

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Joint Select Committee held
at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Tuesday, 27th February, 2018 at 10.00
am**

PRESENT: County Councillors: J.Becker, L.Brown, A.Davies, D. Dovey, A. Easson, M.Feakins, M.Groucutt, S. Howarth, L.Jones, M.Lane, P.Pavia, M. Powell, J.Pratt, R.Roden, V. Smith, B. Strong, J.Watkins, A. Webb, S. Woodhouse, J.Treharne, P. Clarke and D. Evans.

ALSO PRESENT

County Councillor P.A. Fox, Leader Of The Council, Cabinet Member For Whole Authority Strategy And Direction

County Councillor R.J.W. Greenland, Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member For Enterprise

County Councillor R.John, Cabinet Member For Children And Young People

County Councillor P. Jordan, Cabinet Member For Governance

County Councillor P. Murphy, Cabinet Member For Resources

Mr. A. Crowhurst Representing CAIR

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Kellie Beirne	Deputy Chief Executive
Peter Davies	Chief Officer, Resources
Claire Marchant	Chief Officer Social Care, Health & Safeguarding
Ian Saunders	Head of Tourism, Leisure, Culture and Youth
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Paula Harris	Democratic Services Officer
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations

APOLOGIES:

Councillors D. Blakebrough, R. Edwards, R. Harris, T.Thomas, A. Watts, D. Batrouni and M Fowler (Parent Governor Representative)

1. Election of Chair

County Councillor J. Pratt was elected as Chair.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chair

County Councillor M. Feakins was elected as Vice Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

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4. Final Budget Proposals

Purpose:

To scrutinise the Revenue and Capital Budget 2018/19 final proposals following public consultation.

Key Issues:

The Joint Select Committee met to consider the Councils response (savings) to the additional pressures identified during the budget process (most notably recurring overspends arising from month 7 revenue budget monitoring and the notification of APT&C pay award for 2018-19). The Joint Select meeting presented an opportunity for the proposals to be aired and scrutinised, as opposed to being agreed, which is a matter for full Council. The Joint Select meeting enabled discussion and challenge of the priorities across the range of services and therefore scrutiny of the budget.

The Cabinet Member for Resources, County Councillor P. Murphy provided a presentation on the budget proposals updated from the version consulted upon. The changes made were highlighted.

Cabinet Members were welcomed to the meeting to provide responses to questions specific to their portfolio area. Officers were present for clarification of technical points.

It was resolved to allow a contribution from a member of the public, Mr. A. Crowhurst, representing Monmouthshire-based disability support group, CAIR.

Member Scrutiny:

Following the Cabinet Member's presentation, questions and observations were invited.

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, County Councillor R. John responded to questions.

A Member asked, with the changes to Universal Credit due, if there were plans for the authority to transfer the administration of Free School Meals (FSM) to the Revenue Team as in Torfaen. One of the outcomes of that change has been a 12% increase in take up of FSM that effects an increase in Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG). It was responded that the authority is considering the same course of action and confirmed that children eligible for Free School meals they should receive them.

Disappointment was expressed at the £1 increase in fees for before school clubs to cover the child care element, noting that although some parents have well paid jobs, often other people experience hardship and for whom this facility is a great help. It was requested that consideration is given to ways of alleviating this pressure for families in most poverty. It was explained that this had been a difficult decision to take and the proposal had been reduced from £2 to £1 to be in the mid-range of charges made by other authorities. Impact on the most vulnerable families has been taken into account and children eligible for FSM will not pay the additional charge that begins in September.

It was questioned if anything can be done to mitigate the impact of the increase of 35p for school meals on families who are just about managing especially in addition to the before school club charge and increased council tax. It was suggested that the resulting cost due to the increase in school administrators' tasks related to the changes would prevent savings in real terms.

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The Cabinet Member provided assurance that the effect of the changes will be closely monitored and any adverse consequences to risk groups will be reviewed.

A Member raised the proposed savings in transport and questioned if any savings could be made in relation to transporting pupils out of county schools. The Cabinet Member explained that pupils receive free transport to their nearest or catchment school which may be out of county. No free transport is provided to out of county schools if there is space in the nearest school. If there is no space in the nearest school, the next nearest school is out of county or there are extenuating circumstances, free transport would be provided. The importance of driving up standards in county schools was emphasised and it was also noted that a catchment review will be undertaken later this year. The authority maintains provision of home to school transport above the statutory level due to the rural profile of the county.

The Head of Operations confirmed that a student wishing to attend a school other than the nearest or catchment school will be offered concessionary travel on an existing service if spaces are available. The space is charged for and the charge is included as a mandate.

