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County Hall
Rhadyr
Usk
NP15 1GA

Wednesday, 19 March 2025

Notice of meeting:

Place Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 27th March, 2025 at 2.00 pm

The Council Chamber, County Hall, Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA with remote attendance

AGENDA

Item No	Item	Pages
1.	Apologies for Absence.	
2.	Declarations of Interest.	
3.	Public Open Forum. Our Scrutiny Committee meetings are live streamed and a link to the live stream will be available on the meeting page of the Monmouthshire County Council website If you would like to speak under the Public Open Forum at an upcoming meeting you will need to give three working days' notice in advance of the meeting by contacting Scrutiny@monmouthshire.gov.uk The amount of time afforded to each member of the public to speak is at the Chair's discretion, but to enable us to accommodate multiple speakers we ask that contributions be no longer than 3 minutes. Alternatively, if you would like to submit a written, audio or video representation, please contact the team via the same email address to arrange this. The deadline for submitting representations to the Council is 5pm three clear working days in advance of the meeting. If combined representations received exceed 30 minutes, a selection of these based on theme will be shared at the meeting. All representations received will be made available to councillors prior to the meeting. If you would like to suggest future topics for scrutiny by one of our Scrutiny Committees, please do so by emailing Scrutiny@monmouthshire.gov.uk	

4.	Place Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Action List.	1 - 8
5.	Council and Cabinet Work Planner.	9 - 12
6.	To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting.	13 - 20
7.	Next Meeting: Thursday 22nd May 2025 at 2.00pm.	
8.	Nedern Maintenance - To discuss the maintenance of the Nedern, particularly throughout the Castle grounds, Caldicot.	
9.	Bats and Habitats Regulations Appraisals - To discuss the protection of horseshoe bats and related HRA, particularly regarding proposed new housing.	21 - 24

Paul Matthews

Chief Executive

**MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CYNGOR SIR FYNWY**

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COMMITTEE IS AS FOLLOWS:

County Councillor Louise Brown	Shirenewton;	Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Emma Bryn	Wyesham;	Independent Group
County Councillor Tomos Dafydd Davies	Llanfoist & Govilon;	Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Lisa Dymock	Portskewett;	Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Jane Lucas	Osbaston;	Welsh Conservative Party
County Councillor Jackie Strong	Caldicot Cross;	Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Laura Wright	Grofield;	Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor Tudor Thomas	Park;	Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru
County Councillor John Crook	Magor East with Undy;	Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru

Public Information

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Welsh Language

The Council welcomes contributions from members of the public through the medium of Welsh or English. We respectfully ask that you provide us with adequate notice to accommodate your needs.

Aims and Values of Monmouthshire County Council

Our purpose

To become a zero-carbon county, supporting well-being, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life.

Objectives we are working towards

- Fair place to live where the effects of inequality and poverty have been reduced.
- Green place to live and work with reduced carbon emissions and making a positive contribution to addressing the climate and nature emergency.
- Thriving and ambitious place, where there are vibrant town centres and where businesses can grow and develop.
- Safe place to live where people have a home where they feel secure in.
- Connected place where people feel part of a community and are valued.
- Learning place where everybody has the opportunity to reach their potential.

Our Values

Openness. We are open and honest. People have the chance to get involved in decisions that affect them, tell us what matters and do things for themselves/their communities. If we cannot do something to help, we'll say so; if it will take a while to get the answer we'll explain why; if we can't answer immediately we'll try to connect you to the people who can help – building trust and engagement is a key foundation.

Fairness. We provide fair chances, to help people and communities thrive. If something does not seem fair, we will listen and help explain why. We will always try to treat everyone fairly and consistently. We cannot always make everyone happy, but will commit to listening and explaining why we did what we did.

Flexibility. We will continue to change and be flexible to enable delivery of the most effective and efficient services. This means a genuine commitment to working with everyone to embrace new ways of working.

Teamwork. We will work with you and our partners to support and inspire everyone to get involved so we can achieve great things together. We don't see ourselves as the 'fixers' or problem-solvers, but we will make the best of the ideas, assets and resources available to make sure we do the things that most positively impact our people and places.

Kindness: We will show kindness to all those we work with putting the importance of relationships and the connections we have with one another at the heart of all interactions.

Monmouthshire Scrutiny Question Guide

Role of the Pre-meeting

1. Why is the Committee scrutinising this? (background, key issues)
 2. What is the Committee's role and what outcome do Members want to achieve?
 3. Is there sufficient information to achieve this? If not, who could provide this?
- Agree the order of questioning and which Members will lead
 - Agree questions for officers and questions for the Cabinet Member

Questions for the Meeting

Scrutinising Performance

1. How does performance compare with previous years? Is it better/worse? Why?
2. How does performance compare with other councils/other service providers? Is it better/worse? Why?
3. How does performance compare with set targets? Is it better/worse? Why?
4. How were performance targets set? Are they challenging enough/realistic?
5. How do service users/the public/partners view the performance of the service?
6. Have there been any recent audit and inspections? What were the findings?
7. How does the service contribute to the achievement of corporate objectives?
8. Is improvement/decline in performance linked to an increase/reduction in resource? What capacity is there to improve?

