

**MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the Special Meeting of Monmouthshire County Council  
held in the Council Chamber at County Hall, Usk  
on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2014 at 2.00 p.m.**

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

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

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mr P. Matthews	Chief Executive
Ms. S. McGuinness	Head of Policy and Engagement.
Mr W. Mclean	Head of Finance/Section 151 Officer
Mrs J. Robson	Head of Legal Services
Mr R. Hoggins	Head of Operations
Mrs T. Harry	Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services
Mr R. Tranter	Head of Legal
Mrs S. King	Senior Democratic Services Officer

**A**

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

These were received from County Councillors D. Blakebrough, P. Clarke, J.E. Crook, G.L. Down, R.J.C. Hayward, M. Hickman, G. Howard, J. Marshall and A. Wintle.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE BODIES (CHANGES)**

We were advised that a report had been agreed at Cabinet on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2014, which endorsed changes to the EAS governance structure.

We received a report which recommended changes to the appointment to outside bodies, specifically the South East Wales Education Achievement Service (EAS).

The report contained recommendations as follows:

- 1) County Councillor R. Greenland replaces County Councillor P.A. Fox on the EAS Board and
- 2) Two members of the Children and Young People Select Committee are appointed as members of the Audit Committee.

We resolved to agree recommendations, as follows:

- 1) That County Councillor P.A. Fox would be replaced by County Councillor R. Greenland on the EAS Board.
- 2) That the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Young People Select Committee (Councillor Penny Jones and Councillor Peter Farley respectively), are appointed as members of the EAS Audit Committee

#### **4. REFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER**

The Chief Executive presented a report which asked Council to consider Monmouthshire County Council's response to the Reforming Local Government White Paper issued by Wales Government and to its prospectus for Voluntary Merger.

Recommendations within the report were identified as follows:

2.1 That Council agrees a position on its approach to merger with another Council / Council (s). The options are:

- 2.1.1 To adopt the preferred Wales Government position and agree to merge with Newport City Council;
- 2.1.2 To seek to explore an 'exceptional arrangement' merger, with potential participants likely to be Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and Torfaen County Borough Council;
- 2.1.3 If either 2.1.1 or 2.1.2 is the preferred position to determine whether to adopt the 'voluntary merger' approach set out below;
- 2.1.4 To resist a merger proposal and advocate a case for Monmouthshire remaining as a standalone County Council; and /or,
- 2.1.5 To resist a merger proposal and advocate the development of a 'combined authority' model.

2.2 If Council determines to explore merger or if Council is compelled by Wales Government at a future date to merge that delegated authority is given to the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive to engage with counterparts in initial discussions about merger.

All members contributed to discussion and main discussion highlighted points as follows:

- The importance of the special Council meeting was recognised as it was fundamental for Monmouthshire County Council going forward.

## Agenda Item 4b

- The partnership felt that the area of Monmouthshire and wider South East Wales should be considered as a city region, it was believed that a merger with another local authority would not address specific issues pertinent to the County and further options required investigation. Some members preferred recommendation 2.1.5.
- There was a requirement to maintain value, but change to consider the wider vision and opportunities for building relationships. There had been successful examples of collaborative working and this should be continued.
- In supporting recommendations 2.1.5 there would be increased flexibility and opportunities to consider alternative options.
- The Labour group were strongly in favour of recommendation 2.1.3. It was felt that a South East Regional proposal would not suit Monmouthshire. Cross border possibilities should be investigated to maximise opportunities and introduce greater change.
- The Independent group stressed the importance of a preferred position which would be best for the authority and residents. However, it was noted that further details were required to make an informed decision.
- To clarify, the Chief Executive highlighted that the timescales had been following the Williams report and members were invited to reach a position and consider options, for further discussion.
- All members agreed that 'one size fits all' would not be suitable for Monmouthshire County Council and recognised the importance of maintaining locality, representing residents of Monmouthshire and continuing to ensure that a quality service was provided.
- Concerns were expressed regarding cost implications of a merger and further information was required regarding the aspect of budgetary issues.
- It was highlighted that further analysis of options was required.
- Members welcomed further dialogue with other local authorities in order to move forward.
- We highlighted that the minister should be made aware of the debate that had been held.
- In summary, the Chairman observed that Council had mixed support for recommendations 2.1.3 and 2.1.5, however, there was overall agreement that further information and dialogue was required.

County Councillor P.A. Fox proposed an amendment to 2.1.5 which was duly seconded:

*'To resist a merger proposal and seek further talks on the development of a 'combined authority' model.'*

In addition, County Councillor S. Howarth proposed an amendment to 2.2 which was duly seconded:

*'If Council determines to explore merger or if Council is compelled by Wales Government at a future date to merge that delegated authority is given to the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive to engage with counterparts in initial discussions about merger and then report back to Council with result report on discussions, at the earliest opportunity.'*

Members discussed the amendments, we noted the following:

- The wording of 'combined authority' (within recommendation 2.1.5) was ambiguous.

County Councillor P.A. Fox withdrew the original amendment and proposed a new amendment.

*The meeting adjourned for 10 minutes and reconvened at 4.30pm.*

County Councillor P.A. Fox proposed a new amendment to recommendation 2.1.5, which was duly seconded:

*'At this time, to resist a merger proposal and seek further talks around development of a model that sees authorities working together but maintaining local democracy and local accountability.'*

Upon being put to the vote, we resolved to agree recommendations, as follows:

**2.1.5 At this time, to resist a merger proposal and seek further talks around development of a model that sees authorities working together but maintaining local democracy and local accountability.**

**2.2 If Council determines to explore merger or if Council is compelled by Wales Government at a future date to merge that delegated authority is given to the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive to engage with counterparts in initial discussions about merger and then report back to Council with result report on discussions, at the earliest opportunity.**

We agreed that updates would be conveyed through Political Leadership Group, full Council meetings and communications via the Chief Executive.

**Meeting ended 4.50 p.m.**