

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Thursday, 10th April, 2025 at 2.00 pm

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

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, Emma Bryn, Meirion Howells, Paul Griffiths, Jackie Strong, Rachel Garrick, Maria Stevens, Steven Garratt, Angela Sandles, Ben Callard, John Crook, Tomos Davies, Dale Rooke, 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, M. Newell, Paul Pavia, Maureen Powell, Frances Taylor, Tudor Thomas, Armand Watts and Ann Webb

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Jonathan Davies	Head of Finance
Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Peter Davies	Acting Chief Executive
Jane Rodgers	Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Matthew Gatehouse	Chief Officer People, Performance and Partnerships.
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
James Williams	Chief Officer Law & Governance
Deb Hill-Howells	Head of Decarbonisation, Transport and Support Services
Julie Anthony	Human Resources (HR) Advisor
Justine Cass	Deputy Monitoring Officer, Torfaen County Borough Council
Philippa Green	Head of HR
Anne Phillimore	HR Consultant

APOLOGIES:

None.

1. Declarations of Interest

<https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=p9vov7C5VvDsdVok&t=127>

Item 6.2 Senior Leadership Pay Review:

- Members of the Senior Leadership Team withdrew from the meeting during consideration of this item.

Item 7.1 Motion re: Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal:

- County Councillor Richard John declared a personal and prejudicial interest and withdrew from the meeting for this item as he works part time as a public affairs consultant and one of his clients is the Canal and River Trust.
- County Councillor Fay Bromfield declared a personal and prejudicial interest and withdrew from the meeting for this item as her businesses are very close to the canal

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and she relies on trade from tourism at Bromfields Butchers. She will have financial gains or losses.

Item 7.2 Motion re: Procurement Strategy:

- County Councillor Frances Taylor declared a personal interest as one of the domiciliary care providers is based in Magor and she is aware of the business and familiar with many of the staff. The award of domiciliary care contracts in Magor with Undy means core provision is unchanged. She knows many people with whom she has close association and in receipt of care but their care and well-being is not affected. She is not involved in any decisions nor is there any decision being taken except to review process.

2. Chair's Announcement

The Chair's Announcement was noted.

3. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on the 6 March 2025

<https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=UDbi0C4AIQYqhybW&t=182>

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 6th March were confirmed as an accurate record.

4. Public Questions

5. Question submitted by Anne Lynch

<https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=ZwUU-XBUV4tjTX5T&t=195>

The Chair welcomed Anne Lynch to the meeting who shared her late husband's care experience. She explained that the last two years of his life, he was supported by Loughor Home Care, who went above and beyond in the quality of the care provided. Staff were very well trained, professional and compassionate, but also alerted her to changes in his condition and supported her in contacting district nurses, doctors and the ambulance service. The carers became like family and speaking with other service users the trust held in this local company made a significant difference during a very difficult time.

Her question was:

Voice and control, which puts the individual and their needs at the centre of their care and gives them a voice in and control overreaching the outcomes that help them achieve their well-being, is one of the principles of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014.

Given the number of people service users, their families and their carers who've signed a petition requesting that care in South Monmouthshire remains with excellent known local providers, would Monmouthshire County Council please acknowledge the voice of these signatories and enable service users to continue receiving care from the known local carers that they trust.

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County Councillor Ian Chandler, Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health acknowledged Mrs. Lynch's loss and expressed condolences.

The Cabinet Member responded that choice, voice and control run through how the Council assesses and supports people to identify what matters to them and their personal well-being outcomes. The care providers that were successful with the bids submitted were chosen after a rigorous selection process where quality was given a greater emphasis than cost. The new providers are keen, as is the Council, to ensure that the wishes and preferences of how people receive their care remain a priority. The way that the contracts are arranged should assist with a flexible person-centred approach to care.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged that change can be unsettling, which is why the Council continues to provide information points of contact and the opportunity to discuss people's preferences with their social worker on an individual basis. There will be a three-month transition period during which existing providers and new providers will work together to hand over each individual care arrangement, discussing them carefully to ensure the voice of the person isn't lost. The terms of the agreement with the providers requires those providers to ensure that the options for staff transferring from one employer to another under the TUPE process are made clear and encouraged. This will enable people to continue to receive care from the people who they know and trust.