A Member recognised the difficulties associated with parental choice but challenged the responses given particularly noting that we are subsidising other local authorities when a pupil elects to attend an out of county school they take the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) with them. There is therefore a need to maintain take up of school places particularly in areas of the county where they are in decline. It was accepted that there may be extenuating circumstances around special needs, however a guarantee was requested that wherever possible we do not provide transport out of Monmouthshire.

The Cabinet Member was aware that pupils are lost to out of county schools and was committed to retaining more pupils within county. It was clarified by a Member that intake at King Henry VIII Comprehensive School is not in decline.

The Leader supported the Cabinet Member that driving up standards to make schools a more desirable choice and the proposed catchment review is key but these actions may have limited impact in view of parental preference.

A Member raised the issue of the catchment of Chepstow School being eroded by neighbouring schools and questioned how this will be addressed. The Cabinet Member supported the right of parents to choose the best school for their child and referred to the need to work with Chepstow School to address the Estyn inspection recommendations. With regard to the issue of 21st C investment in Caldicot and Monmouth, £400,000 is budgeted to be equally split between King Henry VIII Comprehensive School and Chepstow School for IT investment to bring both up to standard and to be spent as they see fit.

A Member referred to new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) legislation in terms of future costs and demand, including high cost placements and provision within the county. It was asked if there are more pupils from out of county at Mounton House Special School. The Cabinet Member explained that the consultation on the ALN review will be announced at Cabinet next week but there would be no impact in this budget other than some savings from the end of some higher cost placements.

A Member questioned if the money to be invested in IT at Chepstow School might be better spent on refurbishing the Boys Toilets. The Cabinet Member agreed to investigate the concerns mentioned and will provide a response outside the meeting.

The Cabinet Member was thanked for his contribution to the meeting.

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The Chair of Adults Select Committee remarked that the proposed budget savings of £638,000 were not discussed at the committee's meeting on 10th January 2018. It was explained that the proposals were not finalised at that point. A written response was requested to confirm the exact savings. .

Considering Adults Services, Tony Crowhurst, representing CAIR, was welcomed to the meeting. He explained that he was interested in the Council's approach to the needs of disabled and elderly people in view of the proposed budget.

He expressed concern that, the Corporate Business Plan only named four of the nine protected characteristics, and one was inaccurately defined. Additionally there was reference to "Gender", which is not, in itself, a protected characteristic.

He referred to the consultation event for Active Travel proposals and noted that, of the 14 attendees, 8 were officers and questioned if the Council was consulting widely enough. CAIR's response to the plans for each town was that the needs of disabled people are not sufficiently taken into account citing the narrowness of pavements, obstructions such as A frames, plant pots etc. and no equality impact assessments had been included in the response for Welsh Government. He stated that the MonLive Business Plan made reference to actions and activities being DDA compliant which is not possible in reality and that references to legislation were out of date. No equality impact assessment included.

At the Access for All event, proposals were announced to reduce the budget for adult disability services by £638,000 with no specific information on which services would be lost. It was explained that dementia comes under the nine protected characteristics but Carers are not specifically mentioned, and there is a need to consider the needs of carers as the number of people with dementia increases.

Mr Crowhurst acknowledged that he had received a comprehensive response from the Head of Resources and that CAIR had prepared a briefing paper to circulate to other groups with a copy of the response. He referred to a key point that the £638,000 was incorrect and should be £200,000 and this had been incorrectly communicated at the Access for All events. He asked to be convinced that the Council adequately considers the needs of the increasing numbers of disabled, elderly and carers, that the same quality of services is maintained despite the savings to accommodate their complex needs.

The Chair thanked Mr. Crowhurst for his valuable contribution, and responses were made as follows:

- Regarding gender, sex and gender reassignment, the Deputy Chief Executive explained that, in terms of equality impact assessment, the authority utilises a process from the start of any new proposal and provided reassurance that, generally, a note is only made when there is an impact on a protected characteristic. The MonLive Business Plan is draft with the opportunity for review. It was added that frameworks are in place and enhanced training on equalities is available for members and officers.
- Regarding consultation on the Active Travel proposals, CAIR welcomed the suggestion of signage from arrival points to the most appropriate routes e.g. for wheelchair users in Usk and Chepstow. The Head of Operations confirmed that the Council, as per policy, works extensively with stakeholders e.g. regarding obstructions on travel routes. Responding to the request for better consultation, it was commented that the Active Travel event was widely advertised but improvements can always be made.

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- Considering the budget and the quote of savings of £638,000, the Cabinet Member clarified that this was a generic description and not specific proposals for adult disability services. The Head of Social Care, Safeguarding and Health explained that the figure quoted was savings to the overall adult social care budget linked to transformation of practice in supporting people to live their lives, not about cutting services. The range of services commissioned has been provided to Mr. Crowhurst.

It was added that the additional adult social care budget pressures more than offset the savings e.g. the need to fund quality social care for dementia, and the need to reflect the national living wage for carers.

