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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held
at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Thursday, 4th November, 2021 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor M.Feakins (Chairman)
County Councillor A. Webb (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Batrouni, L.Brown, A.Davies, L.Dymock, A. Easson, C.Edwards, R. Edwards, P.A. Fox, R.J.W. Greenland, M.Groucutt, L. Guppy, R. Harris, J. Higginson, S. Howarth, R.John, D. Jones, L.Jones, P. Jones, S. Jones, P. Jordan, M.Lane, P. Murphy, P.Pavia, M. Powell, J.Pratt, R.Roden, V. Smith, B. Strong, F. Taylor, T.Thomas, J.Treharne, J.Watkins, A. Watts and K. Williams

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Peter Davies	Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer, Resources
Jane Rodgers	Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
John Pearson	Local Democracy Manager
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Frances O'Brien	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy and Governance
Mark Hand	Head of Place-making, Housing, Highways and Flood
Ian Saunders	Chief Operating Officer, MonLife
Joanne Chase	Solicitor
Hazel Clatworthy	Sustainability Policy Officer
Jonathan Davies	Acting Assistant Head of Finance
David Jones	Head of Public Protection
Linda O'Gorman	Principal Licensing Officer

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors P. Clarke, J.Becker, D. Blakebrough, D. Evans, G. Howard, S.B. Jones and S. Woodhouse

1. Declarations of interest

None.

2. Public Questions

None.

3. Chairman's announcement and receipt of petitions

On opening the meeting, the Chairman conducted a minute silence in respect of the recent passing of Sir David Amess, and all those who have been lost whilst in the line of delivering public service.

There were no petitions presented to Council.

The Chairman agreed to bring forward item 7.1 on the agenda.

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4. Urgent question: From County Councillor A Easson to County Councillor R. John, Leader of the Council

Monmouthshire's bid for a share of the Levelling up Fund, administered by the Westminster Government, was not successful. In view of this decision, can the Leader make a statement regarding the effect on the economy of Caldicot and Severnside and what plans he will have in respect of the future of Caldicot Town and the Caldicot Leisure Centre.

The Leader of the Council thanked County Councillor Easson for his question and appreciated the sentiment behind it. He went on to explain that the administration was disappointed at the decision not to approve the bid to level up Caldicot. The bid was for £14m and had 3 components: 1, new leisure centre; 2, regeneration of the town centre; 3, better active travel links from Caldicot to Severn Tunnel Junction. He expressed gratitude to officer for the fast pace in developing the bids and those who supported the bids, including Jessica Morden MP who had been a great champion of the Caldicot bid. He explained that everything possible had been done to lobby for the two bids. It was recognised that Monmouthshire is not amongst the most deprived local authorities in Wales but that did not diminish the determination to fight for funding. 16 out of 22 Councils in Wales were not awarded funding. The Leader assured Council that he remains determined to bid in the next round and will be meeting with senior government ministers in the coming weeks to secure feedback on the bids. Consideration will be given on how to improve them and how to achieve the best chance to secure funding in the next round of bidding.

We heard that we had been successfully awarded all nine of our bids to the UK Government's Community Renewal Fund, totalling over £2m. These bids would benefit Caldicot in a number of ways. £80,000 has been secured for Caldicot Community Partnership. Nearly £500,000 has been awarded to invest in Mon Life assets which includes Caldicot Castle. Our carbon-free future scheme was awarded £134,000, which will allow investigation of the housing stock across the County to improve energy efficiency.

Not winning the Caldicot was a set back but the Leader assured that new bids would be refined to maximise our chances of securing funding in the next round.

As a supplementary County Councillor asked if the Leader agreed that losing the bid would set Caldicot back 10 years in terms of the town centre, and if he considered bidding next year would prove successful. He asked if it was time to look into a borrowing position where the process could be started on the basis we would have a positive answer next year.

In response the Leader agreed that the support for the bid was a cross-party project but disagreed that the Caldicot would be set back 10 years. It was recognised the need to make necessary investments in our leisure centre and town centre, making it a more attractive place for people to shop and support local businesses. He considered the UK Government's levelling up fund the ideal partnership to do that and recognised that we need to ensure we are in the best possible place to submit a strong bid.