In a supplementary question, Anne Lynch said that three months is not that long when you've had care from a particular carer for years and questioned why the transition couldn't be done in a much more gradual way. She provided the example of people who have Loughor care in Caldicot could continue to have that care until they no longer need it then a new contract within Caldicot would be given to whoever the new supplier is going to be in a more gradual approach so people can keep their carers rather than move to somebody new.

The Cabinet Member responded that the Council must review its commissioning arrangements periodically and has to re-tender services periodically. The intention is to develop long-term partnership arrangements with providers to provide stability in the care sector and predictability in terms of employment for those organizations. Having agreed those contracts transition has to be managed in an organised way which would not be possible over an extended period, operationally or financially

The Cabinet Member understood the concerns but explained a gradual approach over an extended period is not going to be possible without reverting to the old system of

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spot purchasing individual packages of care from contractors as and when needed, which was ineffective for the Council, not ideal for the recipient of care or the provider market.

6. Question submitted by Jane Moore

https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=4q5Tlb8wb_6oP91A&t=413

The Chair welcomed Jane Moore to the meeting. The following question was asked:

93% of local work workforce have opted out of the TUPE process in favour of retiring or seeking alternative employment. This will be out of the care sector if they are unable to stay in their current position with Loughor. They want to stay with a company that invests in local staff, local services, local service users and the local community. Has the Council evaluated the consequences of this loss to the care workforce and the Community, and what measures are the Council implementing to lessen the negative impact of this decision on the vulnerable local community?

The Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health Services responded that it was not possible to comment at this point on the figures quoted as the TUPE process has not yet commenced. They noted that all care agencies commissioned by the Council are required to pay at least the real living wage.

The Council acknowledges that some staff may choose not to transfer and this will be addressed by the new providers as the implementation progresses by either redeploying staff or recruiting new carers.

The Cabinet Member emphasised that the Council's strategy for commissioning domiciliary care aims to provide more stability in the care provider sector, giving agencies more certainty and the better ability to recruit and retain staff; this is important for those receiving care now and in the future.

7. Question submitted by Joseph Taplin

<https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=ldex9LrTzADQ9PyO&t=892>

The Chair welcomed Joseph Taplin, a private boat owner along the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal and a key volunteer within the Preserve and Protect the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal group.

Mr Taplin explained that the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal is a vital part of our industrial heritage recognised by UNESCO as being of outstanding universal value. It is one of the region's most visited attractions and its recreational value serves everyone from school children to the elderly and supports dozens of community programmes,

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boating centres, hire companies, pubs and shops and these businesses rely on the canals draw to support local well-being and economic activity.

Mr Taplin asked, before any irreversible decisions are made about the canal's future, if the Council has undertaken a comprehensive impact assessment on what the loss of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal would mean. Being that this canal brings in tourism, sustains jobs and promotes physical and mental well-being, if it is allowed to deteriorate or close, is the Council prepared for the cost to livelihoods, to rural connectivity and to Community identity?

County Councillor Sara Burch, Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs and Tourism responded that everyone in the Chamber feels the same about the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal and agreed, if it were to close to navigation, it would be a huge loss to our communities, environmentally and its habitat value, economically, for its tourism value and socially in terms of the pleasure it gives us and as a part of the World Heritage Site.

The Cabinet Member explained that the Council doesn't own the canal and nor does it have significant influence over the decisions which will be taken by the Canal and River Trust, Dwr Cymru and Natural Resources Wales.

If the canal closed to navigation, there would be very little that the Council could do to mitigate the impacts. Impact assessment is undertaken by the Council where there is a decision for the Council to make to ensure that an informed and considered decision is made and in this case, there isn't a decision for the Council to make.

There are decisions for the Canal and River Trust, Dwr Cymru and Natural Resources Wales and the only thing that the Council can do, with our partner local authorities, is to try and influence those decisions on behalf of our residents. The Council is united in trying to do that.