The Leader thanked Mr. Crowhurst for his attendance recognising there are always things to learn noting that not including a nil impact may give the impression that some protected characteristics have been disregarded, and that this point should be revisited by Officers. The Leader welcomed the input of CAIR.

The Cabinet Member for Resources clarified that the actual figures in the original consultation were £638,000 which has now risen to £925,000 but there is also substantial investment of £1.642m investment.

The Cabinet Member for Enterprise observed that last year there was £600,000 in disability facility grants to improve the homes of people with disabilities to assist their independence. This has been increased by £300,000 for this year and the same is planned for next year. Mr. Crowhurst suggested that more lifetime homes should be built, and planning rules amended accordingly. He noted the £2.1m earmarked in last year's budget as a commitment to fair wages included a further £434,000 for 2018/19 and 2019/20 and questioned if the latter figure had been lost. He also referred to Welsh Government proposals advising councils not to make reductions of more than 0.5% in adults and children care budgets.

Regarding County Operations, a Member questioned the extra workload in relation to roads and new legislation on transport. The Head of Operations explained that there would be proposals for reorganisation to meet priorities within the department in due course. The importance for the county of the new train franchises, the need to compete for assets especially in view of City Deal was acknowledged and the valuable role of volunteer experts was recognised.

A Member questioned the change in hours for household waste sites and if there was any flexibility referring to queues on weekends. The Head of Operations clarified that there are peak times and the need to work with the contractor and welcomed suggestions from members accordingly. A Member questioned if reduced winter collections of green waste would increase demand at the waste sites. It was acknowledged that this may be the cause marginal increase at sites. It was confirmed that there is no facility to leave waste at sites when closed.

It was observed that far more consideration is needed on infrastructure. The Leader defended the heavy investment in education especially improvements to school stock for future generations.

A Member welcomed the savings to grass-cutting, sweeping etc. and questioned progress of the proposal for £250,000 additional staffing such as with apprenticeships. The Leader recalled that the motion was lost due to insufficient depth of information. The Head of Operations confirmed that the proposal was to introduce an additional £250,000 in staffing to the highways and grounds budget to enhance the services.

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Whilst commending the investment in schools, a Member referred to the list of anticipated capital pressures, quoting the £80m to maintain a safe road network and asked how the council plans for such expense. The Leader responded that this is an annual reminder of the funds needed and assists in the prioritisation of future plans, and emphasises the difficult choices ahead.

A Member raised the problems with the A466 Wye Valley. It was responded that a full survey is planned though the Monmouthshire sections and the Head of Operations agreed to explore funding options with Welsh Government. The impact of the removal of the Severn Bridge tolls on this and other roads was emphasised and it was suggested that the survey should therefore be wider.

Considering Governance and Staffing, a Member challenged the high level of staff absence, in comparison with other authorities, suggesting that this is an area that needs to be addressed. The Cabinet Member for Governance was aware of the issue and observed that the organisation runs very lean in comparison. The Chief Officer, Resources responded that training has been provided for managers to better manage sickness absence and predicted an improvement in sickness absence. The Cabinet Member for Resources noted that most sickness absence is related to stress and musculoskeletal problems and this is being looked at by the Health and Safety Group. Whilst the lean organisation may contribute to stress levels, training for managers is also being provided to recognise external factors that cause stress.

Regarding Regeneration, the Chair referred to stories in the press about the Borough Theatre , Abergavenny. The Cabinet Member explained that the Trust set up in 2013 can't carry on running the theatre and agreement has been reached that the Council will take control directly in the next few weeks. Cabinet will consider a report tomorrow.

A Member asked how reserve levels compared with other counties across Wales. The Chief Officer, Resources explained the difference between the General Reserve and Earmarked Reserves assuring that, whilst reserves are not high, the Council is in a comfortable position. In terms of earmarked reserves, the policy has been adjusted and efforts are made to have make one off use only and to replenish whenever possible.

The Leader referred to the imbalance in funding nationally and the consequent hardship for large rural authorities. The Council has a lower level of reserves (60% of the highest funded council) and has been prudent in retaining the reserves held whilst protecting services. A Member questioned what is likely to be an acceptable council tax ceiling making reference to the impact on the "squeezed middle". The Leader accepted that this year's rise of 4.95% had represented a dilemma but was in line with other councils. He predicted that this was likely to continue in future years with the option otherwise of reduce locally accessible services.

Committee Conclusions:

Whilst individual Select Committees have already scrutinised the budget proposals relevant to their portfolio area, today's meeting was an opportunity for the members of all Select Committees to directly challenge Cabinet Members on the final budget proposals.

The Select Committee Members asked questions of Cabinet members and Officers especially in terms of strategic risk and responsibility.

