

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Thursday, 7th March, 2019 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor P. Clarke (Chairman)
County Councillor S. Woodhouse (Vice Chairman)

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

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Matthew Phillips	Head of Law/ Monitoring Officer
Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Peter Davies	Chief Officer, Resources
Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Frances Williams	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Julie Boothroyd	Chief Officer Social Care, Safeguarding and Health

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors R. Edwards, G. Howard, S. Howarth and A. Watts

2. Declarations of interest

County Councillor R. Harris declared a non-prejudicial interest in relation to item 6.4 with regards to his position as Vice Chair of Governors at Llantilio Pertholey Primary School; and item 5.1 as a member of the 21st Century School Board.

County Councillor M. Powell declared a non-prejudicial interest in relation to item 6.4 with regards to her being a member of the board of governors at King Henry VIII Comprehensive School.

County Councillor M. Groucutt declared a non-prejudicial interest in relation to item 6.4 with regards to his position as Chair of Governors at Llantilio Pertholey Primary School.

3. Public Questions

None.

4. Chairman's announcement and receipt of petitions

Council received the Chairman's report.

No petitions were presented.

5. Notices of Motion:

5.1. From County Councillor D. Batrouni

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The Leader responded that the whole Council approach is to deliver the schools, collectively and without political bias. The administration fully supports the four school strategy. The capital grant element has been lifted to 65% rather than 75% stated in the motion.

Councillor Groucutt supported the motion recognising the challenges faced by our schools. With four new comprehensive schools we can deliver high class teaching allowing needs to be met.

The Cabinet Member recognised that the raise in funding ratio demonstrates that Welsh Government have listened to local authorities. He confirmed that the Council remain committed to the four school strategy. He added that Chepstow School is now under new leadership, and is keen to redevelop the school as soon as is affordable. He remains passionate about the proposals for King Henry VIII School. Councillor John proposed an amendment to the motion:

That this Council notes and welcomes the Welsh government's announcement to increase its capital grant to 65% for the 21st century school programme. Further notes that the Mutual Investment Model's (MIM) intervention rate has been increased to 81% if that option is chosen. Therefore, the Council asks the administration to bring forward the rebuilding of Chepstow Comprehensive school as soon as possible so the families and young people of Chepstow get a 21st century school sooner than currently anticipated.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Fox.

During discussion it was suggested that if the MIM proves advantageous Council should look to develop Chepstow School ahead of 2024.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was carried.

6. Members Questions:

6.1. From County Councillor P. Pavia to County Councillor S. Jones

The Cabinet Member responded that in January this year Welsh Government signed a grant agreement with BT around the next phase of rollout for Monmouthshire for Superfast Cymru 2, and along with officers, Councillor Jones is to meet with WG officials on 19th March 2019 to discuss the next phase of the rollout. She added frustrations around the rollout of Superfast Cymru, both the first phase and the planned development of the second phase. Current digital deprivation rate within Monmouthshire currently stands at 12.5% in comparison to the other Cardiff Capital Region Local Authorities who sit at 3% to 4%.

Research suggests that the next phase is unlikely to solve all the digital deprivation issues, and it is estimated there will still be 9000 households/premises that will be white post codes, suggesting we will need at even more alternative solutions.

Councillor Jones proposed a digital deprivation action plan and has asked officers to prepare this, which will be brought to Economy and Development Scrutiny Committee before the summer recess.

Councillor Jones expressed thanks to Mike Powell, Rural Programme Manager, for the sterling work he is doing on this project.

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As a supplementary question Councillor Pavia asked that the Cabinet Member implores to the Deputy Minister that MCC Councillors are keen to scrutinise this work and would welcome officials to a meeting as soon as possible.

In response, Councillor Jones expressed the same disappointment at officials failing to attend meetings despite requests and assured Members that on 19th March she would ask that WG officials come back to Committee to provide an opportunity for challenge on the national policy around broadband and digital rollout.

