

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Monmouthshire County Council held at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 26th March 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, J.E. Crook, D.L.S. Dovey, G.L. Down, A. Easson, D.L. Edwards, R.M. Edwards, P.S. Farley, P.A. Fox, J. George, 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, D.W.H. Jones, 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, K. Williams and A. Wintle.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr P. Matthews	Chief Executive
Mrs K. Beirne	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Mr S. Burch	Chief Officer, Health and Social Care
Mrs J. Robson	Head of Finance/Section 151 Officer
Mr W. McLean	Head of Strategic Partnerships
Mrs A. Barton	Head of Communication
Mr P. Davies	Head of commercial and people development
Ms S. Hayward	Head of Community Led Delivery
Mr R. Tranter	Head of Legal/Monitoring Officer
Mrs S. King	Senior Democratic Services Officer

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr J. Morgan Monmouthshire Recovery Board

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed visitors from University Malaysia Sarawak.

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors D. Evans, G. Howard, P. Hobson, S. Howarth, J. Marshall and S. White.

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

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Declarations of interest were noted under the relevant agenda item.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th February 2015 at 10.00am, were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

Correction: *PRESENT: Councillor D.W.H. Jones (not D.W.H. Hones)*

5. PUBLIC FORUM ITEMS

There were no public forum items received.

6. NOTICES OF MOTION

There were no notices of motion received.

7. CHEPSTOW SCHOOL STATEMENT

The Chairman agreed for an item to be added, which was not scheduled as part of the agenda.

County Councillor E. Hacket Pain, Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning, issued a statement in relation to Chepstow School, as follows:

'The Chairman has asked for a statement relating to the recent press release about 11 redundancies at Chepstow School.

I would like to reassure Council today that this is part of a planned process is scheduled and agreed by the Governing Body, to reduce the deficit budget at the school. Other schools, over the years, have been in the same position and have had to make redundancies, it is not uncommon, and often occurs when pupil numbers have reduced and there is a need to balance budgets.

I would like to reassure the Council and parents that Chepstow is an excellent school with high standards and good leadership. The Governing Body takes the matter of its deficit budget very seriously and is doing everything it can to rectify the matter. An action plan showing how the deficit is to be bridged is being drawn up by the Governors of Chepstow School and MCC will monitor this progress against time.

The budget of the school is £4.25 million budget this is delegated to the Governing Body who have total responsibility for the budget. The Governing Body in

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conjunction with the Headteacher set the budget and determine how the school monies are spent. This budget pays for the running of the school and the employment of over 100 staff.

The teacher pupil ratio is one of the highest when looking at Newport, Torfaen, Caerphilly and B Gwent. Chepstow School also has the second highest budget per pupil in comparison with our neighbours.

Admission numbers for September are the best for a number of years there are 182 applications with an admission number of 187. All of these facts bode well for the future.'

8. SWIMMING GRANT STATEMENT

The Chairman agreed for an item to be added, which was not scheduled as part of the agenda.

County Councillor, R. Greenland, Cabinet Member for, Innovation, Enterprise and Leisure highlighted issues as follows:

- *'Letter received from Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism informing that the formulae for the distribution of free swimming grant for children is changing with effect from next month. They will in future use "the formula for children and young person's services".'*
- *'The effect on Monmouthshire will be a reduction in the free swimming initiative grant that covers both children and the over 60s from £90,999 to £51,600; a reduction of 43%. As the intention of Welsh a Government is that this should come from free swimming sessions for children, this will mean that part of the grant is likely to be almost wiped out.'*
- *'Across Wales all Councils in North, Mid and West Wales will suffer reductions in grant. In our area South East Wales, all other former Gwent Councils will see increases and our decrease will effectively be re-distributed to them. This change sees the urban areas of South and Central Wales gaining at the expense of rural Wales.'*

We thanked both Cabinet members for information presented.

9. MONMOUTHSHIRE RECOVERY BOARD

We welcomed Mr J. Morgan, Chair of Welsh Government, Monmouthshire Recovery Board. We were presented with a report on the progress of the education service in Monmouthshire County Council, following the ESTYN inspection of 2012. During the inspection the team had held discussions with the leader of the council, elected members, the chief executive, senior officers, the cabinet member and other relevant officers.

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Inspectors scrutinised documentation, which included evidence on the progress made on the recommendation in the context of additional learning needs, inclusion and youth support services.

The Chairman of the Recovery Board had been impressed with the commitment and drive from the authority, to ensure that Monmouthshire County Council would be lifted from Special Measures in the next visit. Two members of the Recovery Board had been appointed by the Minister and would be working with the authority until the final visit.

6 recommendations were received from ESTYN, following a thorough and detailed inspection, these included:

- Safeguarding
- Standards of attainment
- Strengthening level of challenge
- Corporate planning
- Self-evaluation
- Performance Management

A further visit included four recommendations considered and a steady improvement was identified. The ESTYN outcome letter had been received, which included a positive response on performance management and concluded that the new corporate assessment process was more robust and authority processes were consistent, transparent and understood by staff. Staff were rigorously held to account for their areas of responsibility and the authority used better quality information on standards and leadership skills, to identify underperformance, which increased clarity and rigour to process.

