

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Thursday, 18th July, 2024 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor Su McConnel (Chair)
County Councillor Peter Strong (Vice Chair)

County Councillors: Rachel Buckler, Laura Wright, Tony Kear, Catrin Maby, Jan Butler, Ian Chandler, Sara Burch, Alistair Neill, Mary Ann Brocklesby, Fay Bromfield, Jane Lucas, Meirion Howells, Paul Griffiths, Jackie Strong, Rachel Garrick, 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 Ann Webb

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

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
Jonathan Davies	Head of Finance
Frances O'Brien	Chief Officer, Communities and Place
Ian Saunders	Chief Officer Customer, Culture and Wellbeing.
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
James Williams	Chief Officer Law & Governance
Julie Anthony	Human Resources (HR) Advisor

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors Emma Bryn and Maria Stevens

1. Declarations of interest

Item 11: To establish a Remuneration Committee: Senior Leadership Team Officers made a declaration of interest and withdrew from the meeting.

2. Chair's Announcement

The Chair's Announcement was noted.

The Leader of the Opposition paid tribute to the life and service of former County Councillor Sheila Woodhouse who has sadly passed away. He reflected on her outstanding contribution to public life and on her love of Abergavenny.

Councillor Groucutt paid respects on behalf of the Labour Group recalling how Sheila Woodhouse was admired and respected across the Chamber and will be greatly missed.

Councillor Taylor on behalf of the Independent Group remembered Sheila's passion for her ward, Abergavenny and the whole county. She served with compassion, kindness and caring.

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Councillors Powell and Lane shared fond memories of Sheila Woodhouse and spoke of her dedication to her community.

*County Councillor Christopher Edwards from 2.03pm
County Councillor Tomos Davies from 2.16pm*

3. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 16th May 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th May 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record.

4. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-2029

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2024-2029.

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

Council considered and approved the Council's medium term financial strategy (MTFS) for the period 2024-2029, providing the strategic framework for the medium-term financial plan (MTFP) to adapt over time to changing context and circumstances subject to changes resulting from scrutiny feedback.

Council approved the associated delivery plan and performance framework, delegating authority to the Cabinet Member for Resources and the Deputy Chief Executive (s151 officer) to keep its implementation under continual review.

Council agreed that Cabinet receives a six-monthly update of the MTFP to Cabinet, including formal progress against the performance framework and delivery plan, and that will be subject to scrutiny by the Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee and the Governance and Audit Committee.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/UhmH18Q9ego?si=JNXqIpAZzoUYdtrg&t=1408>

*County Councillor Sue Riley from 2.31pm
County Councillor Phil Murphy from 2.37pm*

5. Older People's Champion

The Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health Services presented a report proposing that Council approve nomination of Cllr Jackie Strong to the role of Older People's Champion.

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

Council approved the nomination of Cllr Jackie Strong to the role of Older People's Champion.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/UhmH18Q9ego?si=UkGMN6-VzOgPB8rN&t=3165>

6. Chief Officer Report – Children and Young People

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The Chief Officer for Children and Young People presented his Annual Report. The report provided members with an overview of the status and performance of the education system in Monmouthshire. It sought to provide the Chief Officer's perspective of the relevant strengths and areas for development in the system, the risks that the service faces and the opportunities that exist to improve.

Council resolved to note the report.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/UhmH18Q9ego?si=sqpwU0-r9JbEf9tc&t=3832>

*County Councillor Jane Lucas from 3.32pm
County Councillor Jayne McKenna left at 3.33pm*

7. Motions to Council

8. Submitted by County Councillor Lisa Dymock

Upon being put to a recorded vote, Council resolved to reject an alteration to the motion.

Recorded Vote: Acceptance of alteration to motion.