6.2. From County Councillor P. Pavia to County Councillor P. Fox

The Leader responded that the Council has established working relationships with key partners such as Welsh Government, the WLGA and treasury advisor to understand the planning for any potential risk to Council Services. Central and Welsh Governments reporting structures are now established and they become live on March 18th 2019. The CEO is a representative on the WG Local Government's Preparedness Advisory Panel which is providing strategic oversight for local government and supporting the coordination of preparedness within local government. We are engaged with partners on the Gwent Local Resilience Forum Risk Group. A Council Brexit Working Group has been established which is being led by Head of Enterprise, consisting of a range of services most likely to be affected including Environmental Health, Social Care and People Services. Close working with WLGA continues. There is a MCC Brexit area now live on the website which signposts to further relevant information.

As a supplementary Councillor Pavia asked will the Leader and the Cabinet Member for Governance commit to working with Members, particularly scrutiny chairs, to get this formulated as soon as possible.

The Leader responded that the Cabinet Member for Governance would be keen to work closely with select chairs, and is reassured that collectively it is evolving at great pace.

6.3. From County Councillor P. Pavia to County Councillor P. Fox

The Cabinet Member responded with an insight to what is currently happening. He referred to a recent joint meeting with Forest of Dean where collectively the importance of the matter was agreed and a Member Steering Group has been established between Gloucester CC, Forest of Dean CC and MCC. Support has been indicated for the scheme. The officer group is in touch with WG about the content and extent of the stage 2 study and are currently establishing which authorities and agencies should be represented on the officer review group. At an Authority level this is fairly straightforward but we need to be sure that both WG and Westminster Government are also fully engaged through agencies such as the Department for Transport, Highways England and WG Transport Planning, Transport for Wales and WG Highways. Getting the process right is important to make progress, and the forum is key to join all pieces together. There is interest amongst many members and officers have been asked to provide members' briefings as this moves forward.

Infrastructure problems around Chepstow cannot be ignored and need this to be a priority on both WG and Westminster agendas.

Regular updates would be provided throughout the process.

As a supplementary Councillor Pavia asked if the Leader could confirm that the objective remains that the second phase of the WELTAG would be completed by the end of 2019, and if so what are the key milestones and anticipated contributions to meet the anticipated £1.3m cost?

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The Leader responded that commitment is strong and should be in place by the end of the year. This requires partners to take action and MCC are ready to contribute. It would be irresponsible of MCC to subsidise others.

6.4. From County Councillor L. Jones to County Councillor R. John

Cabinet Member Richard John responded that WG published its results of the national categorisation on 31st January 2019 and conclusions gave Monmouthshire more green schools that we have had before. In 2012-13 we had three green schools but now have 15, including for the first time 2 green secondary schools. Councillor John paid tribute to the head teachers and staff of King Henry VIII and Maonmouth Comprehensive Schools for the considerable effort gone into achieving the award. The number of red schools has fallen from 2 to 1 and tribute was paid to all involved. There has been an increase in the number of amber schools and along with partners in the EAS we continue to work closely with those schools on their improvement plans.

County Councillor F. Taylor declared an interest as LEA governor at Magor Church in Wales Primary School.

As a supplementary Councillor Jones offered congratulations on the achievements and congratulated Kymin View, and Usk Primary on their deserved achievement of green statuses. She asked what is being done to ensure that our one remaining red school is getting all the support it needs and that we see its categorisation change to amber as soon as possible.

In response Councillor John explained that we continue to work closely with the senior leadership team at the school, as well as the governing body. He paid tribute to Councillor Groucutt who has stepped in to provide effective leadership to the governing body. Challenge advisors are going in and spending time supporting teachers, assisting the school in the drive to raise standards.

7. County Councillor R. John - Statement on childcare provision in Monmouthshire

County Councillor R John provided the following statement:

'This administration is committed to helping working families in Monmouthshire with childcare. We lobbied Welsh Government for Monmouthshire to become an early implementer of the 30 hours free childcare scheme. In January 2019 we rolled out our 30 hours free childcare offer for parents of 3 and 4 year old children, 20 months ahead of the Wales wide roll out in September 2020.