The Board needed to ensure that the authority were supported ahead of the ESTYN inspection and were impressed with the level of change and view of Estyn colleagues, it was recognised that where improvement was secured there was a need for it to be embedded.

Fundamentally, its school leadership and quality of teaching/learning experience in schools. There would be continued challenge of the Education Achievement Service (EAS) and the authority to ensure a robust relationship was maintained. The Recovery Board felt that the overall direction was positive and welcomed a continued working relationship,

Members were invited to ask questions, during debate we noted the following:

- County Councillor R. Greenland declared a personal non-prejudicial interest pursuant to the members' code of conduct as the Chairman of the Education Achievement Service Board.
- County Councillor A. Easson declared a personal non-prejudicial interest pursuant to the members' code of conduct as a Governor of Ysgol y Fin school.

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- We thanked the Chairman of the Recovery Board for attending the meeting and information presented regarding the ongoing work of the board. The Leader of the Council, was supported in thanking the board, in terms of continuous challenge and support that had been provided, which had been a crucial aspect of the recovery journey, alongside constructive support. Raising standards of schools in Monmouthshire would continually be prioritised and we welcomed the progress that had occurred.
- Estyn would critically look at specific groups of learners, there was a need to ensure continued emphasis and that pupils were supported to achieve.
- We were informed that it would be inappropriate for the Board to unpick detail of budgetary position of schools, however, when budgets were set there was a need to ensure that improvement was demonstrated and the authority was able to continue to improve.
- It was difficult to draw absolute correlation between where a school is categorised and the positioning of Estyn. There would be a variety of indicators which would be considered and categorisation allowed a level of benchmarking.

10. COMMITTEE MINUTES

We resolved that the following minutes be received:

(a) Internal Monitoring Board 15th January 2015

We resolved that the minutes be received.

(b) Democratic Services Committee 9th February 2015

We resolved that the minutes be received.

11. PUBLICATION OF PAY POLICY STATEMENT

We were presented with the Publication of Pay Policy Statement as required by the Localism Act.

During discussion of the item, all Chief Officers left the Council Chamber.

The purpose of the report was for Council to approve to pay the nationally negotiated and agreed 2.0% pay award for those employees who come under Joint National Council (JNC) Chief Officers' terms and conditions, with effect from 1 January 2015 to cover the period to 31 March 2016.

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In addition Council were asked to approve that the salaries of Heads of Service and Chief Officers were no longer based on a percentage of the Chief Executive Officer's salary, and to note that associated contractual changes were to be made.

Debate ensued and we noted the following:

- Members of Council emphasised that resource implications should have been explicitly included within the report.
- We were advised that Council were required, by law, to approve the pay policy by the end of March.
- The report specifically related to Chief Officers and for salaries to be separated from the spot salary of the Chief Executive.
- In response to a question regarding attractiveness of levels of pay, we were informed that the authority were nearer the bottom in terms of senior officer level pay. However, it was recognised that prospective employees were attracted to the authority for more than financial reasons.
- Council were reminded that the report related to the statement of pay policies, terms and conditions being operated in Monmouthshire County Council. Individual policies can be nationally or locally negotiated and can be changed at any time via the normal scrutiny and cabinet approval processes.

We resolved to agree recommendations:

1. That Full Council approves the Pay Policy for the year 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016.
2. That Full Council approves that the salaries of Heads of Service and Chief Officers are no longer based on a percentage of the Chief Executive Officer's salary, and to note that associated contractual changes are to be made. Chief Executive Officer terms and conditions and pay are prescribed by the Joint National Council (JNC) for Local Authority Chief Executive Officers. To date, no agreement on a pay offer for 2015 has been reached.
3. That Full Council approves to pay the nationally negotiated and agreed 2.0% pay award for those employees who come under Joint National Council (JNC) Chief Officers' terms and conditions, with effect from 1 January 2015 to cover the period to 31 March 2016.
4. In light of the issues outlined in this report, Full Council resolves to amend the Pay Policy Statement to include the following paragraph:
5. The Council employs Chief Officers under JNC terms and conditions which are incorporated in their contracts. The JNC for Chief Officers negotiates on national (UK) annual cost of living pay increases for this group, and any award of same is determined on this basis. Chief Officers employed under JNC terms and conditions are contractually entitled to any national JNC determined pay rises and this council will therefore pay these as and when determined in accordance with contractual requirements.

12. JANUARY 2015 MONMOUTHSHIRE ENGAGEMENT

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Council were presented with the January 2015 Monmouthshire engagement, learnings and future recommendations report. The purpose of which, provided an evaluation and feedback to Council of the recent Monmouthshire Engages events.

The paper identified the future strategies to ensure that future engagement and consultations are effective in meeting both their legal requirements and Monmouthshire's aspiration of being a listening organisation that will work with communities to become sustainable and resilient.

We welcomed the Head of Communication.

