

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Thursday, 29th June, 2017 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor M. Powell (Chairman)
County Councillor P. Clarke (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Batrouni, D. Blakebrough, D. Dovey, A. Easson, R. Edwards, D. Evans, P.A. Fox, R.J.W. Greenland, L. Guppy, R. Harris, J. Higginson, G. Howard, D. Jones, P. Jones, S. Jones, P. Jordan, P. Murphy, B. Strong, F. Taylor, A. Watts, A. Webb, J.Becker, L.Brown, A.Davies, L.Dymock, M.Feakins, M.Groucutt, R.John, L.Jones, M.Lane, P.Pavia, J.Pratt, R.Roden, T.Thomas, J.Treharne and J.Watkins.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Joy Robson	Head of Finance/Section 151 Officer
Robert Tranter	Head of Legal Services & Monitoring Officer
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer

APOLOGIES:

Councillors V. Smith, S. Howarth, S.B. Jones, S. Woodhouse and K. Williams

2. Public Open Forum

There were no matters for the public open forum.

3. Chairman's Announcement and receipt of petitions

Council received the Chairman's report. In doing so the Chairman expressed the sympathy of Council to all those affected by recent events in London.

County Councillor R. Greenland presented a petition from the business people of Monmouth regarding the street furniture policy. The petition, signed by 153 people and another 119 online, would be considered by Cabinet and Senior Officers and reported back to Council in due course.

4. Declarations of interest

County Councillors J. Pratt and L. Brown declared personal, non-prejudicial interests relating to item 8.2 due to being in the age bracket/gender under discussion.

County Councillor D. Dovey declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in relation to item 9, as a governor of Chepstow School, and a member of JAG Committee.

5. To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 16th May 2017

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The minutes of the meeting held on 16th May 2017 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

6. To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 18th May 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th May 2017 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

We noted a typographical error on page 9.

7. To receive the Action List of the meeting held on 18th May 2017

We noted the action list of the meeting held on 18th May 2017.

In doing so, it was agreed that the timing of meetings would be discussed at the next meeting of Democratic Services Committee, and the recommendations would be discussed at the following Council meeting.

8. Notices of Motion

8.1. Motion From County Councillor A. Easson

Following representation by parents in my Ward, and adjoining Wards, who have expressed concern that Cabinet in December last year agreed to divert section 106 monies from refurbishing Castroggi Park in Caldicot to the Leisure Centre ATP pitch. They say that the refurbishment is long overdue and believe that they have been ignored; that the park would be better used if the equipment was up to standard. Cabinet, when challenged, and following officer advice, stated that section 106 money from the White Hart site when developed, would be earmarked for the work needed to be carried out at Castroggi Park. I therefore bring a motion to Council, seeking support to vire monies from reserves, to bring the park back up to a high standard with the knowledge and confidence that it will be reclaimed from section 106 monies, in full, in due course.

The motion was duly seconded.

The Leader understood the frustrations expressed and explained that officers had been to inspect the park. He agreed that the park did look tired but was safe and useable. Some surfacing issues were to be addressed immediately. It was explained that it was not possible to use section 106 monies before they are received but in the meantime, design works could take place, and it was appropriate for Caldicot members to be involved in the process. He was therefore, unable to support the motion.

Councillor J. Watkins expressed disappointment that Councillor Easson had not discussed this with her, as it is in her ward. She added that there is grant funding from other sources, and suggested that this funding be used in collaboration with 106 money. She requested that officers liaise with community groups to enable discussion.

Councillor Greenland supported these views but was unable to support the motion.

Councillor L. Guppy proposed an amendment to the motion:

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To seek support for the virement of money to bring the park up to a high standard with full engagement of the community, and exploration of further financial contributions to the project, and that these monies will be reclaimed from 106 monies at a later date.

The amendment was seconded and became the substantive motion. Debate ensued.

Councillor Murphy said that as the amendment include the term 'vired' he was unable to support.