Scrutinising Policy

1. Who does the policy affect ~ directly and indirectly? Who will benefit most/least?
2. What is the view of service users/stakeholders? What consultation has been undertaken? Did the consultation process comply with the Gunning Principles? Do stakeholders believe it will achieve the desired outcome?
3. What is the view of the community as a whole - the 'taxpayer' perspective?
4. What methods were used to consult with stakeholders? Did the process enable all those with a stake to have their say?
5. What practice and options have been considered in developing/reviewing this policy? What evidence is there to inform what works? Does the policy relate to an area where there is a lack of published research or other evidence?
6. Does the policy relate to an area where there are known inequalities?
7. Does this policy align to our corporate

	<p>objectives, as defined in our corporate plan? Does it adhere to our Welsh Language Standards?</p> <p>8. Have all relevant sustainable development, equalities and safeguarding implications</p> <p>9. been taken into consideration? For example, what are the procedures that need to be in place to protect children?</p> <p>10.</p> <p>11. How much will this cost to implement and what funding source has been identified?</p> <p>12.</p> <p>13. How will performance of the policy be measured and the impact evaluated</p>
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General Questions:

Empowering Communities

- How are we involving local communities and empowering them to design and deliver services to suit local need?
- Do we have regular discussions with communities about service priorities and what level of service the council can afford to provide in the future?
- Is the service working with citizens to explain the role of different partners in delivering the service, and managing expectations?
- Is there a framework and proportionate process in place for collective performance assessment, including from a citizen's perspective, and do you have accountability arrangements to support this?
- Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out? If so, can the Leader and Cabinet/Senior Officers provide members with copies and a detailed explanation of the EQIA conducted in respect of these proposals?
- Can the Leader and Cabinet/Senior Officers assure members that these proposals comply with Equality and Human Rights legislation? Do the proposals comply with the Local Authority's Strategic Equality Plan?

Service Demands

- How will policy and legislative change affect how the council operates?
- Have we considered the demographics of our council and how this will impact on service delivery and funding in the future?
- Have you identified and considered the long-term trends that might affect your service area, what impact these trends could have on your service/your service could have on these trends, and what is being done in response?

Financial Planning

- Do we have robust medium and long-term financial plans in place?
- Are we linking budgets to plans and outcomes and reporting effectively on these?

Making savings and generating income

- Do we have the right structures in place to ensure that our efficiency, improvement and transformational approaches are working together to maximise savings?
- How are we maximising income?
- Have we compared other council's policies to maximise income and fully considered the implications on service users?
- Do we have a workforce plan that takes into account capacity, costs, and skills of the actual versus desired workforce?

Questions to ask within a year of the decision:

- Were the intended outcomes of the proposal achieved or were there other results?
- Were the impacts confined to the group you initially thought would be affected i.e. older people, or were others affected e.g. people with disabilities, parents with young children?
- Is the decision still the right decision or do adjustments need to be made?

Questions for the Committee to conclude...

Do we have the necessary information to form conclusions/make recommendations to the executive, council, other partners? If not, do we need to:

- (i) Investigate the issue in more detail?
- (ii) Obtain further information from other witnesses – Executive Member, independent expert, members of the local community, service users, regulatory bodies...

Agree further actions to be undertaken within a timescale/future monitoring report...

Monmouthshire's Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2024-25

Place Scrutiny Committee – Meetings at 2pm unless otherwise stated				
27 th March 2025	Nedern Maintenance	To discuss the maintenance of the Nedern, particularly throughout the Castle grounds, Caldicot.	James Galsworthy (NRW)	External Scrutiny
	Bats and Habitats Regulations Appraisals	To discuss the protection of horseshoe bats and related HRA, particularly regarding proposed new housing.	(NRW response) Andy Karran (Gwent Wildlife Trust)	External Scrutiny
22 nd May 2025 – NO MORE ITEMS	Active Travel	To scrutinise various aspects of Active Travel, including Bridges, Engagement, Disabled Access, Castle Meadows, Llanfoist and Abergavenny Railway Station links	Paul Sullivan Graham Kinsella Nicholas Tulp Ian Saunders Cllr Maby	Pre-decision Scrutiny
	Destination Management Plan	To conduct pre-decision scrutiny.	Colette Bosley Ian Saunders Cllr Griffiths	Pre-decision Scrutiny
SPECIAL 5th JUNE 2025	RLDP (single item agenda)	To scrutinise the Replacement Local Development Plan before Council on 26 th June.	Craig O'Connor Deb Hill-Howells Cllr Griffiths	Pre-decision Scrutiny
10th July 2025	Placemaking Plans (no other items)	To scrutinise the Monmouth, Abergavenny, Magor (and Chepstow?) Placemaking Plans.	Craig O'Connor Daniel Fordham Cllr Griffiths	Pre-decision Scrutiny
25th September 2025	Markets and Stalls	To scrutinise the rates for markets and stallholders, and the policies for them generally.	Tracey Thomas Mathew Wooles Simon Parfitt	Policy Development