5. Reports for Council:

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6. SAFEGUARDING EVALUATION REPORT April 2020 - March 2022

The Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health presented the report, the purpose being:

- To evaluate the progress of Monmouthshire County Council's key safeguarding priorities during 2020 / 2021, highlighting progress, identifying risks and setting out actions and priorities for 2021 - 2022.
- To inform Members about the effectiveness of safeguarding in Monmouthshire and the work that is in progress to support the Council's aims in protecting children and adults at risk from harm and abuse.
- To inform Members about the progress made towards meeting the standards in the Council's Corporate Safeguarding Policy approved by Council in July 2017, amended January 2019.

A question was raised around social services maintaining contact with those who needed it over the last two years, and in response the Cabinet Member assured that those who were in contact with a social worker would have received contact, but that might not have been on a face-to-face basis. The Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health confirmed that within Children's Services contact has continued with children in accordance with statutory requirements. She added that care and support needs continue to be met through other people and practitioners.

Concerns were raised about care for those who may be slipping under the radar, particularly those with dementia. The Cabinet Member reflected that people with dementia are served well in Monmouthshire, once they are in the system, but there are problems with people taking the first steps into the GP surgery, and the number of people awaiting assessments.

The Chief Officer explained that as the Covid situation fluxed, risk assessments around home visits have increased, but where risks have been significant home visits have continued. The service is running as normal other than the positives taken from some of the digital approaches that may have proved beneficial.

The Chief Officer clarified that if a safeguarding concern is raised it is responded to and the concern is dealt with as effectively as it needs to be. Due to the pandemic, pressures are on the longer-term care and support of individuals, which is an area of challenge for officers.

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

That members receive and endorse the Annual Safeguarding Evaluation Report and Activity Plan.

6.1. CLIMATE AND DE-CARBONISATION STRATEGY

The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services and Infrastructure presented the report to update the plan which sets the actions which the authority will take to deliver the objectives in the Climate and Decarbonisation Strategy approved by Council in October 2019 and accelerate progress towards the commitment made by Council to reduce our emissions to net zero by 2030.

County Councillor Martyn Groucutt stated that it was a privilege to sit on the cross-party Working Group and commended the roles of Matthew Gatehouse and Hazel Clatworthy. Ideas around creating a new senior level post could be discussed at the Working Group.

We heard that trials had been undertaken with electric waste vehicles and the challenges of the rurality of Monmouthshire. There had been recent procurement of a Green Routes electric bus

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but the Cabinet Member suggested that eventually the hydrogen powered larger vehicles would be more suitable to the geography in Monmouthshire.

County Councillor Frances Taylor was pleased to see definitive actions and commitments around Magor Brewery.

There were concerns regarding the commitment to planting and the lack of money for maintenance of green infrastructure.

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

That Council endorse the updated action plan attached as Appendix 1.

That revisions are made to the Climate Emergency Strategy to ensure it reflects the latest data and evidence while maintaining the ten strategic objectives agreed by Council in 2019, with slight amendments to the wording of one of these objectives relating to green spaces as highlighted in paragraph 3.3 below.

7. DIVERSITY AND DEMOCRACY DECLARATION

The Cabinet Member for Governance presented the report for Council to agree to sign up to the WLGA Diversity in Local Democracy programme and agree the actions committed to in the declaration to improve diversity.

The WLGA Council identified three areas for action:

- Encouraging Councils to ensure all councillors receive their full entitlement to allowances and salaries and encouraging the introduction of resettlement grants, so that all members receive fair remuneration for their work and that the role of member is not limited to those who can afford it.
- An agreement by Council to undertake new or developed work in this area and visibly commit to this by signing up to becoming Diverse Councils.
- To discuss positions and making representation to political parties and acting locally to set quotas and/or voluntary targets for the election of councillors from underrepresented groups.

The Leader of the Opposition suggested there should be more of a support package from WLGA, reflecting on safety of Councillors.

We heard that Democratic Services Committee has brought forward a paper detailing a range of issues and the point around support ought to be taken back to the committee.

A question was raised around supporting the settled status community and how we can encourage people from these communities into politics.

The importance of diversity training was recognised and would be covered in the induction process following the 2022 election.

The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services and Infrastructure highlighted that the Conservative Party have a group called Ability to Win, whose aim is to improve representation of those with disabilities in parliament and at all levels of public life.

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Upon being put to the vote Council resolved to accept the recommendation to sign up to the WLGA Diversity in Local Democracy Programme.

8. COUNCIL DIARY

The Cabinet Member for Governance presented the report for Council to approve the diary of meetings for 2022/2023.

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

That the diary of meetings for 2022/2023 be approved.

9. AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS & ISA260 MCC ACCOUNTS

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented the report to provide the audited Statement of annual accounts for the Authority for 2020/21 for final approval, subsequent to the audit process undertaken by Audit Wales and review and endorsement by the November Governance & Audit Committee.

The Vice Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee provided a statement explaining that the Committee had been asked, on 3rd November 2021, to consider the final audited Statement of Accounts for 2020/21. The Committee were given reassurance by WAO that the misstatements identified and corrected during the course of the audit process had no impact on the Council fund balance, and instead represented reclassifications of existing balance sheet categories.

We heard that there had been coding errors around senior officer remuneration, and this has since been amended.

Some investments had decreased in value over the pandemic but have since recovered. Newport Leisure Park had improved substantially. There were no intentions to dispose of assets.

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

The final audited Monmouthshire County Council Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 are approved by Council.

10. STATEMENT OF GAMBLING POLICY AND PROPOSALS FOR CASINOS

The Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing and Social Justice presented the report for consideration of the Council's existing resolution to not permit casinos within the County of Monmouthshire, and to agree the Council's 'Statement of Gambling Policy 2022.

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

To refuse any casino applications made under the Gambling Act 2005 and stated within the Authority's Gambling Policy.

To adopt the 'Statement of Gambling Policy 2022' for Monmouthshire County Council, provided in Appendix A (changes highlighted in red)

11. Notices of Motion

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11.1. Submitted by County Councillor Kevin Williams

This council welcomes the proposed changes to the Parliamentary Boundary changes proposed by the Boundary Commission for the Monmouth constituency. It resolves to write in support of the common sense change affecting Monmouthshire to create a new seat that follows the boundaries of this council.

Seconded by County Councillor Higginson.

Suggestion was made that officers look to communicate the differences in the boundaries for the Welsh Assembly election.

Members were in support of the motion and upon being to the vote the motion was carried.

11.2. Submitted by County Councillor D Batrouni

That the Council write a letter to the UK government expressing disappointment at their decision not to continue to pay the £20 Universal Credit uplift, which should include an explanation of how this decision will have negative consequences for low-income households in Monmouthshire.

Seconded by County Councillor Groucutt. In doing so he expressed that the Monmouthshire Conservative Group represent a party that, in recent years, have done more to widen the gap between the rich and the poor than any other party in this democratic era in the UK.

The Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing and Social Justice highlighted how, through the crisis, UK Government had spent £400 billion protecting people's jobs, livelihoods, supporting businesses and public services. She agreed with the decision that the economic support should be wound down as we come out of the pandemic crisis and we focus on getting people back into work and getting people back to our new normal.

We heard of the increased attendance at food banks and there were fears that foodbanks would become an even more essential part of our society if we don't start assessing the true cost of living.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was carried.

12. Submitted by County Councillor A. Watts

Monmouthshire County Council formally acknowledges care sector workers have gone above and beyond expectations and demands of supporting our most vulnerable citizens throughout the pandemic. The Authority gives recognition to their commitment and dedication by implementing an increase in the minimum hourly rate to £15.00 to all employees in the authority's care sector.

County Councillor Easson seconded the motion and requested a recorded vote.

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County Councillor Pavia declared a personal interest as an associate consultant for Practice Solutions Ltd.

County Councillor Batrouni declared a personal interest as a family member resides at a MCC care home.

Cabinet Members agreed with the sentiment of the motion. However, the Cabinet Member for Resources stated that without a business case being accepted and funded by WG it would be impossible for the vast majority of authorities to fund the consequences. He highlighted the following figures on the £15 per hour basis:

- For in-house carers and other care workers, in health services would be at a cost of £1.586 million
- External residential would be at a cost of £4.126 million
- External non-residential would be at a cost of £2.403 million.

It was suggested that this should be addressed through the budget process.

County Councillor Taylor referred to the gender pay gap and stated that this is an area that is undervalued, underpaid and under-resourced.

County Councillor Batrouni proposed an amendment to the motion:

*Monmouthshire County Council formally acknowledges care sector workers have gone above and beyond expectations and demands of supporting our most vulnerable citizens throughout the pandemic. The Authority gives recognition to their commitment and dedication by **planning** an increase in the minimum hourly rate to £15.00 to all employees in the authority's care sector.*

County Councillor Howarth seconded the amendment. Debate ensued.

There were comments around the word planning would still be considered as intent.

A recorded vote was undertaken and the amendment was defeated.

Debate returned to the original motion and a further recorded vote saw the motion defeated.