Councillor Easson expressed concern at the double standards of Council, in that reserves had previously be used in Portskewett. The Leader explained that 106 monies had been allocated in Portskewett but could not recall it being vired from reserves. He added that he could not support the motion while it still included virement from reserves.

As a point of personal explanation, the Leader asked financial officers to provide clarity of the distribution of 106 monies to Portskewett. The Chief Executive confirmed this would be clarified in writing, and explained that there is a clear process within Council on how 106 monies are spent.

Upon being put to the vote, the substantive motion was defeated.

The original motion was put to the vote, and was defeated.

8.2. Motion from County Councillor D. Batrouni

Pension changes introduced by the UK government to equalise women's pensionable age with men's will mean many women in Monmouthshire could lose around £38,000 - £48,000 compared to women who retired at 60. This Council notes this will have a negative impact on the lives of the women affected, making it harder for them to volunteer in their local communities and to commit time to their families. This could increase pressures on council services, e.g. social care, and the recruitment of volunteers to help the Council deliver some of its services. Therefore, the Council will write a letter to the UK government outlining its concerns and expressing support for the 63 is the new 60 proposal. This proposal is a compromise, which will allow all women born on or after 6th April 1953 up to 5th April 1960 to retire on their 63rd birthday. Anyone born after that date will follow the timetable of the 2011 Act.

The motion was duly seconded.

Councillor Blakebrough supported the motion and added that the issue had been brought to her attention by residents, and thought the motion was a good way for the '63 is the new 60' campaign group to be heard, and to raise awareness of the problem. People were looking for a fair deal, and a compromise of incremental increases.

There were some concerns over the generalisations of people in the age bracket.

Councillor Sara Jones supported pension equalisation, adding that those at the lowest end of the economic scale, and those employed in manual jobs were most likely to suffer the most financial hardship and should be given the priority as a matter of urgency. Councillor Jones added an amendment to the motion:

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To remove: *Therefore, the Council will write a letter to the UK government outlining its concerns and expressing support for the 63 is the new 60 proposal. This proposal is a compromise, which will allow all women born on or after 6th April 1953 up to 5th April 1960 to retire on their 63rd birthday. Anyone born after that date will follow the timetable of the 2011 Act.*

To add: *This Council supports the UK Government in the principle of pension equalisation which aims to ensure greater parity given our change in demographic. However we do note the concerns of our residents that are affected and this Council will make contact with the UK Government to request further exploration of the 63 is the new 60 proposal, and indeed all options around transitional arrangements.*

The amendment was seconded.

Councillor Batrouni accepted the amendment and withdrew the original motion.

Upon being put to the vote the substantive motion was carried.

9. Reports of the Head of Finance

9.1. Audit Committee Annual Report 2016-2017

Council were presented with the Audit Committee Annual Report 2016-17.

On behalf of the Audit Committee, the Chair of the Committee submitted the report for consideration by the Council.

The report showed that the workings of the Committee have been both valuable and productive and provides assurance to the Council regarding the Committee's activities in the effective governance of financial affairs and other matters conducted by the Authority.

The Leader thanked Mr. White for the presentation, and his sentiments were echoed by Councillors Higginson and Batrouni who praised Mr. White on his conduct of the meetings.

Councillor Easson stated that it had been a very successful year for the Audit Committee. He sought clarification on points 4.14 and 4.15 regarding Chepstow School, and asked if we are likely to see a secure future for the budgeting for Chepstow School. Councillor Murphy responded that regular meetings had been held with representatives of Chepstow School, and was happy to report that the recovery plan has been successful to the point where looking forward to the end of this current year the school budget is forecast to be in slight surplus.

Upon being put to the vote Council resolved to accept the report.

9.2. Monmouthshire County Council Zero Hour Contracts

Council received a report, as requested, from the Audit Committee, on the use of non-guaranteed hours/casual contracts used by the Council with specific regard to the use of 'Zero Hours Contracts'.

Debate ensued, where the following points were noted:

Councillor Batrouni explained that the report defined an exploitative zero hour contract rather than a zero hour contract as defined by the Government.