Monmouthshire's Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2024-25

Place Scrutiny Committee – Meetings at 2pm unless otherwise stated				
6th November 2025	Local Flood Strategy (Joint with Public Services Committee?) – TBC	<i>Pre-decision scrutiny of adoption of the Local Flood Strategy.</i>	<i>Craig O'Connor Cllr Maby</i>	<i>Pre-decision Scrutiny</i>
11th December 2025	Sustainable Drainage Systems – TBC (covered in Flood Strategy scrutiny?)	<i>To scrutinise SuDs and drainage on estates in the county.</i>	<i>Ross Price Craig O'Connor Cllr Griffiths</i>	<i>Policy Development</i>
5th February 2026				
19th March 2026				
To be confirmed – Summer 2025?	Car Parking Review		<i>Carl Touhig Cllr Griffiths</i>	
To be confirmed	Shire Hall Museum Monmouth	<i>To scrutinise progress of the National Lottery Heritage Fund development phase and consider options for the stage 2 delivery bid.</i>	<i>Ian Saunders Tracey Thomas Cllr Sandles</i>	<i>Policy Development</i>
To be confirmed	Pavement Café Policy	<i>To scrutinise the pavement café policy as the basis for making decisions on applications for licences.</i>	<i>Graham Kinsella? Cllr Griffiths</i>	<i>Policy Development</i>
To be confirmed	Road Safety Strategy	<i>To scrutinise the Road Safety Strategy.</i>	<i>Geraint Roberts Cllr Maby</i>	<i>Pre-decision Scrutiny</i>
To be confirmed	Destination management Plan	<i>To conduct pre-decision scrutiny.</i>	<i>Colette Bosley Ian Saunders Cllr Griffiths</i>	<i>Pre-decision Scrutiny</i>

Monmouthshire's Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2024-25

Place Scrutiny Committee – Meetings at 2pm unless otherwise stated				
To be confirmed	Tackling Poverty and Inequality Action Plan	<i>To scrutinise performance against the action plan.</i>	<i>Lucinda Boyland Cllr Sandles</i>	<i>Performance Monitoring</i>
To be confirmed	Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy	<i>To scrutinise progress of the strategy prior to Cabinet decision.</i>	<i>Deb Hill-Howells Ian Hoccom Cllr Maby</i>	<i>Pre-decision Scrutiny</i>
To be confirmed	Monlife Heritage Strategy		<i>Tracey Thomas</i>	
Corporate and Community Plan Items for the Committee's consideration for inclusion into the Place Scrutiny Forward Plan:				
Inclusive Cultural Strategy				
Increase the use of local produce in schools and care homes and new food strategies and policies approved by Cabinet				
Nature Isn't Neat expansion				
Development of Active Travel routes				

Monmouthshire's Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2024-25

Place Scrutiny Committee – Meetings at 2pm unless otherwise stated

Development of a new station at Magor and improvements at Severn Tunnel Junction Creating plans for a metro that links Monmouthshire to Bristol, Newport and Cardiff				
RLDP submission for examination				
Develop a county-wide digital solution that matches those who need to travel with those who have car spaces				
RLDP for adoption				
Find new ways to progress refurbishment of Caldicot Leisure Centre				

Monmouthshire’s Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2024-25

Place Scrutiny Committee – <i>Meetings at 2pm unless otherwise stated</i>				
Deforestation and school meals procurement - Food Strategy - Jointly with P&O				

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Place Scrutiny Committee

Action List

6th February 2025

Minute Item:	Subject	Officer / Member	Outcome
4	To refer the petition to the Cabinet Member to respond on its progress	Sara Burch	
5	To provide details of the proportion of black/red roads, how many are considered for maintenance, and whether there are the same categories for pavements	Deb Hill-Howells	
5	To provide a written response as to whether any funds are allocated for the Wye Valley Walk in Wyesham and the section of Redbrook where residents currently walk on a 60mph road, and if not, what areas are planned to receive the funding	Ben Callard	Response sent from Cllr Burch to Cllr Bryn 3 rd March.
5	To provide a written response about the current opening hours and proposed changes to community hubs	Ben Callard	
5	To provide a written response about the removal of the post of Head of Public Protection: what the interim position is and long-term forecast	Jonathan Davies	
5	To provide a written response as to where in the south of the county the rural Youth Services are	Ben Callard	
6	For members to send questions for NRW about Nedern maintenance to Scrutiny team	Place Members	
6	To add a future item on the rates charged for markets and stallholders, and the policies for markets generally	Scrutiny officers	Added to 25 th September meeting

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Committee / Decision Maker	Meeting date / Decision due	Report Title	Cabinet member	Purpose	Author	Date item added to the planner
Council	01-Jul-25	RLDP for Adoption	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy	To adopt the RLDP following receipt of the Inspector's report, making it the County's Development Plan as defined by S38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004	Mark Hand / Rachel Lewis	23-Aug-22
Cabinet	02-Apr-25	Marches Forward Partnership	Mary Ann Brocklesby - Whole Authority Strategy		Peter Davies - Lead (Cath Fallon)	3-Mar-25
Council	26-Jun-25	Licensing Act Policy 2025	Angela Sandles - Engagement	Policy has to be approved by Full Council and it needs to be in place by 1 st July 2025	Linda O Gorman	10-Jan-25
Cabinet	21-May-25	Y Prentis Update	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy		Hannah Jones	26-Feb-25
Cabinet	05-May-25	Pavement Café Policy	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy	To adopt the pavement café policy as the basis for making decisions on applications for licences	Mark Hand / Paul Keeble	4-Oct-22
Council	10-Apr-25	Senior Pay Review	Ben Callard - Resources		Julie Anthony	3-Mar-25
ICMD	09-Apr-25	PSPO Lane Closure to prevent fly tipping & off roading	Catrin Maby - Climate Change and Environment		Mark Cleaver	13-Mar-25
ICMD	09-Apr-25	Welsh Church Fund Working Group - meeting 4	Ben Callard - Resources			
Cabinet	02-Apr-25	Digital, Data and Technology Collaboration	Mary Ann Brocklesby - Whole Authority Strategy	To develop proposals to build on existing collaborative arrangements in place for the provision of technology services through the Shared Resource Service. Expanding on these to include digital and data services will generate economies of scale enabling the authority to access expertise to accelerate progress against delivery of priorities set in the Community and Corporate Plan.	Peter Davies & Matt Gatehouse & Sian Hayward	14-Mar-25

