

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Monmouthshire County Council held at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 22nd January 2015 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: County Councillor J. Prosser (Chairman)
County Councillor B. Strong (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Batrouni, D. Blakebrough, G.C. Burrows, R.F. Chapman, P.R. Clarke, D.L.S. Dovey, G.L. Down, A. Easson, D.L. Edwards, R. Edwards, P.S. Farley, P.A. Fox, R. J. W. Greenland, L. Guppy, E. J. Hackett Pain, R.G. Harris, R.J.C. Hayward, M. Hickman, R.J. Higginson, P.A.D. Hobson, G. Howard, S.G.M. Howarth, D.W.H. Hones, P. Jones, S. Jones, S.B. Jones, R.P. Jordan, P. Murphy, M. Powell, V.E. Smith, F. Taylor, A.C. Watts, P.A. Watts, A.E. Webb, S. White and K. Williams.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr P. Matthews	Chief Executive
Mrs K. Beirne	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Ms S. McGuinness	Chief Officer, Children and Young People
Mr S. Burch	Chief Officer, Health and Social Care
Mr W. Mclean	Head of Policy and Engagement.
Mrs J. Robson	Head of Finance/Section 151 Officer
Mr R. Hoggins	Head of Operations
Mrs T. Harry	Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services
Mr R. Tranter	Head of Legal/Monitoring Officer
Mrs S. King	Senior Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors J.E. Crook, D.J. Evans, J. George, J.I. Marshall, A.C. Watts and A.M. Wintle.

2. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT AND RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

We received and noted the Chairman's report.

There were no petitions presented.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were noted under the relevant agenda item.

4. PUBLIC FORUM ITEMS

There were no public forum items received.

5. NOTICES OF MOTION

There were no notices of motion received.

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6. COMMITTEE MINUTES

We resolved that the following minutes be received:

(a) Democratic Services Committee 1st September 2014

It was noted that the committee had raised concerns regarding issues within the Council chamber and these would be continually monitored by the Democratic Services committee and were included within the action plan.

The Democratic Services Committee were encouraged to hold meetings within the Council Chamber.

Information was requested, in relation to number of viewed webcast meetings.

We received the minutes.

(b) Internal Monitoring Board 5th December 2014

County Councillor F. Taylor declared a personal interest pursuant to the Members Code of Conduct as she had a child at a school which was mentioned in the Internal Monitoring Board minutes.

We received the minutes.

7. SACRE ANNUAL REPORT 2013/14

The Cabinet Member, with responsibility for Schools and Learning, presented the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) Annual Report 2013/14

We resolved to agree to adopt the report.

8. REPORTS OF HEAD OF FINANCE/S151 OFFICER

County Councillor R.J. Higginson declared a personal interest pursuant to the Members Code of Conduct as a governor of Durand Primary School.

County Councillor V.E. Smith declared a personal interest pursuant to the Members Code of Conduct due to involvement with Coleg Gwent.

County Councillor P.A. Fox declared a personal interest pursuant to the Members Code of Conduct as a family member worked at Mounton House school.

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i) REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET 2015/16 – FINAL PROPOSALS

We were presented with the Revenue and Capital Budget 2015/16, which:

1. Updated Council with consultation responses received on the budget proposals since the Cabinet meeting on 7th January 2015.
2. Made recommendations on the Capital and Revenue budgets and level of Council Tax for 2015/16
3. Received the statutory report of the Responsible Financial Officer on the budget process and adequacy of reserves.