- Key issues were identified, which included, attendance levels, accepting public attitudes and timing of the engagement process.
- A mixture of media channels and communication sessions were utilised.
- Reflected on what would have worked better, reaching out to hidden populations and bringing conversations earlier.
- Team working to engage around budget, but also look at delivery and focus on key things that are being communicated. Supplementary leaflet would be sent out with Council Tax bills.

Members were invited to ask questions and during debate, the following points were highlighted:

- Further clarification was requested in relation to engagement with vulnerable groups within the community. Officers welcomed information from members regarding specific groups and different environments. Planning would ensure that communities of need would be engaged.
- We were informed that communities were being engaged in many different ways, which included community coordination and whole place. However, it was recognised that a comprehensive piece of work was required.
- We emphasised that local members should be included in consultation and engagement, at the earliest possible stage.
- Members thanked the officers for the report and we recognised that this was the start of an ongoing process.
- Details would be provided to officers regarding engagement tools that were available.

We resolved that recommendations be agreed:

- 1) Council received the feedback from the Monmouthshire Engages events;
- 2) Council considered the appropriateness of future engagement and consultation activity;
- 3) Council builds on the engagement process to focus on on-going engagement during the consultation and into the delivery of the budget.

13.REPORTS OF HEAD OF DEMOCRACY AND REGULATORY SERVICES

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a) TIMING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

The Chairman of the Democratic Services Committee presented a report which followed a request by Council at a previous meeting, that timings of meetings were considered by the Democratic Services Committee.

The report outlined that Democratic Services Committee had gathered evidence and considered information on the effect of changing the time of Council meetings from 2.00pm to 5.00pm, reasons included increased diversity and public attendance.

The Democratic Services committee recommended to Council that, based on evidence presented, they could not find any substantial reason to change the time of Council meetings at this stage.

Members were invited to ask questions and during debate we noted:

- Disappointment expressed regarding some comments and the number of responses received.
- Statistics could not be considered in isolation and meaningful engagement was required with the public.
- It was suggested that the Council should allow for increased flexibility in relation to meeting times, which could be operated alongside the agile and flexible working practices for staff.
- Varied views were expressed, some in favour and some against the change of meeting time.
- Views in favour of the change related to, increased diversity, flexibility and engagement. Whilst views against related to, issues for carers, availability of officers and attendance at other meeting which were held in the evenings.
- The Chief Executive reinforced to Council that the decision was a matter for members and requirements would be accommodated by officers.
- Council supported the principle of flexibility and changing timing of some meetings.
- Council recognised that it was not possible for some employed elected members to have time off for meetings, particularly within smaller organisations.
- We recognised that change would not be instant, however, supported being a flexible and adaptable authority.
- In response to a query raised regarding remote voting, the Monitoring Officer advised that it was not possible to allow remote attendance and Council had agreed this within the constitution.
- We recognised that there was a need for increased communication and engagement regarding the issue, this included further details regarding practice at other authorities.

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It was proposed and duly seconded that three meetings, subsequent to the AGM were held at 5.00pm.

Upon being put to the vote the amendment was carried and became the substantive motion.

We resolved that the three County Council meetings, May, June and July, after the AGM 2015 would be held at 5.00pm.

b) DIARY OF MEETINGS 2015/16

We received the diary of meetings 2015/16 which had been deferred from a previous meeting.

We resolved that the diary of meetings be agreed, with the minor amendments as discussed in item 10a.

14. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

(a) From County Councillor K. Williams to County Councillor P. Murphy:

"How many meetings have cabinet members had with Welsh Government to specifically address the lower funding that this council receives as a block grant to run its services in comparison to other authorities during the term of this administration?"

In response:

'There are few opportunities to meet with Ministers these days and regular meetings facilitated by the WLGA are also getting less. However our AM, Nick Ramsay, also MP David Davies are far more easily placed to make representations and they do so on our behalf.

The last correspondence between Cabinet and the Minister was following the Provision Settlement.

All Rural Authorities have the same problem and the process which utilises the WLGA formula is questioned increasingly at that level. The key is Deprivation, and the vote, because that is what it comes down to, from the Authorities that benefit from the deprivation factor is unlikely to result in any of them giving up any part of the funding.

Our 151 Officer is on the Distribution Sub Group which considers various aspects of the distribution mechanism each year. The potential Local Authority re-organisation may well be a good chance of getting a better settlement as the current formula will inevitably have to change.

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The Leader has meetings, (on average 6 per year) where he gets the opportunity to lobby the Minister and also raises issues, especially around rurality in the Rural Forum. The subject of funding is at the top of the Agenda. It is vital, as a result of being the lowest funded Authority in Wales that we take all the opportunities that are available to us and to engage with others to assist. Indeed as an Authority that delivers services with the lowest staff to population ratio, I would have thought Monmouthshire would attract the Ministers attention.

On the subject of engagement, we would also be grateful for any assistance that the Labour Group can give as I'm sure that more opportunities exist within the framework that you work in.'

The meeting ended at 5.05 p.m.