Cabinet	Deferred	Review of Monmouth Cluster and proposed statutory consultation	Martyn Groucutt - Education		Matt Jones	3-Mar-25
Cabinet	02-Apr-25	Reponse to Boundary Commission Electoral Review Consultation	Angela Sandles - Engagement		John Pearson	12-Feb-25
ICMD	26-Mar-25	Proposal to increase the fee payments to Monmouthshire Foster Carers	Ian Chandler - Social Care & Safeguarding		Charlotte Drury	4-Feb-25
ICMD	12-Mar-25	Highway Traffic Regulation Amendment Order No 16	Catrin Maby - Climate Change and Environment			
Council	06-Mar-25	Appointment of Chief Officer - Head of Transport - Exempt info	Catrin Maby - Climate Change and Environment		Deb Hill Howells	21-Jan-25
Council	06-Mar-25	Publication of the Councils Pay Policy	Ben Callard - Resources	To approve the publication of Monmouthshire County Council's Pay Policy, in compliance with the Localism Act.	Matt Gatehouse / Pip Green	17-Jan-25
Council	06-Mar-25	Contract Procedure Rules	Ben Callard - Resources		Scott James	9-Jan-25
Council	06-Mar-25	2025/26 Final Budget sign off including CT resolution	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	13-Jun-24
Council	06-Mar-25	2025/26 Capital Strategy & Treasury Strategy	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	13-Jun-24
Cabinet	05-Mar-25	Approval of a Discretionary Policy for Council Tax Premiums	Ben Callard - Resources		Ruth Donovan	27-Jan-25
Cabinet	05-Mar-25	2025/26 Final Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	4-Jun-24

Cabinet	05-Mar-25	2025/26 WCF/Mon Farm Strategy	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	4-Jun-24
ICMD	26-Feb-25	County of Sanctuary: Homes for Ukraine	Angela Sandles - Engagement	To confirm future support arrangements for Ukrainian's living in Monmouthshire as part of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme following changes to the national arrangement for both funding & visas	Richard Drinkwater/Matt Gatehouse	7-Feb-25
ICMD	26-Feb-25	Housing Allocations Policy				
Cabinet	19-Feb-25	2024/25 Revenue and Capital Monitoring Month 9	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	4-Jun-24
Cabinet	19-Feb-25	UK Shared Prosperity Fund post March 2025 – financial implications and impact	Paul Griffiths - Sustainable Economy		Hannah Jones	10-Jul-24
ICMD	29-Jan-25	2025/26 Community Council and Police Precepts final	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	17-Dec-24
Council	23-Jan-25	Council Diary 2025/26	Angela Sandles - Engagement		John Pearson	
Council	23-Jan-25	GWENT REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP BOARD (RPB) AREA PLAN AND RPB ANNUAL REPORT 23/24	Ian Chandler - Social Care & Safeguarding		Natasha Harris (Torfaen)	
Council	23-Jan-25	Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/26	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	13-Jun-24
Cabinet	22-Jan-25	Business case for the purchase of a property in Abergavenny to develop supported accommodation for care experienced young people	Ben Callard - Resources		Jane Rogers	7-Jan-25
Cabinet	22-Jan-25	2025/26 Draft Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	4-Jun-24

Cabinet	22-Jan-25	Education Middle Tier	Martyn Groucutt - Education		Will McLean	20-Nov-24
ICMD	15-Jan-25	Decision to transfer Dixon Archive from Monmouth Museum to Herefordshire Record Office			Rachael Rogers	9-Dec-24
ICMD	15-Jan-25	Welsh Church Fund Working Group - meeting 3	Ben Callard - Resources		Dave Jarrett	13-Jun-24
ICMD	18-Dec-24	2025/26 Community Council and Police Precepts draft	Ben Callard - Resources		Jon Davies	13-Jun-24

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA with remote attendance on Thursday, 6th February, 2025 at 2.00 pm

Councillors Present

County Councillor Jane Lucas (Chair)

County Councillors: Louise Brown, Emma Bryn, Tomos Davies, Lisa Dymock, Jackie Strong, Laura Wright, Tudor Thomas, John Crook

Also in attendance County Councillors:

Sara Burch and Ben Callard

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Peter Davies, Acting Chief Executive
Jonathan Davies, Head of Finance
Matthew Gatehouse, Chief Officer People, Performance and Partnerships.
Craig O'Connor, Chief Officer, Place
Deb Hill-Howells, Head of Decarbonisation, Transport and Support Services
Carl Touhig, Head of Neighbourhood Services
Nikki Wellington, Finance Manager
Stacey Jones, Senior Accountant
Dave Loder, Finance Manager

APOLOGIES: None

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

Two members of the public spoke on the matter of the petition. They suggested the implementation of a visible crossing, in black or white, to ensure it is noticeable from both the pavement and the road. They highlighted issues with the current crossing near the Caldicot building, including cars not stopping and the bus stop creating a blind spot, and mentioned that the grey zebra crossing is not well distinguished, especially for out-of-towners, and that the road appears to be at the same level as the pavement, leading to confusion. They suggested the need for a brighter zebra crossing and double yellow lines to improve safety.

3. Petition: 'Design over Health and Safety?' petition, relating to the safety of the zebra crossing on Sandy Lane adjacent to The Cross public house, Caldicot - To agree whether to refer to the Executive or full Council for action.