8. Reports to Council

9. Constitution Review

<https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=kKYuTGha1dNhbb2w&t=1345>

County Councillor Angela Sandles, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement presented a report on Constitution Review for Council to consider the proposed amendments to the Council's constitution.

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

That Council approve the proposed amendments to the Council's Constitution as set out in the draft constitution at Appendix A.

10. Senior Leadership Pay Review

<https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=IWUKy8Ide0RvHC2W&t=2283>

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Members of the Senior Leadership Team left the meeting for the duration of this item.

County Councillor Ben Callard, Cabinet Member for Resources presented a report on the Senior Leadership Pay Review to consider the recommendation made, following an independent senior leadership pay review; that senior leaders in Monmouthshire County Council (the Strategic Leadership Team) receive an increase in pay, in accordance with the median salary range, and that this increase is implemented over a 2-year period, from April 2025. The implementation of this recommendation will ensure that the salary structure for senior leaders is comparable with other Councils in the regional area.

Upon being put to the vote Council resolved to approve the recommendations that Council:

- i. Approve the recommendation made, following an independent senior leadership pay review; that senior leaders in Monmouthshire County Council (the Strategic Leadership Team) receive an increase in pay, in accordance with the median salary range, and that this increase is implemented over a 2-year period, from April 2025.**
- ii. Recommend that a job evaluation scheme is put in place for all Chief Officers and, consequently, that the Chief Officer (JNC) pay structure is reviewed.**

14.53 County Councillor Rachel Carrick joined the meeting having experienced technical difficulties

11. Councillor Motions:

11.1. Submitted by County Councillor Jan Butler

<https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=tb6SULaYEdsnDESF&t=4008>

County Councillor Jan Butler presented the motion:

That this council recognises the valuable contribution that the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal brings to the economy of Monmouthshire.

Recognises that the continued health and operation of the canal is essential to the well-being of our residents and securing its future is vital to the communities who thrive along its route.

Requires the Leader of the Council to urgently convene a meeting of all key organisations to discuss a resolution and ensures all councillors including the affected ward members are briefed on developments.

The motion was seconded by County Councillor Simon Howarth.

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

11.2. Submitted by County Councillor Lisa Dymock

https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=baZtRQkv5YX_6mPZ&t=6027

County Councillor Lisa Dymock presented the motion:

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This Council: Notes the administration's commitment in the Community and Corporate Plan to a socially responsible procurement strategy to promote locally sourced goods and services. Calls on the administration to undertake a full and transparent review of its procurement processes to ensure a level playing field for small and local businesses.

The motion was seconded by County Councillor Richard John.

An amendment to the motion was proposed by County Councillor Simon Howarth.

And agrees to review the process and decision-making involved in the commissioning of domiciliary care contracts in the South of the County.

The mover of the original motion accepted the amendment. The motion was amended without debate and without the amendment being put to a vote.

Upon putting the amended motion to the vote, the following votes were recorded:

In favour of the motion:	23
Against the motion:	22

The motion was carried.

14.48 County Councillor Christopher Edwards left the meeting due to experiencing technical difficulties

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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	x		
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			
Councillor S GARRATT		x	
Councillor R GARRICK		x	
Councillor P GRIFFITHS		x	
Councillor M GROUCUTT		x	
Councillor S.G.M. Howarth	x		
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	x		
Councillor P MURPHY	x		
Councillor A NEILL	x		
Councillor M NEWELL	x		
Councillor P PAVIA	x		
Councillor M POWELL	x		
Councillor S RILEY	x		
Councillor D ROOKE		x	
Councillor A SANDLES		x	
Councillor M STEVENS		x	
Councillor J STRONG		x	
Councillor P STRONG		x	
Councillor F TAYLOR	x		
Councillor T THOMAS		x	
Councillor A WATTS		x	
Councillor A WEBB	x		
Councillor L WRIGHT		x	
Total	23	22	

12. Members' Questions:

- 12.1. From County Councillor Tomos Davies to County Councillor Sarah Burch,
Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs, Housing and Tourism