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Councillor Blakebrough referred the figures being above the UK average and requested a breakdown of figures by age and gender.

Assurance was sought that all those working regular hours have been offered a fixed term contract.

Councillor Taylor noted that the report was a result of a motion and it highlighted some gaps in enactment of policies. She expressed disappointment in the scope of the Audit Committee's investigation. She asked the Head of Paid Service if he was content with the assurances of the Committee. The Chief Executive responded that based on the scope the Audit Committee took, the outcome was reasonable. He added that at the various levels of investigation over the last few months he had always been satisfied with the outcome. The Cabinet Member for Finance assured Council that these arrangements were reviewed regularly, and the matter was raised in every management meeting, on a more heightened basis than previously.

Upon being put to the vote, Council resolved to agree the recommendations in the report:

- The County Council should note that the Audit Committee is satisfied that MCC does not use Zero Hours Contracts for anyone it employs according to the definition: 'A flexible contract where an employer does not guarantee set hours of work for an employee. The employee is contracted to that employer and cannot work for another employer'.
- MCC does employ casual workers who are not obliged to do any work for the Authority if they choose not to. It is accepted that this is helpful both to the Authority, when organising work patterns and suits many of the casual workers who have other commitments or do not wish to be committed to fixed hours.
- It is recommended the use of casual employment should continue to be monitored. Managers and Service Areas should take ownership of this for their own areas. The Human Resources Business partnering approach will help, making use of annual information on the use of casual employment.
- Where appropriate, MCC should continue to offer casual employees fixed term contracts, if the work has become a regular commitment, for example.

10. Members Questions:

10.1. From County Councillor A. Watts to County Councillor P. Murphy

How many of our public buildings, within our property portfolio, are compliant with Welsh Assembly legislation standards regarding the fitting of sprinkler systems?

Councillor Murphy responded:

MCC has functioning sprinkler systems in the following primary schools: Kymin View; Llanfoist; Ysgol Yfenni; Magor; Pembroke; Dewstow and Rogiet.

The two new schools in Caldicot and Monmouth will have sprinklers installed. With regards to Thornwell and Castle Park, the extensions built in recent years were constructed with both pipework and sprinkler heads and when both schools are fully refurbished this will be connected up. In addition, the cladding systems used on buildings are not within the flammable range that was unfortunately installed in London. County Hall, Usk is covered by a high quality fire alarm system that covers all areas including roof voids. When the building was designed and constructed MCC building insurers and consultants were aware of the future uses of the building, and a sprinkler system did not form part of their requirements. The only stipulation the Insurers raised was that we had a fire suppression system in the bio-mass fuel store. The matter has been reviewed since and is considered to meet all standards.

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10.2. From County Councillor G. Howard to County Councillor B. Jones

Following on from the car park review of last year and the proposal to introduce a public electric car charging point in Chepstow, would the Cabinet

Member outline his commitment, any proposals and a timescale to extend this to the whole of the County area? I ask on behalf of a constituent who has recently purchased an electric Nissan car and who feels that not only it would be convenient for residents to introduce a network of charging points but that it might encourage greater ownership of such vehicles. Furthermore, any tourists travelling to the area might be encouraged to spend a few hours in our towns and villages, whilst their cars are recharged.

As Cllr Jones will be aware, this Authority does not have to directly provide charging outlets since they are often installed by other companies who will receive a revenue stream; however his confirmation that MCC will engage and enable such provision would be welcomed.

Councillor Fox responded on behalf of Councillor B. Jones:

I am pleased to advise Council that I took an Individual Member Decision on 14th June 2017, which approved the installation of an electric vehicle charging point in Welsh Street car park, Chepstow. The report goes on to delegate further distribution of charging points in our towns to the Head of Operations. The charging system is being installed and managed by a Monmouthshire based community interest company at no cost to MCC. I understand that the number of electric vehicles is growing and this initiative will help to demonstrate MCC's commitment to supporting sustainable energy solutions.