County Councillors Higginson, Harris, Lane, Howarth, Watkins and Williams left the meeting at 19:00pm

13. Members Questions

- 13.1. **From County Councillor A Easson to County Councillor Jane Pratt, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services and Infrastructure**

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What is the annual budget for maintenance and renewal of pedestrian crossings; how many crossings have been upgraded; how many have been removed or replaced; and how many new crossings have been installed in the County between 2019 and today?

It was agreed that 7.2 and 7.3 would be covered as one item.

The Cabinet Member thanked County Councillor Easson and explained that the Street Lighting Team are responsible for the maintenance of formal light-controlled crossings and have an allocated annual budget of £25,000 for these works. In terms of new facilities, these installations have been funded by capital monies. MCC is installing a new crossing on School Lane in Goytre, 106 money £40,000; the B4245 in Magor, 106 money £54,000; Hereford Road, Monmouth road safety grant is estimated at £30,000.

Zebra Crossings are being installed to replace Pelican Crossings at The Cross in Caldicot, estimated at £54,000; Station Road, Chepstow, estimated at £30,000. These are both WG funded and form part of wider schemes.

Pedestrian Crossings are installed in accordance with the Department of Transport guidance and include the Traffic Signals Manual, Active Travel Design Guide and new Manual for Streets 1 & 2. Over time the requirements for crossings change, identified as part of a planned scheme, officer reviews or reports and requests to Highways. Officers are happy to discuss any aspects should Members wish to do so.

Referring to the specific accident in 2020, the incident was reported to have occurred within 50 meters of the existing pedestrian crossing. Officers are working on options for a potential additional crossing, better aligned with the new school entrance. The Active Travel team are to meet consultants in the coming days to look at Mill Lane and Woodstock Way as part of the Active Travel Study. If location and costs could be agreed this would be put forward for core active travel funding next year.

County Councillor Easson expressed the importance of keeping Ward Members involved in discussions.

14. From County Councillor A Easson to County Councillor Jane Pratt, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services and Infrastructure

What is the criteria for installing pedestrian crossings; how are those assessments made prior to considering new crossings and refurbishments or renewal of others; are changes in the traffic and pedestrian environment considered on a regular basis?

Covered under the previous question.

15. From County Councillor M. Powell to County Councillor Lisa Dymock, Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing and Social Justice

Following the easing of the lockdown rules, how successful were the Summer Play Schemes, and how well were they attended?

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The Cabinet Member thanked County Councillor Powell adding that she was very please with the Summer of Fun delivered by Mon Life. The sixth year of Monmouthshire Games saw a variety of different interests and hobbies keeping children and young people active and entertained over the summer holidays. This took place at the County's leisure centres in Abergavenny, Caldicot, Chepstow and Monmouth with almost 900 children participating.

Challenges caused by the pandemic meant this year's events also aimed to improve well-being and promote healthy bodies and minds.

The team also delivered a four week enrichment programme over the school holidays, which provided healthy meals, nutrition and food education. Physical sessions saw over 420 children sign up at five schools. The scheme was overwhelmingly positive for a large majority. The Monmouthshire Games saw a total of 7750 attendances.

16. From County Councillor P. Jordan to County Councillor S. Jones, Cabinet Member for Economy

Can the cabinet member provide an update on what support will be provided for our town centres to encourage footfall in the run up to the Christmas period?

The Cabinet Member thanked County Councillor Jordan and referred to a meeting in September 2021 Cabinet approved the regeneration paper and talked on a number of initiatives around encouraging footfall and spending in the town centres. She went on to explain that they are now building on the latest iteration of the successful 'shop local' campaign. This is being pushed further around Christmas with a 'magical experiences' campaign, focused on using the shop local branding to encourage people to get back into the town centres. WG funding has been secured through the Transforming Towns Business Fund which will allow town councils and communities to bid into the fund to support the premise behind the shop local campaign. There will be promotions through communication channels, as well as social media campaigning, reaching out to the younger demographic.

There will be free parking on weekends throughout December.

The Cabinet Member referred to the increasing Covid rates and should we receive updated Covid advice from WG the campaign may need to be managed slightly differently.

17. To confirm minutes of previous meetings

18. 23rd September 2021

Council approved the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd September 2021.

18.1. 1st October 2021

Council approved the minutes of the meeting held on 1st October 2021.

19. Next meeting - 16th December 2021

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Noted.

The meeting ended at 7.20 pm