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For an update on the authority's Active Travel Plan, including the development of the Llanfoist pedestrian bridge

https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=lyEQsFI_D8lxqhXz&t=11858

County Councillor Sara Burch, Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs, Housing and Tourism responded that the Active Travel Wales Act 2013 requires local authorities to develop their active travel network maps and prioritise creating routes for walking, cycling and wheeling alongside interventions for road safety, reducing traffic speeds and an integrated public transport system to create an environment where people make walking, cycling or wheeling their first choice for local journeys, where young people can travel independently to school or wherever else they want to go.

Annual funding has been available from Welsh Government to develop projects on our active travel network maps, which includes the routes across Severnside, an active travel bridge across the River Wye at Monmouth and a bridge across the River Usk between Llanfoist and Abergavenny.

Additional phases of the Williamsfield Lane Links project in Monmouth and Phase One of the Caldicot Links project to convert the disused railway line for a safe and accessible route joining communities, have been delivered.

Smaller projects such as dropped kerbs and crossings improving walkability for local communities plus road safety and cycle training have been completed.

In the last year, large scale physical improvements have been made in Monmouth and Caldicot, with projects progressing through WeITAG stages in Caldicot, Magor and Undy, Chepstow, Monmouth and Abergavenny. Despite challenges around grant funding, progress is being made across the County.

Llanfoist Bridge has been subject to regulatory delays and technical issues due to the new route crossing a fast-flowing river through a SSSI historic landscape. It is hoped that these issues have been resolved, and it will be possible to proceed with the project subject to receiving final confirmation of the second tranche of funding from Welsh Government. An imminent announcement from the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales, Ken Skates is expected.

In a supplementary question, and citing press reports speculating about potential cuts to the Welsh Government's active travel budgets, Councillor Davies pressed the Cabinet Member to continue to engage with local residents, particularly the Community Council and businesses, especially during the delivery phase. Maintaining a partnership approach between the Council and local stakeholders will be vitally important so that we all maximise the benefit for Abergavenny and the wider community.

The Cabinet Member will ensure that any news is shared, and stakeholder meetings will be arranged providing the news is positive. The Cabinet Member assured that working together with communities to deliver projects is very much the process preferred for all active travel projects. Acknowledging that it will be disappointing if the funding for active travel is reallocated, but noting also that it would likely be allocated to repairing highways and roads which would also be welcomed.

12.2. From County Councillor Tomos Davies to County Councillor Angela Sandles, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement

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To confirm the number of cases of reported anti-social behaviour recorded across Monmouthshire in the past twelve months, including cases of vehicle off roading.

https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=tKezZJoJn16XP_L6&t=12166

County Councillor Angela Sandles, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement responded that, in Monmouthshire, during the 2024-2025 financial year, 1233 Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) incidents were recorded representing a decrease of 11 compared to the previous year. The Community Safety Team secured extra Home Office funding in 2024/25 which was successfully used for additional youth outreach work and extra security to bolster police patrols. The figures included 20 ASB calls related to off road bikes.

Primarily concentrated in North Monmouthshire, there are a number of green lanes or byways open to all traffic across rural areas of Monmouthshire, which allow road legal vehicles, including off road motorcycles, but some riders do unfortunately stray into prohibited areas.

The Community Safety Team are working alongside residents to identify illegal riding locations and are supporting ongoing efforts with Gwent Police to develop a plan to address these issues.

In response to a supplementary question, the Cabinet Member agreed to meet with some of the local residents in Llanellen, to explore what further resource can be leveraged both through the authority's offices but also in partnership with Gwent Police to address their growing concerns. The Cabinet Member urged residents to keep reporting all the hot spots where this is happening.

12.3. From County Councillor Tomos Davies to County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

To confirm the number of fixed penalty notices issued for littering and fly tipping offences for the financial year 2024/25.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=gflQ1l9GixNrAjef&t=12343>

County Councillor Angela Sandles, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement responded that there was a successful prosecution on the 11th December 2024 for four fly tipping incidents in Monmouthshire. The prosecution was brought in conjunction with Newport City Council and Torfaen County Borough Council for additional offences in their areas. The sentence included 30 weeks in custody suspended for 18 months, 120 hours unpaid work and to pay a victim surcharge of £187.