The Cabinet Member for Resources, County Councillor P. Murphy, outlined the main points within the budget and we noted the following points:

- Cabinet issued its budget consultation proposals on 5th November 2014 thereby allowing a period for consultation and scrutiny. The report had identified proposals to close a £5.8 million gap. The report highlighted that £440k still needed to be found in the budget for 2015/16.
- The budget at that time included £1.38 million of pressures and £5.332 million of saving proposals.
- Early budget ideas had been the subject of public engagement sessions in October. The MTFP and budget was also discussed at the all Member Seminar held on 1st October 2014.
- Proposals were considered in December by the Children's and Young Persons, Strong Communities, Adult Services, and Economy and Development Select Committees and the minutes of these meetings were considered by Cabinet on 7th January 2015.
- Further public engagement had taken place in January as well as meetings of JAG, and the Schools Budget Forum.
- Budget proposals were made available on the Council's website, in addition the Cabinet Member was filmed being interviewed about the budget (available via You Tube and Twitter).
- As expected, responses to consultation varied, comments made early on in the October engagement sessions were taken into account when the draft budget proposals were presented in November 2014.
- There were no strong objections received regarding the overall shape of the budget reduction proposals. However, a number of comments were received via the all member seminar, the Select Committee meetings and other consultation meetings.
- Positive comments were received in relation to the engagement sessions and the openness of the Authority in discussing the issues and challenges it faces.
- The Authority had received its final settlement and further work had been undertaken on the budget:
 - A reduction in Aggregate External Finance (AEF) from the final settlement was more than had been identified in the provisional settlement, which increased the gap by £40,000.

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- Pay award pressure had been added, which represented the difference between the 1% pay award included in the model for 2014/15 and 2015/16 and the recently agreed pay award of 2.2% over 15 months, starting on 1st Jan 2015.
- The increased living wage had resulted in an additional pressure of £30k to ensure the Council's commitment to this can be maintained in 2015/16.
- Further budget monitoring information in relation to Children's social services, identified that original pressures amount was considered insufficient and additional finance should be available to the service to meet this demand, if required.

A member expressed concern that date of the meeting, to consider the budget, had changed from February to January. We were informed that the budget discussions had commenced in October/November 2014 and it had been agreed in advance that the budget would be considered earlier than normal to ensure that officers had sufficient time for decisions to be implemented. Council were reassured that due notice had been given and appropriate process had been followed in relation to the budget being considered.

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor Batrouni and seconded that the budget be modified as follows:

Services to be protected

➤ Turning the lights back on	£85,000
➤ Additional Learning Needs	£120,000
➤ Education budget	£500,000
	£705,000

Savings/Income Generation

➤ Advertising revenue (All websites)	£85,000
➤ Advertising on Council vehicles	£30,000
➤ Private Consultant Cap	
£500,000	
➤ Leisure & Culture Membership bolt on	£20,000
➤ Investment Strategy – Land Portfolio (interest rate increase)	£70,000
	£705,000

In debating the amendment we noted:

- Some members supported aspects of the proposed amendment and highlighted that additional funding to education may help with extra resources for schools.
- We debated issues surrounding street lighting and recognised the importance of lights being switched on in some areas. It was confirmed that lights had been turned on in areas that were considered vulnerable or unsafe.
- Council were informed that advertising on the website would be the most valuable method of generating income. Advertising on council vehicles would be difficult as the fleet had reduced.
- Support was expressed for ALN and school budgets.

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- The Leader thanked the Cabinet Member and Head of Finance for proposals presented and recognised that there had been difficult deliberations and decisions to be made within the budget process.
- A member requested clarification in relation to mandate 28, hubs and libraries. We were informed that the mandate related to the hubs being established, Caldicot library would be retained in the existing building and building works would be undertaken in Usk so that the service could be amalgamated. An additional report would be considered regarding the new positioning of Abergavenny library, which was not part of the mandate and would be the subject of an additional separate debate.

Upon being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

It was moved as an amendment and seconded that the budget be modified as follows

Delete part of Mandate 41 that relates to reduced highways crews

In debating the amendment we noted the following:

- The Strong Communities Select committee had been opposed to cuts being made in provision of crews servicing the county.
- The Cabinet Member and Head of Operations advised that the mandate affected 4 highways operatives from overall crews in County and Trunk roads.