Votes For: 18

Votes Against: 23

Abstentions: 0

Councillor J BOND		X	
Councillor M A BROCKLESBY		X	
Councillor F BROMFIELD	X		
Councillor L BROWN	X		
Councillor E BRYN	-		
Councillor R BUCKLER	X		
Councillor S BURCH		X	
Councillor J BUTLER	X		
Councillor B CALLARD		X	
Councillor I CHANDLER		X	
Councillor J CROOK		X	
Councillor T DAVIES	X		
Councillor L DYMOCK	X		
Councillor A EASSON		X	
Councillor C EDWARDS	X		
Councillor C FOOKES		X	
Councillor S GARRATT		X	
Councillor R GARRICK		X	
Councillor P GRIFFITHS		X	
Councillor M GROUCUTT		X	
Councillor S.G.M. Howarth	X		

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Councillor M HOWELLS		x	
Councillor R JOHN	x		
Councillor D. W. H. Jones	x		
Councillor P. Jones	x		
Councillor T KEAR	x		
Councillor M LANE	x		
Councillor J LUCAS	x		
Councillor C MABY		x	
Councillor S MCCONNEL		x	
Councillor J MCKENNA	-		
Councillor P MURPHY	-		
Councillor A NEILL	x		
Councillor P PAVIA	x		
Councillor M POWELL	x		
Councillor S RILEY		x	
Councillor D ROOKE		x	
Councillor A SANDLES		x	
Councillor M STEVENS		-	
Councillor J STRONG		x	
Councillor P STRONG		x	
Councillor F TAYLOR	x		
Councillor T THOMAS		x	
Councillor A WATTS		x	
Councillor A WEBB	-		
Councillor L WRIGHT		x	
	18	23	0

This council:

Calls upon the Prime Minister to continue the work of the former Conservative govt and to appoint a dedicated Veterans Minister within the government to address the unique needs and challenges faced by our veterans.

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

https://www.youtube.com/live/UhmH18Q9ego?si=2HxXf4rBnZfVIA_W&t=9680

County Councillor Frances Taylor left at 3.04pm

9. Submitted by County Councillor Richard John

This Council:

Congratulates Cllr Fookes on her election as the Member of Parliament for Monmouthshire and notes her promise to be 'a full-time MP'.

Notes that the Welsh Labour Government has legislated to prevent parliamentarians from double jobbing as county councillors.

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Notes the significant disruption and challenges in Town ward including town centre footfall, roadworks and parking, which require a strong voice on this Council for residents and traders.

Calls on Cllr Fookes to resign from MCC so residents in Town ward can elect a new county councillor.

Upon being put to a recorded vote the Council resolved to reject the motion.

Votes For: 16

Votes Against: 22

Abstentions: 1

Recorded Vote: Call for County Councillor Catherine Fookes to resign following her election as Member of Parliament

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NAME	For	Against	Abstain
Councillor J BOND		X	
Councillor M A BROCKLESBY		X	
Councillor F BROMFIELD	X		
Councillor L BROWN	X		
Councillor E BRYN	-		
Councillor R BUCKLER	X		
Councillor S BURCH		X	
Councillor J BUTLER	X		
Councillor B CALLARD		X	
Councillor I CHANDLER		X	
Councillor J CROOK		X	
Councillor T DAVIES	X		
Councillor L DYMOCK	X		
Councillor A EASSON		X	
Councillor C EDWARDS	X		
Councillor C FOOKES		X	
Councillor S GARRATT		X	
Councillor R GARRICK		X	
Councillor P GRIFFITHS		X	
Councillor M GROUCUTT		X	
Councillor S.G.M. Howarth			
Councillor M HOWELLS		X	
Councillor R JOHN	X		
Councillor D. W. H. Jones			X
Councillor P. Jones	X		
Councillor T KEAR	X		
Councillor M LANE	X		
Councillor J LUCAS	X		
Councillor C MABY		X	
Councillor S MCCONNEL		X	
Councillor J MCKENNA	-		
Councillor P MURPHY	X		
Councillor A NEILL	X		
Councillor P PAVIA	X		
Councillor M POWELL	X		
Councillor S RILEY		X	
Councillor D ROOKE		X	
Councillor A SANDLES		X	
Councillor M STEVENS		-	
Councillor J STRONG		X	
Councillor P STRONG		X	
Councillor F TAYLOR			
Councillor T THOMAS			
Councillor A WATTS		X	
Councillor A WEBB	-		
Councillor L WRIGHT		X	
	16	22	1

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<https://www.youtube.com/live/UhmH18Q9ego?si=aOpCqhvAV0fZkTs0&t=11471>

County Councillor Simon Howarth left at 5.28pm
County Councillor Phil Murphy left at 5.53pm

10. Members Questions

11. From County Councillor Richard John to County Councillor Mary Ann Brocklesby, Leader

What changes has the Council made to the documents for the re-tender of the dairy contract and can the Leader confirm that smaller businesses will be able to compete on a level playing field?