There was a successful prosecution on the 12th February 2025 for fly tipping in Monmouthshire. The sentence included 18 weeks in custody, suspended for 12 months with costs of £1713 and a victim surcharge of £154. There have been two fly tipping fixed penalty notices, and one fixed penalty notice for littering.

Fly tipping is illegal, and the Council investigates each incident for evidence but it is rarely present. Any details found are passed to Environmental Health working closely together to secure successful prosecutions.

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The Cabinet Member added that there are hundreds of fantastic litter champions in Monmouthshire and it's great to see fellow councillors regularly joining organised litter picks in their wards, building on the work of Litter Champions and helping Monmouthshire be in the top quartile in Wales for cleanliness and litter.

There is a Members' Workshop in June to look at Litter, Dog fouling and fly tipping and where members feel there's a need for better signage and higher levels of education and enforcement.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Davies commented that it is disappointing to hear of so few fixed penalty notices being issued for littering and fly tipping offences across the County, which does very little to deter those who act with impunity and who tarnish the natural beauty of this County. The efforts of the countless litter picking volunteers and the Keep Abergavenny Tidy group were applauded. Councillor Davies was pleased to learn of the Members Seminar, but invited the Cabinet member to bring forward a report to full Council at the earliest convenience, specifically to address the issue of deterrence and to explore how else we might tackle some of the challenges associated with enforcing and deterring would be litter offenders across Monmouthshire.

The Cabinet Member responded that this is a cause that would unite this entire Council and the Members seminar will should preclude that for Council to get ideas from all the Members.

12.4. From County Councillor Jackie Strong to County Councillor Sarah Burch, Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs, Housing and Tourism

Can the Cabinet member give an update on progress towards the development of a Cultural Strategy for Monmouthshire?

<https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=NIQ5HORoOKxP0eM&t=12557>

The Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs, Housing and Tourism responded that work over the last year has included engaging with several groups in the heritage and arts fields, canvassing Town and Community Councils and hosting networking groups engaged in cultural industries and community activity. Whilst the work is being led by MonLife Arts, Heritage and Destination Officers, the Cultural Strategy will be a cross-Council strategy aligned to the Community and Corporate Plan, sharing themes and actions with the Destination Management Plan, the Leisure Strategy, Heritage Strategy, Library Strategy, Place-Making plans, Green Infrastructure and nature recovery work.

The 3 themes are people, places and prosperity. There will be engagement with the public and specific groups between the 12th May and 27th June through Let's Talk Monmouthshire and 4 focus groups sessions. The final strategy will be compiled through July and August and will then commence the political process of approval and adoption.

The current work is building on the work from the Creative Industries Cluster Hubs project, which mapped and brought together over 200 visual arts organizations and practitioners working in the County which has led to a continuing network for the visual

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arts. It also builds on the Creative Futures SPF project, which has worked with nearly 600 young people and established the Monmouthshire Youth Theatre. The first celebration arts event was held in April 2024 and the second is tomorrow.

A database of contacts has been created, and the team are now in regular communication with over 300 creative practitioners sharing news, opportunities and information. Spaces to display work have been created in the Hubs, the Tourist Information Centre and the Borough Theatre, and artists and makers are now selling their work. The team continued to promote Monmouthshire as a venue for filming, for events and festivals.

County Councillor Jackie Strong asked the Cabinet Member to ensure that Severnside isn't forgotten as there is no dedicated arts space, theatre or a space for local groups to hire cheaply. They must either use the school or the choir hall which is costly and increases pressure to raise funds. There is an abundance of talented individuals, and the comprehensive school recently presented the musical "Our House". Caldicot Male Voice Choir is also performing a show. There is a magnificent medieval castle and grounds that hosts musical events and the Armed Forces Day.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Strong asked how the Cultural Strategy will support local groups to sustain them and provide them with the necessary support to provide opportunities and access to the arts for current and future residents.