Councillor Jackie Strong introduced the petition, highlighting the safety concerns of the Zebra crossing on Sandy Lane, emphasising the poor visibility of the crossing and the disregard for the no-parking zone. She noted that the damaged beacon has been repaired and described the issues with vehicles parking in non-parking areas and the need for better enforcement. She suggested that the design of the crossing could potentially cause accidents and called for urgent action to address these issues. She

proposed that the council should review and publish the results of any safety reviews and carry out an urgent review of the crossing, and report back to the scrutiny committee with more information.

Cabinet Member Sara Burch acknowledged the concerns raised and apologised for the delay in addressing them, noting that the issues have been raised over time. She mentioned that a review of the original road safety audits from 2020 and 2023 is underway, with a plan to update the audit and consider technical feasibility of suggested changes, and informed that a group of officers walked the route to observe the issues firsthand. A task and finish group has been convened to address the suggestions made by residents and councillors. She is committed to bringing back a detailed action plan and implementing necessary safety measures as a matter of urgency, and emphasised the importance of involving residents in the design of future schemes to ensure their needs are met.

The committee's decision was to refer to the Cabinet Member to respond on progress = **ACTION**

4. Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals - To scrutinise the 2025/26 Draft Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals.

Cabinet Member Ben Callard introduced the report, delivered the presentation, and answered the members' questions with Deb Hill-Howells, Jonathan Davies and Cabinet Member Sara Burch.

- *Considering the council is implementing service savings, could some be put towards keeping Together Works in Caldicot open?* The Cabinet Member acknowledged the value of Together Works and its funding through the Shared Prosperity Fund, which is outside the council's direct control. He explained that despite the service savings, the council still faces a budget gap of £3 million, making it difficult to allocate additional funds to Together Works. The council is, however, exploring grant funding options to support Together Works.
- *The proposals regarding Old Tintern Station are very disappointing – many residents will be concerned about the prospect of it being sold.* The Cabinet Member clarified that there is no current proposal to close Old Tintern Station. He emphasised the intention to explore different stewardship options, including the possibility of the site being more successful under private sector management. He stressed the importance of balancing the roles of the local authority and the private sector in operating tourist attractions in Monmouthshire.
- *The Solar Farm's £50k losses are a concern. Can the grid outage be explained?* The Cabinet Member explained that grid outages occur when the National Grid has a glut of energy and needs to balance inputs and outputs to maintain frequency. This can result in the solar farm being turned off, leading to losses.
- *What is the proportion of roads categorised as black and red? How many are considered for maintenance? Is there the same category for pavements?* Funding for the resurfacing of the Wye Bridge is allocated, and the date for the

work will be confirmed soon. – **ACTION – to provide details of black and red roads**

- *Are any funds allocated for the repair of the Wye Bridge and Staunton Road?* No funding is allocated for Staunton Road in this year's or next year's budget; it relies on a resilient roads bid to Welsh Government, with the outcome expected by the end of March.
- *Is any of the public right of way investment allocated to the collapsed part of the Wye Valley Walk in Wyesham or the improvement of the section in Redbrook? If not, what areas are planned to be targeted with that funding?* The situation regarding the public right of way is complex, involving land ownership and responsibility issues. A written response with more detailed information will be provided – **ACTION**
- *What are the reasoning and timeline for the car parking review?* The car parking review will take a broad look at car parking in the county, including payment systems. The money raised from car parking is ring-fenced for highways, but the income does not cover the total maintenance costs.
- *Can you confirm that £110k savings will not necessitate closure or reduction of any libraries? Will we receive a review of any knock-on effects of reduced opening hours on other services?* The Cabinet member clarified that there are no proposals to move or downsize any hubs. The adjustment of hours is to respond to demand and ensure equitable service.
- *What are the current opening hours of community hubs and what is proposed to be the opening hours following this change? How can you ensure consistency and availability throughout the county?* Current opening hours vary by hub, ranging from 35 hours in Abergavenny to 43 hours in Caldicot. Proposed changes include potentially having a day closed in each of the four main hubs, but not on the same day for all hubs.
- *Community hubs act as information and advice places but also warm spaces. The aim is to ensure that a hub is open somewhere in the county at all times, providing staff on hand to answer phones and assist residents. Changes to hub hours do not necessarily affect library hours, as some hubs are linked to libraries and some are not. There are 24 warm hubs across the county, funded by Welsh Government, and the council will continue to provide these valuable services. Adjusting hub hours is a measure taken due to financial constraints, and if the financial situation allowed, this would be one of the proposals the Council would prefer not to implement.*
- *Could you specifically provide the current opening hours and proposed changes to community hubs?* – **ACTION – to provide a written response**
- *Can you explain what the interim position is regarding the removal of the post of Head of Public Protection, and what is the long-term forecast?* Interim arrangements are currently in place, covering the responsibilities of the head of

public protection through acting up arrangements. The council recognises the importance of the head of public protection role and is committed to conducting a thorough review over the coming months to determine the appropriate long-term arrangements. The interim arrangements are working well and sufficiently at the moment, but the council acknowledges the need to get the long-term solution right. – **ACTION – to provide a written response**

