

Monmouthshire Scrutiny

People Scrutiny Committee ~ Feedback to Cabinet of Meeting held on 18th February 2025

Report Item 4: Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals

The Committee undertook thorough scrutiny of the report, highlighting the following important issues for the Cabinet Member's consideration:

- Are there any caveats on the £2.9 million expected from the Welsh Government?

Some of the additional funding from the Welsh Government is expected to be earmarked specifically for social care and health. This earmarked funding will offset other funding, allowing redistribution to other services as required. The exact details are still being finalised, but there is confidence in closing the remaining gap without further impact on services or Council tax.

- When will the police and Crime Commissioner's precept be available to the public?

The police and community councils have recently provided their precept proposals. This information is being processed and will be included in the final budget papers, which will be presented to the cabinet on March 5th and to the Council on March 6th.

- Do we charge for the administration of the police precept?

No, the local authority does not charge an administration fee for the police precept due to regulatory restrictions. The arrangements around the Council tax base and collection rate are strictly regulated.

- How does the £125,000 staffing review saving within the home care teams equate with the increased demand and pressure on home care teams?

The saving is part of a broader strategy to right-size care packages and support people within their communities for as long as possible. The review aims to consolidate existing vacancies without compromising the quality of care or delaying transfers of care from hospitals. The Cabinet Member confirmed they believe it is sustainable without impacting service delivery. Officers added that they are confident in maintaining service levels despite the vacancies, as they have been managing with these vacancies for a considerable time and are changing the way services are delivered.

Monmouthshire Scrutiny

- What changes are planned for youth clubs in rural areas?

The plan is to withdraw the standalone rural youth service provision in the South of Monmouthshire and focus on the youth service provision within the four main towns (Caldicot, Chepstow, Abergavenny, and Monmouth). The services required in rural areas will be absorbed by the existing provisions in these towns.

- How successful are we in getting maximum Continuing Healthcare (CHC) funding from the NHS?

Securing CHC funding remains a challenge, particularly for younger people with mental health and learning disabilities. While there is more success with older people, the process is complex and often involves long-standing disputes. The local authority is actively lobbying Welsh Government to address these challenges.

- Is any of the increased investment in key infrastructure specified for bridge maintenance, particularly the chain bridge?

The work required for the Chainbridge is not specifically covered in the budget. However, a grant application has been submitted to the Resilient Roads Fund to cover the necessary work, and the outcome is expected by the end of March.

- How do we budget for the costs associated with bed blocking and how the social care budget manages these costs, particularly when there are delays in discharging patients from hospitals?

The local authority provides care packages based on needs assessments, and the costs are part of the normal budget for externally commissioned services. Negotiations with the health board determine whether costs are covered by social care or continuing healthcare funding.

- Does the revenue from car parking fees have to be reinvested into car parking?

The revenue from car parking fees is ring-fenced and goes back into highways, not specifically into car parks.

- Please can you explain what the £46,000 allocated for the Together Works project in Caldicot is?

The Together Works in Caldicot was funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund, not the revenue budget. The Shared Prosperity Fund has been cut, putting services at risk, but Cabinet Member Paul Griffiths has been working on a solution to keep

Monmouthshire Scrutiny

Together Works open. The £46,000 mentioned was the remaining allocation from the Shared Prosperity Fund.

- What are the savings related to Welsh language services?

The savings are achieved by utilising technology to deliver Welsh translation services more cost-effectively, reducing the labour content while maintaining quality through human validation.

- How are the savings in Mon Life's budget being achieved, particularly in leisure services?

The savings in Mon Life's budget are achieved through various measures, including an options appraisal for the Old Station in Tintern, reducing subsidies for the Borough Theatre, and increasing income from leisure centres. The income shortfall across Mon Life is due to the diverse nature of its portfolio, which includes both commercial and non-commercial services. Leisure centres have seen strong income and increasing memberships. The plan is to continue this trend to provide additional income.

- Where are the £110,000 savings for community hubs going to come from and are there any redundancies planned? Is the resulting disservice to the community worth it, as reducing opening hours might negatively impact residents, as these services are crucial for the community.

The Cabinet Member explained that savings will come from reducing the opening hours of the four main hubs (Abergavenny, Caldicot, Monmouth, and Chepstow). There are no changes proposed for Usk and Gilwern hubs. The importance of the services provided by the hubs was acknowledged and it was stated that if the financial situation allowed, there would be consideration given to not reduce the opening hours. However, due to the budget pressures, the savings are necessary, the aim being to manage demand, while bringing a budget saving forward.

- Could the ceasing of insurance for cybersecurity be explained?

The cybersecurity insurance policy costs just under £100,000 a year and is considered not to represent good value for money. The local authority will self-insure in the event of a data breach, and this decision does not impact the cybersecurity provisions in place, which remain robust and are managed in collaboration with the SRS.

- Does the SRS (Shared Resource Service) has its own insurance for cybersecurity?

Monmouthshire Scrutiny

It is unlikely the SRS would be covered specifically for the costs associated with a data breach, as this type of insurance is quite niche.

- Are there plans to extend the opening times of leisure centres to support the trend of increasing memberships?

Despite the reduced opening hours implemented last year, the leisure centres have continued to see strong growth in memberships. Extending the opening hours would incur additional costs, which would reverse the savings achieved and that there are no current plans to revert to the previous opening hours. Should the financial situation improve, extending the opening hours could be reconsidered, however, given the current budget constraints, maintaining the reduced hours is necessary.

- Has an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) been undertaken for *the withdrawal for the standalone rural youth service provision* in the south of Monmouthshire?

Yes, Integrated Impact Assessments (IIA's) have been undertaken for all budgetary proposals.

- Are the documents relating to the capital side of the budget available, to detail specific projects like school modernization and infrastructure improvements?

All the information related to the capital budget proposals is available on the website if there are further questions ahead of the Council meeting, Cabinet Members and officers are available to assist.

Chair's Conclusion:

The Chair advised that the questions and responses would be summarised and presented formally to the Cabinet, together with the draft minutes of the meeting for the Cabinet meeting on **5th March 2025**.