To meet demand for childcare spaces we put forward proposals to expand nursery provision in Monmouthshire and am pleased to announce today that these plans have been endorsed by the Welsh Government with a grant of £2.1m. We will be building new nurseries at Arch Bishop Rowan Williams Primary School in Portskewett, Trellech Primary School, as well as bi-lingual nursery provision as part of a new Welsh Medium Primary School in Monmouth, and an expansion of nursery provision at Ysgol Y Fin in Caldicot to provide wraparound childcare.

We are committed to ensuring that parents can access affordable and local childcare which is why we are so keen to implement the 30 hours free childcare offer earlier than a number of other councils. So I am delighted that our proposals to expand nursery provision in Portskewett, Monmouth, Trellech and Caldicot have been endorsed meaning more children in Monmouthshire will be able to benefit from the advantages of a nursery education.'

8. Report of the Head of Legal Services/Monitoring Officer:

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8.1. Appointment of Standards Committee Independent Member

The Cabinet Member for Governance presented a report to seek Council approval for two new appointments to the Standards Committee.

Upon put to the vote Council resolved to accept the recommendation:

To approve the appointment of Mrs Rhian Williams-Flew and Dr Peter Easy to the Standards Committee.

9. Reports of the Chief Officer for Resources:

9.1. Treasury Management Strategy 2019/20

Council received the Treasury Management Strategy Report in order to agree the 2019-20 Treasury Policy and strategic framework for officers to follow. This is to ensure that an appropriate level of care is taken of the Authority's funds and that a prudent budget is set to cover these activities.

In relation to borrowing and funds available on the market, regardless of how Brexit turns out, a question was raised if we could benefit from safe haven institutions, such as pension funds, in the short term. The Assistant Head of Finance explained that this would not normally be the case and pensions are long term prospects. Our approach to treasury management is to avoid or mitigate our borrowing costs.

Upon being put to the vote Council resolved to agree the recommendations:

That Council approves the following reports endorsed by Audit Committee on the 31st January 2019:

- **the proposed Treasury Management and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement for 2019/20 (Appendix 1);and**
- **the proposed Treasury Management Strategy 2019/20 (Appendix 2) including the Investment & Borrowing Strategies**

That Council agrees that Audit Committee should continue to review the Council's treasury activities on behalf of the Council by receiving & scrutinising the mid-year report and year-end report and also scrutinising the Treasury Policy & Strategy before passing to Council for approval.

The Council agrees that although the Treasury Indicators will continue to be a part of the Treasury Strategy, the Prudential Indicators will be presented directly to full Council with the Capital Strategy.

9.2. Council Tax Resolution 2019/20

Council were presented with the report as the Council is bound by Statute to specific timescales for Council Tax setting and is also required to make certain defined resolutions. The recommendations that form the major part of the report are designed to comply with those Statutory Provisions.

The recommended resolutions also draw together the Council Tax implications of precepts proposed by the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent and Town and Community Councils, thereby enabling the County Council to establish its headline Council Tax levels at the various property bands within each Town or Community area.

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The Leader of the Opposition expressed disappointment at the increase in taxes on Monmouthshire residents, whilst taking away services. He referred to the extra funding received from Welsh Government. Areas of disappointment in the budget included plastic bag proposals, increased car park charges and proposals for Mounton House School.

The Leader responded that the opposition had not presented an alternative budget, and stated that Welsh Government have slashed £1billion out of local government funding. He thanked the Cabinet Member and Officers for their work presenting this budget.

Concerns were highlighted around the increase in car park charges and the effects on high street businesses.

Many members expressed frustrations around the funding formula and a suggestion was made that a national debate should be held around Council Tax in general.

Upon being put to the vote Council resolved to accept the recommendations as per section 2 of the report.

10. County Council Action List

Council noted the Action List.

In doing so Councillor Pratt advised that residents of Dan y Coed have met with the Project Engineer in charge of the project, and have received an apology. There is a full investigation taking place into the engineering. The drainage has been updated and assurance has been given that the situation will not happen again.

11. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 17th January 2019

The minutes of the meeting of County Council held on 17th January 2019 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

12. To confirm the minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 21st February 2019

The minutes of the meeting of County Council held on 21st February 2019 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

The meeting ended at 3.55 pm