The Cabinet Member responded that the creative industries work has shown that Caldicot has a large number of creative professionals who live there but are working elsewhere so it would be great to create more opportunities for them in Monmouthshire and part of the project has been setting up the quarterly creative conversations with local artists in local cafes.

These events provide mutual support and opportunities for sharing ideas and help the Council to understand where it can support the sector.

It was announced that the Council will be hosting an Arts and Creative Festival in Caldicot in September, as well as the strong programme of summer music and other events at the castle. The Team is working on how to best support the many voluntary and community groups such as choirs and Youth Theatre groups. One example is the refurbishment of the costume collection for the Youth Theatre, which is now available for all community theatre groups in the County. Other practical ways in which the sector can be supported are welcomed.

12.5. From County Councillor Jayne McKenna to County Councillor Angela Sandles, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement

How is the council working with Gwent Police and Wye Valley National Landscape to prevent damage to tracks and trails?

<https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=ltCJ9thB3Kk63DP6&t=12915>

County Councillor Jayne McKenna explained there has been a significant increase in off road motorbike activity, with some riders travelling long distances to use our tracks and trails and residents are increasingly concerned about environmental damage, erosion,

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noise and antisocial behaviour. They feel that signage is lacking, enforcement is limited and their concerns are not being heard.

The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement responded that one of the ways the Council has worked with the police is by providing them with mapping information so they can clarify the status of the paths and their permitted users. Tracks and trails of the Wye Valley, guided by recommendations from Tomorrow's Tourism is designing clear signage to aid the police undertaking enforcement and inform the public where they can and cannot legitimately go.

Condition surveys are being conducted on troublesome minor highways considering ecological impacts to address maintenance issues and seek funding. Efforts are also being made to develop a sense of place and protect heritage and natural surroundings. The use of counters is being investigated to evidence usage, potentially leading to traffic regulation orders.

The Wye Valley National Landscape team are developing clearer ways to outline responsibility and reporting channels. The police have been asked for complaint statistics but unfortunately have not been able to participate in meetings now due to resource constraints, and the same applies to Natural Resources Wales. However, they will be involved as work progresses.

Currently, Countryside Access and Highways are working together to produce guidance and briefings on traffic regulation orders for Tracks and Trails and more recently, the Council has been seeking to address specific issues such as bridal way damage by motorcycles, in collaboration with the police.

The Cabinet Member encouraged reporting occurrences of people being where they're not supposed to be to provide the Police with better data.

County Councillor McKenna, in a supplementary question, asked if the Cabinet Member would lobby Gwent Police on behalf of residents of Whitebrook to increase enforcement in these hotspot areas, The Cabinet Member agreed to do this when meetings are arranged with Gwent Police and other bodies.

12.6. From County Councillor Jayne McKenna to County Councillor Sarah Burch, Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs, Housing and Tourism

How is the council ensuring value for taxpayers in the effective delivery of policies to tackle homelessness?

<https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=aBB8PZZuenhOGQPA&t=13149>

The Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs, Housing and Tourism responded that the delivery of the Council's homeless service has been extremely challenging over recent years, as it has for other local authorities in Wales. We've experienced higher numbers of people presenting as homeless, many of whom have had high levels of support needs, for which there are many reasons such as the unaffordability of private rents, the mismatch between local incomes and house prices, the lack of affordable housing and the failure to upgrade benefits in line with rents, amongst other factors.

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In 2022, the Council inherited over 100 homeless households being accommodated in hotels, bed and breakfast or other temporary accommodation including expensive holiday lets that are particularly unsuitable for families with children.

The Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, which was approved by Cabinet in April 2023, set out the road map to improving the service and reducing the cost of temporary accommodation. Progress against the plan is reported to People Scrutiny Committee. The priorities of the plan are to prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity to increase the supply of affordable housing, to provide timely support to sustain accommodation and maximise resources through partnership working.