- *The Welsh Government is not expected to fully cover the budget gap of £2.68m. How do you expect any shortfall to be covered?* The Cabinet Member emphasised that the budget-setting process is fluid, with many moving parts between the draught proposals and the final budget, including changes to service demand and grant awards. It is hoped that the funding gap would be somewhat bridged by Welsh Government, but not entirely. The CM highlighted the importance of supporting the growth of Monmouthshire to increase income from Welsh Government, mentioning the Replacement Local Development Plan as a key factor. He acknowledged that there is still insufficient funding in public services and emphasised the ongoing advocacy for better financial support for Monmouthshire.
- *How will the proposed savings relating to homelessness be achieved given the ongoing demand for accommodation?* Councillor Burch explained that the Welsh Government's "everybody in" approach post-pandemic has led to high costs for bed and breakfast accommodations, including 24/7 security in some cases. The current number of people in bed and breakfast accommodations is around 34, with many others in temporary accommodation, which is generally cheaper and offers better living conditions. The refurbishment of Severn View will provide temporary accommodation with wrap-around support, including collaboration with local churches and the third sector, to help individuals to transition to permanent affordable housing. The preventative work by the housing options team and the increase in affordable housing are helping to reduce the number of people in bed and breakfast accommodations and the associated costs.
- *Concerning the proposal to cut £40k regarding youth clubs services, what will a more sustainable operating model look like in practice to those who benefit from these services in our rural communities?* The current rural youth service operates in the south of Monmouthshire but not in the north. The proposal is to remove the rural provision and reinvest funds into youth services in the towns, aligning the provision with that in the north. This means youth service provision will be centred in Caldicot and Chepstow in the south, similar to the existing provision in Abergavenny and Monmouth in the north.
- *Can it be confirmed that there will be no changes to the frequency of road sweeping operations?* Yes, no changes are proposed as part of this budget.
- *Will the aspiration to generate £150k of new income from leisure services translate into a spike in fees to access those services?* The proposal to generate £150k in new income from leisure services does not involve increasing fees for accessing these services. Instead, it focuses on increasing the usage of leisure services to drive higher income. The recent investments in leisure services and

the growing memberships at leisure centres underscore their value as community assets.

- *What is the source of the £366k savings in the social care budget?* These savings primarily come from increased non-residential fees, based on financial assessments in line with the Social Services and Well-being Act of 2014. The rates are being increased, but they are means-tested with a maximum weekly cap of £100. The service is facing pressures from rising National Insurance, real living wage, and inflation. Despite low headline inflation, certain areas are still experiencing significant cost increases. The fee increase reflects these anticipated cost pressures, but support is available for those who need it through means-tested financial assessments.
- *If there's a cap of £100 per week what range of increases can actually be utilised?* The hourly rate of care charge will go up from £20 to £24 for non-residential care.
- Where are the youth services that are mentioned as being in the south? – **ACTION – to provide a written response**
- *The 7.8% increase in council tax is a concern. Is it correct that it means a Band D property will pay a further £400 p/a?* The proposed increase for a Band D property is £131.56 per year, not £400, and is necessary to sustain service delivery.
- *What is the explanation for cutting cybersecurity insurance?* The decision to cut cybersecurity insurance is based on its poor value for money. The council's cybersecurity measures are robust and the insurance only covers the cost of cleaning up after a breach, not preventing it. The council's cybersecurity protocols are robust, and the risk of loss and damages was deemed manageable without the insurance. Furthermore, the market for cybersecurity insurance is immature, and the council's internal security measures have significantly improved. The council holds a budget for self-insurance and an insurance and risk management reserve to cover potential financial risks.
- *Are we doing as much as we can with roads, or are we looking to do any more on Highways?* There is a significant backlog in road and infrastructure maintenance, at around £80 million; the additional £2.3 million investment, therefore, while helpful, is insufficient to address the entire backlog. The council is aware of the poor state of the roads and is doing what it can within the financial constraints, and has also received additional funding from Welsh Government to support borrowing for highway improvements. Specific roads and lanes will be considered based on their priority and risk assessment.
- *Is it correct that leisure centre times are not changing?* Yes, this is correct.
- *Is there a possibility of realigning the market from the bottom car park at Blestium Street to Agincourt Square? This change could potentially release car parking spaces and increase revenue.*

- *Regarding Hubs, can we have a counter on both doors? Can you confirm that the library in the Hub in Monmouth is not being reduced, and how the potential move to Shire Hall would take place?* The need for accurate data collection on hub usage is acknowledged and there is an ongoing piece of work to ensure consistent measurement across all hubs. He reiterated the importance of making evidence-based decisions regarding the opening hours of the hubs and ensuring that any changes do not create additional demand on other services. The idea about a counter will be passed on to Cabinet Member Sandles.
- *Is it correct that the old library room, under the lottery bid, would be used to archive and display items from the museum, such as books, papers, and maps?* The proposals for Shire Hall are quite exciting and have been developed in partnership with the people of Monmouth and the Heritage Lottery. The aim is to make Shire Hall a modern museum and a hub for heritage and culture, which could increase footfall. As part of this development, it was considered whether collocating the library service in the same building would provide a better experience for all users, such as allowing visitors to access both the museum and library on a Sunday. Although there has been a strong response to this idea, there is no firm proposal yet. The current proposals for Shire Hall are still evolving, and the bid will further develop these ideas. The museum collections include many documents, a local history library, and the Nelson collection. The current proposals include a reading room, education spaces, and areas for research and educational groups.
- *The lack of immediate parking for residents near Shire Hall is a concern. Additionally, the food bank and other hub services, such as support for women in crisis, benefit from the current location, and people can discreetly access various services under the guise of visiting the library, which provides them with privacy.* It is important that we understand who uses the hubs and for what purposes. You stress the decisions regarding the opening hours of the hubs need to be evidence-based to ensure that any reduction does not place additional demand on other services, such as the homelessness service. There are pros and cons regarding the proposals around Shire Hall: some people believe that moving the library back to the centre of town would be beneficial, but this week, there has been strong feedback highlighting the cons of the proposal.
- *Have you conducted a review to rationalise the wider groups that we support e.g. Cardiff Capital Region, to understand how contributions to such partnerships are made and how maximum value can be leveraged from this partnership work?* The different partnerships, such as the Cardiff Capital Region, are funded centrally, and the local authorities, including MCC, take an active role in them. There is a larger piece of work happening in England that may affect the Western Gateway, particularly with the consolidation of some authorities. However, in Wales, the way of working with and funding the Cardiff Capital Region is not affected by the current budget, as it is funded centrally and does not come across the Cabinet Member's desk.