As a supplementary, Councillor Howard asked that a timetable of roll out to other towns be reported as part of the action list at the next meeting.

10.3. From County Councillor D. Batrouni to County Councillor R. John

1. What is the Cabinet Member's top three priorities for education in Monmouthshire?

2. How many teaching assistants in Monmouthshire schools have been made compulsory redundant in the academic years (i) 2012/13 (ii) 2013/14 (iii) 2014/15 (iv) 2015/16?

3. How many teaching assistants in Monmouthshire schools have taken voluntary redundancy in the academic years (i) 2012/13 (ii) 2013/14 (iii) 2014/15 (iv) 2015/16?

4. How many schools are planning compulsory redundancies this academic year?

Councillor John provided an overview of changes in the school system and provided the following responses:

1. The top 3 priorities are:

- i. To improve the standards in the way we educate every child;
- ii. That schools are well prepared to promote and enhance the wellbeing of young people;

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iii. To work with colleagues within the Children and Young People Directorate to ensure we have the right policies, procedures and resources we need to ensure young people can thrive in our schools.

2 and 3 together. In the academic year 2012/13 there were 11 compulsory and 9 voluntary redundancies; 2013/14 there were 6 compulsory, and 4 voluntary; 2014/15 there were 4 compulsory and 5 voluntary; 2015/16 there were 3 compulsory and 7 voluntary.

4. We were advised there were three Compulsory redundancies planned.

As a supplementary, Councillor Batrouni sought reassurance that the TA figures provided were not due to budgetary cuts implemented over the last four years.

Councillor John responded that there are many reasons, such as Deri View where there was a large reduction in 21012/13. Some budgetary pressures related to one to one support where students had left the school and the support was no longer required. Also curriculum changes had an effect. He acknowledged there are budgetary pressures in our schools, particularly as one of the worst funded authorities in the country.

10.4. From County Councillor D. Batrouni to County Councillor P. Jones

What is the new administration's view of pooled budgets for social care based on health board boundaries?

Councillor P. Jones responded:

Monmouthshire and other Gwent authorities have a strong record of pooling budgets where it is linked to effective service and is sound financially. An example being the Gwent Frailty Service, which is the only one of its kind across Wales, which bring authorities and health boards together in a financially sound arrangement. There is a legal requirement under the Welbeing Act for care homes to pool budgets by April 2018 and Monmouthshire is keen to extend integration with the health boards. It already has successfully integrated arrangements with other authorities. The risks are whether Monmouthshire is going to benefit, and whether it makes for a more efficient service with enough resources. With this in mind, work is underway with the Greater Gwent Regional Health and Social Care Partnership, working to provide and support better outcomes for service users, sustainable services and cost effective outcome. The question of cross subsidy must be considered and the need for effective governance arrangements. Discussions are ongoing and the results will be brought to Select Committees and Full Council for approval.

10.5. From County Councillor D. Batrouni to County Councillor S. Jones

When can the Council expect to see the administration's plan to tackle deprivation in the county?

Councillor S. Jones talked about process and provided the following response:

The strategy going forward will be about social justice, inequalities and about how we focus as a Council on how we work with our partners. Not just about Members and Officers, but about communities, our registered social landlords, and supporting businesses in three key areas. To understand the underlying causes of poverty, and the disadvantage our communities face. To understand how partnership solutions can be taken forward to help tackle societal change. The second point in the strategy would be to put in place policy interventions to proactively tackle

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barriers around social mobility. Councillor Jones welcomed Members to invite her to their wards, and informed how she had met with partners and third sector organisations to increase understanding on how local government can tackle changes. She acknowledged the positive work already taking place in the county in terms tackling the deprivation and isolation agenda, for example digital inclusion, development of Community Hubs, small local enterprise and youth enterprise. It is planned the strategy will come forward in the Autumn.

As a supplementary, Councillor Batrouni noted that the portfolio for social justice talked about rural deprivation, and sought assurance that urban poverty would not be neglected. In response, Councillor assured that absolutely all areas would be covered.

The meeting ended at 3.55 pm