The Cabinet Member is confident that the Council is delivering on the priorities and currently can prevent homelessness in most cases through a variety of means and the hard work of the Housing Options team.

From the end of April, Severn View will replace the use of bed and breakfasts with better quality, lower cost options where the majority of costs can be recouped from rents and housing benefit.

Increasing the availability of good quality temporary accommodation and permanent accommodation through housing association partners has enabled the reduction of the use of less suitable accommodation and to deliver better homes and better value.

A mix of leasing managed lettings and purchases, a range of housing support is provided which helps tenants to retain their tenancy and move forward in their lives.

Numbers of homelessness inquiries are reducing and consequently the numbers needing temporary accommodation, including B&B have reduced. In April 2023, when the plan was approved, there were 94 people in B&B accommodation and this currently stands at 20 which is a marked improvement and is having financial benefits for the authority.

The cost of B&B in 2024/25 was under £1.5 million reduced from over £2.1 million in 2023/24. These are gross figures as we recover part of the expenditure from housing benefit. This demonstrates the progress that is being made and it is hoped by the end of 2025/26 to have virtually eliminated the use of B&B providing a significant saving.

In a supplementary question, Councillor McKenna had been informed that in recent years the Council has been hiring 10 rooms per week at a venue in Monmouthshire, at a cost of £3500 per week yet occupancy within the past month has been as low as 10% so effectively that's £3500 a week to house one person, which raises serious questions about value for money. Given the low occupancy and several of these establishments, B&B's and Airbnb's across the county, The Cabinet Member was asked to ensure that that this is being looked at as a matter of urgency to review the temporary accommodation across the county for the future.

The Cabinet Member agreed to look into the detail of that stating that the Council is gradually withdrawing from some of those arrangements that have been in place previously.

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**12.7. From County Councillor Tudor Thomas to County Councillor Sarah Burch,
Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs, Housing and Tourism**

The Canal and River Trust has expressed concern that new limits placed on its ability to extract water from the River Usk will mean that the Monmouthshire and Brecon canal may be closed during the summer months, which are of course the peak months for Welsh tourism. The Canal is a major tourism attraction for visitors as well as its value for residents and for wildlife. What steps will the administration take to support the tourism and leisure businesses which could be affected?

<https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=X9--93TjucKaiBsb&t=13492>

The Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs, Housing and Tourism responded that much of the question had been covered in the discussion on the earlier motion.

Regarding the impact on tourism businesses, there are 4 canal boat hire companies operating in Monmouthshire and several holiday cottage businesses, which are attractive because they are Canalside. It is one of the most beautiful and affordable places to enjoy a canal holiday.

The Cabinet Member had spoken to one of the boat companies which has seen an effect from the very thorough publicity work by the Canal and River Trust to raise awareness of what is currently a potential serious problem.

The Tourism team provides support to all the tourism businesses and promote the canal to visitors through Visit Monmouthshire and there was also a meeting of the Bannau Brycheiniog Tourism Partnership this week.

All that the Council can do is to continue to push to get a permanent resolution to the water issues. The Cabinet Member wished to reassure that even if it is necessary to stop the lock gates being used temporarily, it is understood that the canal is intended to remain in water. The canal towpath will still be a great way to take a level walk or cycle through the beautiful and historic landscape. The canal would still be there for canoeists and paddle boarders. Canalside pubs will still be open for business.

**12.8. From County Councillor Rachel Buckler to County Councillor Catrin Maby,
Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment**

Monmouthshire Council are getting regular reports of bridges needing repair from residents and community councillors, but bridges are left damaged and decaying, with many bridges in a precarious state. These bridges are vital to the connectivity of communities in rural Monmouthshire in areas like Llangwm and the surrounding area. What can the cabinet member do to ensure these vital road networks are kept open and these historically significant structures are not in danger of disappearing for good?

<https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=fzje-8dCq1Q7N5Nh&t=13634>

County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment responded that she shared the concerns raised. Bridges are regularly monitored for safety and where they don't meet safety standards, restrictions are put in place until this can be remedied.