- *Is there a risk of being in breach of Welsh Language standards in using AI for translation?* The use of AI in Welsh language translation is intended to strengthen the council's capabilities. Quality verification will be in place to ensure accuracy, and if the Welsh Language Commissioner wishes to review the proposals, they would be welcome to do so. In fact, they should welcome this development, as the use of technology like this can be key to delivering good value for residents.
- *Do we have particular grants for potholes?* The Welsh Government's draft settlement includes additional investment for highways and structures, allowing the council to allocate an additional £1.4 million for these works. He emphasized the importance of a structured approach to addressing potholes and related infrastructure issues.
- *Will there be a review next year to assess the financial and social impacts of the potential changes in hub hours, particularly on other MCC departments such as homelessness and social care, and to ensure that vulnerable adults are not unduly affected by the closures?* The intention is to design changes in the opening hours of the hubs to have minimal impact, especially in locations where services are most needed. The situation will be continuously monitored, and it is acknowledged that if more funds were available, these changes might not be necessary. The hubs are considered the 'front door' of the community, and there is a strong commitment to ensuring they provide good value and effective service for residents.
- *Can you clarify the grassroots fee structure – is the annual payment £10 or £12.50?* The mention of four instalments of £12.50 was an error in the document. The correct proposal is a £10 annual fee for grassroots membership.

Chair's Summary:

Thank you to Cabinet Members and officers, and to Councillor Strong for organising the members of public attending. We have discussed a number of aspects of the budget today, including the impact of car park reviews, noting that money from car parks goes to the highways department; social care savings and price increases; the Regional Partnership Board; Old Tintern Station, expressing concerns shared by others; the realignment of opening hours for youth clubs and centres, particularly in rural communities, and the savings from these changes; road sweeping, leisure centre prices, partnerships, and Welsh language compliance; questions about the hubs, residents' travel expectations, public transport protection, and funding shortfalls from the Welsh government; Severn View House and homelessness cost reductions. Finally, we also asked about highways, council tax increases, and issues related to the hubs and Shire Hall.

5. Place Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Action List.

Officers reminded members to provide questions for NRW regarding the Nedern, ahead of the next meeting. A Special meeting on 5th June to scrutinise the Replacement Local Development Plan was agreed – **ACTION**

Members requested an item to look at the rates charged for markets and stallholders, and at markets more generally – **ACTION**. Councillor Brown reiterated the intention to scrutinise the Shire Hall Lottery bid.

6. Council and Cabinet Work Planner.

7. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes were confirmed.

8. Next Meeting

Thursday 27th March 2025 at 2.00pm.

The meeting ended at **4.29 pm.**

Our Ref: CAS-267599-H9X4
Your Ref: -

Robert McGowan
Scrutiny and Policy Officer
Monmouthshire County Council
County Hall
The Rhadyr
Usk
NP15 1GA

Date: 18th March 2025

Dear Mr McGowan,

Thank you for the telephone conversation on 27th January 2025 and subsequent emails on 5th and 6th February 2025. You have invited Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to comment on specific concerns raised by one of your committees. This is regarding public interest concerning proposed new housing in Monmouthshire's Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP), specifically around the associated Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and the protection of horseshoe bats.

NRW are Welsh Government's principal technical adviser on the environment and natural resources, and we value the importance the scrutiny committee has in ensuring openness, accountability and transparency in the governance process of Monmouthshire County Council. Whilst we are unable to attend a Scrutiny Committee in person, we have agreed to provide comments to the specific questions you have submitted via email.

The Local Authority Planning Team are considering our response letter and the advice within it. We have also raised some concerns over the proposed allocated site at Leasbrook (Policy HA4) due to potential impacts on the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Bat Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which includes Newton Court Stable Blocks Bat SSSI (a site that supports roosts of both lesser and greater horseshoe bats).

At this stage, we are advising the Council to undertake further assessment (as part of their HRA) to understand what effect the proposed change in land use may have on bat features roosting in the stable block. We have spoken to the Local Authority Planning team since our response and have been informed that further assessment is being prepared with the intention of sharing that with us prior to submission of the RLDP for examination.

We have responded to those specific concerns raised below which should provide more context for the committee to understand the relevant issues.

1. Screening

The resident believes that CS0270 should have been filtered out as part of the screening process, as it will require mitigation measures such as lighting schemes which, the resident argues, are prohibited under the HRA guidance: www.gov.uk/guidance/habitats-regulations-assessments-protecting-a-european-site . Specifically, the resident notes that it

says, “At this stage, you should not consider any mitigation measures included by the proposer for the purpose of avoiding or minimising risk to a European site” (the resident suggests that this guidance applies to both England and Wales).