The Leader confirmed that anyone who tenders will be able to compete on a level playing field.

A “meet the buyer” event was held which was attended by several small businesses.

A Prior Information Notice (PIN) has been posted on Sell2Wales, which includes details of the lots and financial values based on recent expenditure. The PIN invited the marketplace to submit written submissions on the proposed lotting strategy, contract duration and any suggestions as to how the proposed procurement process could be improved. Six responses were received including four local businesses and two from outside of the county. The responses will be used to develop the final specification and lotting structure.

There are ten lots: five for the north and five for the South of the county. Lots can be tendered separately or in collaboration making the process more accessible for micro and small businesses.

At the event, Council officers discussed how to reduce the burden on suppliers for the tender submission documentation to avoid the need to appoint consultants. The feedback was that they use consultants to give us answers e. g. on policy aspects of decarbonization. This feedback is being used to ensure that our questions are proportionate and suitable for smaller suppliers to complete themselves. Access to free business support was provided.

The process has been designed to ensure that the procurement exercise is more accessible to micro and small enterprises with a 5-year commitment contract proposed to enable businesses to invest in any technologies required for the delivery of contracts. Feedback was that they needed to know anticipated quantities and this data is being collated as a tender exercise progresses. The tender documentation will be issued on 13th August with the submission date on 16th September.

Consortia bids are welcome which should make the process more accessible for micro and small businesses.

Supplementary Question:

I wanted to ask about one of the requirements in the last set of tendering documents was that bidding companies have a third-party food safety accreditation.

Now for small independent businesses, which already have regular food safety inspections from Monmouthshire’s own food hygiene inspectors.

Third party accreditation is extremely expensive and unnecessary when standards have already been verified by our own trusted inspectors, so will you agree to look at removing barriers like

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this so that small businesses have fair access to bid for Council tenders such as this dairy contract.

There are two national wholesalers, one based in Wales and the other based in London that want to tender. The Welsh supplier indicated it would be keen to identify work with local small and micro businesses if successful in the tender process.

There are four local suppliers able to supply all the products identified in the lotting structure. One supplier suggested it can source UK manufactured plant-based alternatives. All have confirmed that they would be able to meet the proposed delivery requirements, and several have elaborated on the ability to deliver multiple products at the same time, products that will have different temperature-controlled requirements which would save emissions. Locally based suppliers are keen to promote their locally sourced and production credential, and the positive impacts on reducing emissions and supporting local jobs. The Welsh based wholesaler promoted priorities around local job growth and supporting Community initiatives. One local supplier indicated that they were able to support visits to their bottling facilities based in Monmouthshire.

All supported the proposed 5-year contract as it provides certainty and enables them to build their business model to support our requirements. Largely there was a support for an external accreditation scheme with only one challenging the cost. One supplier explained its net zero journey and its use of renewable energy in its manufacturing processes.

For next steps, there is sufficient interest and willingness to fit in with the requirements and with the lotting structures as proposed. There are more opportunities to be more accessible to micro and SME. The ten lots over the two geographical areas will be progressed. The specification buying design is not completed as consultation is still in progress and feedback from the expressions of interest is expected.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/UhmH18Q9ego?si=qf0CHwSJymbAc6i&t=14883>

County Councillor Tomos Davies left at 5.59pm
County Councillor Laura Wright left at 6.05pm

12. From County Councillor Tony Kear to County Councillor Angela Sandles, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement

Please can the Cabinet Member explain the reduced opening hours at Usk Post Office?

