would be a good time to encourage Community Councils to take matters more into their own hands by considering the levels of precepts.

The Cabinet Member for Inclusive and Active Communities stated that the proposals set out a path to firmer ground, adding that there would be a review of assets in the coming months which will aim to reduce running costs and climate impact. She also explained how they were reconfiguring services to support homeless people at a time of rising homelessness.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment referred to decarbonisation and how it remains at the core of the budget, explaining that it cuts across every service and has multiple co-benefits in terms of cost savings, health, and efficiency.

The Cabinet Member for Education commended the quality of the work of officers and was proud of what had been achieved, with little additional money. He stated that under the previous Conservative administration, key stage 4 free school meals pupils were performing the worst in Wales, but they were now changing the way they operate. He referred to the Educational Psychology Service who were now going beyond individual casework and seeking to address the reasons why children meet a crisis point. He asked the opposition to note the tremendous strides taken across schools so that they were meeting individual needs.

The Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health Services referred to the challenges within his budget area and reminded Members of their responsibility to 'looked after children' in their role as corporate parents.

The Leader of the opposition highlighted areas of concern within the proposals stating disappointment in the increase in council tax, being higher than similarly rural neighbouring authorities. He considered that the administration lacked a sense of purpose and that earlier action could have stemmed the rise and the resulting call on reserves.

Further frustrations included:

- Disappointment that Tudor Street was in the list of assets to be sold given that assurances had been given that this was not the case.
- A lack of addressing the needs of vulnerable adults.
- A lack of investment into Highways.
- The issues regarding litter.
- Engagement sessions had been disappointing.

Upon being put to a vote the recommendations as set out in the report were rejected.

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The meeting ended at 1.10 pm