NRW Response

There is some misunderstanding from the resident regarding the Habitats Regulations. HRA is a staged process. The resident is correct in stating that mitigation measures should not be considered or looked at during the screening stage (i.e. the first stage). If during screening it is shown that there may be a likely significant effect on a European site, or equally a likely significant effect cannot be ruled out; the proposed allocation must be considered further through an appropriate assessment (i.e. the second stage of HRA). This is the stage that takes a closer look at the potential impacts and proposes any avoidance or mitigation measures to reduce those impacts, so they are unlikely or insignificant. This is referred to as the integrity test and the Council must conclude there to be no adverse effect on the European site’s integrity prior to allocating in the RLDP. This is explained in greater detail under ‘How to carry out an HRA’ in the HRA guidance link above.

2. Significant Effect

The resident further notes that the rules say, “A proposal, alone or in combination with other proposals, could cause a significant effect on a European site if there’s a reduction in the amount or quality of designated habitats or the habitats that support designated species”. The resident believes that removing grazing land within the Core Sustenance Zone for the bats, as well as ripping out established hedgerows, adding artificial light and interrupting commuting lines, would lead to a reduction in the amount or quality of designated habitats. As a result, this would qualify as a “likely significant effect”.

NRW Response

The resident is correct, and this is why the proposed allocation has progressed from screening to appropriate assessment stage.

The Council has considered the proposed allocated site through an appropriate assessment (within the HRA which was published alongside the Deposit Plan). Our advice is that the assessment isn’t sufficient to enable a conclusion of no adverse effect. We are advising further assessment, specifically in terms of how the proposal would impact on land currently used for bat foraging, is required before a conclusion on integrity of the SAC can be reached.

3. Diluted protections

The resident further argues that Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) has diluted the protection for the Greater Horseshoe Bats. The resident notes that in the HRA (p9), the consultants proposed “To meet the requirements of the Habitats Directive regarding allocated greenfield sites within the Core Sustenance Zones (CSZs) of the Usk Bat Sites SAC and the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Bat Sites SAC, the applicant is required to provide evidence that the development will not result in adverse effects on site integrity. To achieve this, a habitat assessment will have to be undertaken by a suitably qualified

professional. Where habitats are suitable, a suite of bat surveys (e.g. bat activity surveys, roost emergence surveys) will need to be undertaken between April and September. Where a land parcel is demonstrably used by SAC bats, mitigation and avoidance measures might be required, and the planning application will likely need to be assessed through a project-level Habitats Regulations Assessment and will need to consider matters such as habitat connectivity, foraging value and minimised lighting”.

However, the resident further quotes that “With regard to this recommendation Monmouthshire Council expressed concern as to whether the extent of the suggested wording is needed as it is too prescriptive. Instead, the Deposit Plan addresses these recommendations by providing less prescriptive form of wording in Policy NR1 – Nature Recovery and Geodiversity and its supporting text in paragraphs 10.10.2 – 10.10.8 under the heading International/National (Statutory) Sites and Protected Sites and Species with specific reference to Functionally Linked Land in paragraph 10.10.5, but without providing specific details of the need for bat surveys, survey seasons and the potential need for mitigation”. (these paragraphs are in the RLDP Deposit Plan, p84: www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/app/uploads/2024/10/Monmouthshire-Deposit-RLDP.pdf)

The resident therefore accuses MCC of diluting or removing the protection of horseshoe bats.

Here is a link to the HRA (as well as the points raised above from p9, bat sites are discussed in full on p76): www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/app/uploads/2024/10/HRA-of-the-Monmouthshire-RLDP-Deposit-Plan.pdf

NRW Response

This point has been noted in our response letter (paragraphs 8 and 9). This part of the HRA is proposing mitigation measures to avoid or reduce the adverse effects on the European site which have been found. However, given our advice that the appropriate assessment is currently insufficient, it is premature to advise on mitigation measures. We would expect this to be reconsidered in an updated HRA once the further assessment has been carried out and found to be appropriate.

4. Sustenance Zone

Finally, the resident is concerned about the 3km Core Sustenance Zone. The resident notes: “On p138 of the HRA (Policy HA4 – Land at Leasbrook, Monmouth), it does not mention that this site (i.e. CS0270) is well within the Core Sustenance Zone of 3km for The Greater Horseshoe Bats. In fact, the site is only 950 metres from the Newton Court SSSI. The HRA talks only about a ‘Greater Horseshoe Bat Juvenile Sustenance Zone’ in relation to site HA4. But the Bat Conservation Trust in their guidance do not differentiate between adult and juvenile bats. They instead, based on a thorough literature review, have recommended a 3Km Core Sustenance Zone for the Greater Horseshoe Bats.”

NRW Response

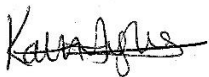
Our understanding is that the HRA has considered proposed allocated sites within 3km of both Wye Valley SAC and Forest of Dean Bat and Usk Bat Sites SAC, although this may

not be explicitly clear in the HRA. We have reviewed the Deposit Plan and HRA considering a 3km core sustenance zone on both SACs.

In summary, there are some issues with the level of assessment that's been carried out in the HRA. This may be addressed and found to be acceptable subject to avoidance or mitigation measures being brought forward during the planning application stage. However, the further assessment could conclude the proposal would adversely affect the integrity of the SAC and the Council would need to reconsider this allocation.

We trust these comments aid the committees understanding of NRW's position regarding the points made by the resident. Should you require any further information or have any questions regarding the above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully



Kathryn Hughes

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Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a byddwn yn ymateb yn Gymraeg, heb i hynny arwain at oedi.

Correspondence in Welsh is welcomed, and we will respond in Welsh without it leading to a delay.