Upon being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor S.G.M. Howarth and seconded that the budget be modified as follows:

Council looks to adjust the increase in Council Tax to 5.95% rather than 4.95%, with the differential in funding raised will be applied to post 16 transport arena with view to introduce means tested approach.

A member moved that a recorded vote was taken and this was duly supported by the appropriate number of members.

During the vote we recorded:

FOR: County Councillors R.F. Chapman, R.J.C. Hayward, S.G.M. Howarth, D.W.H. Jones and V.E. Smith.

AGAINST: County Councillors G.C. Burrows, P.R. Clarke, D.L.S. Dovey, G. L. Down, D.L. Edwards, R. Edwards, P.A. Fox, R.J.W. Greenland, L. Guppy, E.J. Hackett Pain, M. Hickman, P.A.D. Hobson, G. Howard, P. Jones, S. Jones, S.B. Jones, R.P. Jordan, P. Murphy, M. Powell, J.L. Prosser, B. Strong, A.E. Webb and S. White.

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ABSTAIN: County Councillors D. Batrouni, D. Blakebrough, A. Easson, P.S. Farley, R.G. Harris, R.J. Higginson, F. Taylor, P.A. Watts and K.G. Williams.

Upon being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor A. Easson and seconded that the budget be modified as follows:

Mandate 14 be removed and referred back to select committee

Upon being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

Members were invited to debate the original proposals within the report and during debate we noted:

- Concerns were strongly expressed, by some members, that some budget mandates were unclear, that the date had changed for the budget to be considered and that due process had not been followed.
- For future budgets, the Leader welcomed sight of proposed amendments in advance and thanked the Labour group for proposals, which would be considered in the MTFP future budget discussions.
- Recognised that the ALN service required a review, in order for it to be operated in accordance with the changing needs of the child. We were reassured that the service provided will be best possible for those who need it in the County.
- In relation to the hubs, it had been assumed that the Abergavenny Hub would be created from the capital budget set aside to fund the new Library, which would not put a significant pressure on the rest of the Council capital budget.
- We discussed the settlement from Welsh Government and were disappointed as Monmouthshire were allocated one of the lowest amounts.

We resolved:

That the following be approved:

- (a) The revenue estimates for the year 2015/16 as recommended by the Cabinet at its meeting of 7th January 2015. (Appendix I)
- (b) The capital programme for 2015/16 to 2018/19 including the additional schemes and funding notes in 3.1.8 and 3.1.9 as recommended by Cabinet at its meeting of 7th January 2015. (Appendix J1)
- (c) The disposal of assets at best value
- (d) 4.95% increase in the Band "D" equivalent Council Tax to apply for County purposes in 2015/16

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ii) COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2015/16

We received the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2015/16, which presented arrangements for the implementation of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and for it to be approved for 2015/16 and affirmed that, in the absence of any revisions or amendments, annual uprating amendments would be carried out each year without a requirement to adopt the whole Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

We resolved to agree recommendations as follows:

1. To note the making of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Prescribed Requirements (Wales) Regulations ("the Prescribed Requirements Regulations") 2013 by the Welsh Government on 26 November 2013.
2. To recommend that Council adopts the provisions within the Regulations above in respect of its Scheme for the financial year 2015/16 as the Council's local scheme from 1st April 2015 and to continue to exercise the previously approved discretions as follows:
 - To apply a 100% disregard for war disablement pensions, war widows' pensions and war widowers' pensions, for both pensioners and working age claimants.
 - Not to increase the extended reduction periods for pensioners and working age claimants from the standard 4 weeks in the Prescribed Scheme.
 - Not to increase the backdate period for pensioners and working age claimants from the standard 3 months contained within the Prescribed Scheme
 - To provide the minimum level of information to customers in order to ensure they are notified of their award in accordance with legislation.
3. That Council affirms that in the absence of any revisions or amendments to the Scheme, annual uprating amendments will be carried out each year without a requirement for Council to adopt the whole Council Tax reduction Scheme.

10. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

There were no questions received from members.

The meeting ended at 5.15 p.m