The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement explained that Usk's Post Office, operating from the Community Hub, is the first in the UK to be managed by a local authority. Initially it opened on Mondays, Wednesdays, late night Thursdays and Saturday mornings. To support the local authority postmaster and these hours, 2 staff members were recruited each on 17-hour contracts. In February 2021 one staff member resigned, leaving the postmaster and another trained colleague to manage the service until the lockdown.

When Services resumed, reduced opening hours were implemented due to staffing constraints and operational data analysis. During the lockdown, a thorough review of the operational data was conducted which revealed that to balance the revenue and expenditure it was needed to adjust the operating hours. Consequently, it was decided to cease operations on Wednesdays due to low footfall and income, and to close at 5:00pm on Thursdays, reinvesting the additional 2 hours into the broader Hub service.

The extended Thursday hours that were intended to support local businesses with banking were underutilised despite the best promotional efforts of the Council.

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The authority's mandate was to cover staff expenses through the income generated by the Post Office. Unfortunately, the income projections provided at the time of establishing the service never materialised, therefore reducing staffing by 17 hours a week and cutting opening hours by 10 hours a week was necessary to ensure a sound budgetary position.

Saturday opening for four hours is sustained through the core Hub budget. Monday and Thursday opening continues although sometimes it is necessary to close on an ad hoc basis at lunchtimes. If it was financially viable, we would certainly be considering restoring Wednesday openings.

We know that residents value having a Post Office, even at reduced hours. Usk Town Council contributes the sum of £4000 a year to its running and this helps it stay viable. All of these measures are essential to maintaining the current and future viability of Usk Post Office under the given financial constraints. Staff have not received any complaints from customers and the Town Council is unaware of any objections from residents.

Supplementary question:

You probably are aware of the changes happening at Raglan Post Office which is closing and being technically downgraded to a Local. Footfall in Usk is increased when Raglan Post Office is shut. Is there a possibility that we could look at reopening on a Wednesday based on the statistics showing increased trade potentially coming back to Usk from Raglan and continue to work with Usk Town Council to do so? It is a very popular service, appreciated by elderly people and there are concerns that the reducing opening hours was a path towards closure.

The Cabinet Member stated that if footfall vastly increases then the viability of further opening hours would be looked as it is a valued service.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/UhmH18Q9ego?si=6VzZtyonwQlfzFlr&t=15666>

13. From County Councillor Jane Lucas to County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

Could the cabinet member provide an update on the work taking place at St Thomas' roundabout in Monmouth?

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment confirmed that the work at St. Thomas's roundabout is complete.

Supplementary Question:

It was a great shame that during the work, the hand carved kerbstones have been removed and replaced with constitute concrete. Have the kerbstones been saved to for use elsewhere? Also, in making the roundabout smaller, there is a very strange step system which is about to drop away within the soil that's holding up the Cenotaph in the middle. In the past there has been wonderful flower displays that our ground staff have taken great delight in and done an amazing amount of work looking after it. The residents would like to see that retained. Is it possible for a kerb to be nicely placed to hold the soil up where it's been cut away and reinstate the flower beds.

The Cabinet Member described the work completed at St. Thomas's roundabout. As part of the active travel route into Monmouth from the Wonastow Road end from Rockfield there was a need to alter the track of vehicles around the roundabout, so the central reservation is now an oval rather than a round; only very recently completed, so the planting has not yet been done.

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Consideration is ongoing about the correct way to plant. It was confirmed that the kerbstones are not listed, only the Cenotaph.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/UhmH18Q9ego?si=HXf2JkKJ6WFBjBli&t=16040>

14. Urgent Question from County Councillor Lisa Dymock to County Councillor Paul Griffiths, Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development

Please can the Cabinet Member provide clarification on the recent proposal to establish a third site within the small hamlet, while I appreciate the importance of providing adequate accommodation for the Gypsy and Traveller community, I am concerned about the concentration of multiple sites in one small area. Specifically, I would like to understand the rationale behind this decision and why a more distributed approach across the entire county, has not been considered?

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for a Sustainable Economy welcomed the question as an opportunity to share with Council and the wider community how we are responding to the assessed need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches.