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Officers show diligence in doing their best to manage what seems like an impossible situation arising from a substantial shortfall in funding for highways infrastructure across the UK over the last 15 years. A backlog of an estimated £80 million worth of work was inherited that needed to bring the highways network asset up to standard.

Monmouthshire County Council has 1600 kilometres of roads to maintain including the bridges with funding from Council budgets, with a workforce and budget of a similar size to SEWTRA which has 160 kilometres of road to maintain helping to explain why rural roads look rough compared to the trunk roads.

The Cabinet Member commented that the Council, under previous administrations, should have allocated more funds to roads to avoid getting them into the current state. Priority may have been given to other demands, such as social services and education.

The Cabinet Member consistently argues for more resources for roads and infrastructure, and that it is close to a critical point.

Residents concerns are understandably passed on to Highways. The impacts of climate change with more frequent extreme weather events is adding to the damage to our infrastructure and it means that we sometimes have to divert from our planned programs to manage new more urgent problems.

Challenges are faced by highways teams in England and Wales and it's now recognised that there is not the level of funding needed to keep local roads in good condition. It is reported that the backlog of carriageway repairs in England and Wales has reached new heights at almost £17 billion.

While local roads are only resurfaced on average once every 93 years, and one in six miles are reported of only five years of structural life remaining, Over the last decade, more than £20 billion has been spent on carriageway maintenance in England and Wales, including spending to fill the equivalent of 1 pothole every 18 seconds, every day for 10 years. But unfortunately, due to the short term nature of the allocation of funding this has resulted in no quantifiable uplift in the condition and resilience of the network.

The Cabinet Member explained that the Council is ensuring that funding brought in is maximised and officers are currently submitting a bid to the local government borrowing initiative for improvements to roads and infrastructure, including bridges.

The funding bid was sent last week and as soon as officers know what's to be funded, a Members Workshop to discuss this year's programme of works will be arranged. The funding is welcome, but the amounts so far announced are relatively small compared to what is needed, and there are concerns about the stability of the supply chain and the cost of the materials.

A much more long-term substantial investment is needed in the network across the country to ensure that connectivity to our communities is maintained. The Cabinet Member has raised it in the community, in the Cardiff Capital Region and with Ministers.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Buckler highlighted that when bridges collapse, then there's an enormous job to do and asked that each Ward Councillor be provided

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with an overview of the bridges in their ward, when they were last surveyed and what sort of problems were flagged up.

The Cabinet Member agreed to ask what data is available and how it can be shared.

A Members Workshop is planned for the summer and it may be possible to have as much data as possible available to explain about bridges as well as roads before the workshop.

12.9. From County Councillor Rachel Buckler to County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment

The state of road repairs in Monmouthshire seems to be at a crisis point. Regular reports from community councillors and residents in the Devauden Ward rarely seem to lead to pot holes being filled, culverts being cleared and gullies kept open. If potholes are filled they last for a couple of weeks and then the roads are back to square one. The road from Nantygelli Crossroads to Llansoy in the Devauden ward I represent is a case in point. Soon even a pony and trap will not be able to navigate it. What will the Cabinet Member do to change this depressing trajectory?

<https://www.youtube.com/live/lxJxdKzZJiQ?si=hprziWDdX4FX9cSU&t=14152>

The Cabinet Member responded that the reduction in funding for highways has left a bad shortfall to maintain even a steady state. Long term funding is needed to improve the network and that's what will be fought for at a political level.

On the specific road mentioned, temporary repairs were carried out a few weeks ago. Ideally, we would do more permanent fixes but there are not always resources available to do that.

There's an endless list of new potholes appearing and it is recognised many of the roads weren't built for the high level and weight of traffic we are seeing.

The Cabinet Member will keep on fighting for funding for the repair of highways.

Referring to the Nantygelli to Llansoy road, in a supplementary question, Councillor Buckler said the road had been quite comprehensively repaired twice which is then washed away which is a waste of resources and asked for a more sustainable method of repair.

The Cabinet Member responded that this point can be discussed at the Members' Workshop.

The meeting ended at 6.00 pm