In October, Cabinet initiated a consultation and technical appraisal of three potential sites to provide 11 pitches for Gypsy and Traveller households.

The Cabinet Member was reviewing the responses of the consultation and the technical studies whilst awaiting the decision of the Planning Committee on an application relating to a site in Llancayo. That decision was made on Tuesday and has resulted in a reduction to the assessed need from 11 to 7 pitches.

It is proposed, on that basis, to take forward only one of the three sites for inclusion in the Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP); the site which has the most advantages and the least disadvantages, Bradbury Farm. That proposal has been published in the report to be considered at a Special meeting of the Place Scrutiny Committee on the 24th July 2024. At that meeting, the evidence base for this preferred site will be provided.

Following the Place Scrutiny Committee meeting, any points made and those raised by Councillor Dymock, will be taken into account in a report for a Special Cabinet meeting on the 21st August 2024. If there is Cabinet support for this proposal, it will be included in the RLDP which, in October, Council will be asked to accept as the basis for public consultation throughout November and December.

The residents of Portskewett and Caldicot would have a further chance to comment on this proposal if it were included in that RLDP and was subject to that consultation at that time.

Supplementary Question

Considering the proposed dual development for the RLDP and Gypsy and Traveller site provision, what plans are in place to enhance the local infrastructure, in particular, road safety. This road has reduced visibility on the blind bend, so access and egress will be challenging, noise levels in particular for those living in static accommodation and preserving the nearby area of SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), the Neddern Brook Wetlands in Caldicot, which is only a few hundred metres away.

The Cabinet Member agreed that the existing highway (Crick Rd) would not provide suitable

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access and egress to a Traveller site in that area. Given the process of a future planning application and following the RLDP, by the time the pitches are in place plans will be advanced to develop housing on the strategic site in Portskewett or Caldicot East. The planning for that development will have to include a safe walking and cycling route from the Gypsy and Traveller site through the residential site to local amenities in Caldicot.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/UhmH18Q9ego?si=rafdaLabgazBtgkE&t=16287>

15. Urgent Question from County Councillor Richard John to County Councillor Martyn Groucutt, Cabinet Member for Education

How will the Cabinet Member ensure that the proposed consultation on changes to the Council's school transport policy engages widely with those affected?

The Cabinet Member for Education explained:

- To maximize awareness of the consultation, all parents and guardians of children who currently receive transport, schools and transport operators have been notified of the proposals and online survey.
- A press release has been published and a social media campaign has commenced.
- To date, only one request for a hard copy of the consultation document has been received. By noon yesterday, there were 180 survey responses and 176 of those from parents and guardians.
- The Cabinet Member will attend People Scrutiny Committee.
- Drop-in sessions at each of the Hubs have been arranged.

Supplementary Question:

What you're proposing is quite significant changes to school transport eligibility changing from transporting children their nearest or catchment school(for primary from 1.5 miles or above and for secondary from two miles). You are proposing to change those to two miles for primary and three miles for secondary so a significant number of families will be affected by the changes. Do you know how many pupils will be affected? And will the Council be writing specifically to those families to enable them to take part in the consultation?

- The Cabinet Member confirmed that every family that currently receives school transport has been notified, also, where possible, future pupils if notified by nurseries.
- It was accepted that there will be a fairly wide impact in some areas of the county. If the proposals are accepted, it would bring us into line with nineteen of the 22 Welsh authorities. Numbers affected are not yet available.

https://www.youtube.com/live/UhmH18Q9ego?si=gl1Br9_vYr_GyG_&t=14887

16. Next Meeting 19th September 2024

17. To establish a Remuneration Committee (paper to follow)

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The Cabinet Member for Resources presented a report to establish a Remuneration Committee to determine the remuneration for the Council's Senior Leadership Team which consists of the Chief Executive and 7 Chief Officers.

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

That Council establishes a Remuneration Committee

<https://www.youtube.com/live/UhmH18Q9ego?si=jSbjY-JIV51eRqSE&t=16675>

The meeting ended at 6.48 pm