No alternative budget proposals were put forward by the opposition parties for consideration by Cabinet and Council.

The Joint Select Committee welcomed a contribution from a member of the public who attended the meeting representing Monmouthshire-based disability support group, CAIR, thanked him for his presentation and looked forward to working with him in future.

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5. Integrated Commissioning and Section Agreement for Care Homes for Older People in Gwent Region

Key Issues:

Partnership Agreement for Pooled Budget Arrangements for Care Homes for Older People in the context of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (2014) which sets out:

- Duties and expectations around partnership working.
- A Regional Partnership Board (RPB) comprising ABUHB, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen Local Authorities, 2 county voluntary service organisations and representatives of the regional citizen's panel and provider forum.
- The RPB will undertake an assessment of population health and social care need, and developing an area plan to meet those needs.

A major priority for the RPB is the development of arrangements to pool funds for care home arrangements and the establishment of a partnership agreement (Section 33 Agreement) to enable integrated commissioning and pooled funds for care home Accommodation to be in place by April 2018, subject to approval by all partners.

The Gwent region has been the pilot area for Wales to develop a Model Partnership Agreement (MPA) for pooled budget arrangements for older people.

The scope of the agreement, and its design principles, were aligned to the draft priorities for older people contained in the Population Needs Assessment (PNA) and the draft Area Plan which is currently the subject of consultation.

A 2016 national analysis of the current size and scope of the care home sector showed that in 2015/16 there were

- nearly 18,000 placements by local authorities and health boards, which included 4,877 placements of people funding their own care.
- There were 21,823 registered beds in care homes for older people on the census date and the combined local authority and health board spend was approximately £369 million excluding client contributions, third party payments and the fees paid by those individuals who fund their own care.

RPBs will be expected to develop written agreements concerning any formal partnership arrangements which involve a delegation of function. Partners can make arrangements for the establishment and maintenance of a 'pooled fund' which is made up of contributions from the partners to allow payments to be made towards expenditure incurred in the exercise of National Health Service functions or health-related (Local Authority) functions in arranging care for Older People (over 65) in Registered Homes. Any changes to this approach will require further approval by all partners to the agreement.

Initial market analysis, as at September 2017, shows there were a total of 95 care homes for older people in the Gwent region offering 3,363 beds. There is a mixture of sole providers that own and operate one home, medium sized providers that own and operate more than one home and a number of national companies that operate care homes across the region. Few homes are registered solely for residential, residential care for people with dementia, nursing or nursing

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care for people with dementia. Many homes offer a combination of beds, across all types of care e.g. dual registration for residential and nursing or dual residential and nursing care for people with dementia. Appendix 1.

Current risks and challenges in the care home sector

- An anticipated benefit is an integrated regional commissioning approach to care homes in a coherent, strategic approach which will support the sector in its medium and longer term business planning and mitigate the current risks the sector is experiencing.
- Recruitment and retention of registered general nurses and registered mental health nurses is becoming particularly challenging as is the recruitment and retention of registered managers and care staff.
- There is an increasing demand for care provision for older people with mental health conditions such as dementia, in both residential and nursing care homes, whilst there has been a decrease in demand for residential and nursing only provision.
- Across the region, older people are being supported to remain as independent as possible in their own homes for as long as they are able to. As a consequence people entering a care home for older people are now older and often require more complex care.
- Bed vacancies do not necessarily align with need as vacancies are often not in the required category of care or in the locality of need. Despite efforts to realign the market to better reflect need, the market can be slow to respond.
- There is evidence that the size, structure, age, layout and location of care homes across Gwent is having an impact on sustainability.
- Rising cost pressures is another a feature that threatens sustainability. It is anticipated that the incremental increases each year until 2020 in the National Living Wage, the growing costs of recruitment and retention, employee pension costs and other costs such as the purchase of equipment will continue to exert an upwards pressure on operating costs.
- Care home workers are also subject to registration from April 2018, although this will be phased in over several years. There is a need to plan for registration so it does not adversely impact on retention and recruitment.
- Risks and challenges that have been identified in relation to joint commissioning and pooled budgets for care home commissioning:
 - i. effective management of a Section 33 Agreement so that there is timely and sufficient local management information.
 - ii. ensuring partner budget management and reporting requirements are fully met. The size of the spend on this care provision means that this is vital.
 - iii. engaging providers in revised commissioning arrangements in due time and without compromising current provision.
 - iv. ensuring joint commissioning arrangements do not cut across individual commissioners care home fees setting arrangements (which are determined at organisational level and approved by each organisation).
- In order to mitigate the risks, the development of a Section 33 Agreement for care home placements draws on the experience and learning from the regional pooled budget arrangements put in place for the Gwent Frailty Programme (refreshed in 2016) and the Gwent Wide Integrated Community Equipment Service (GWICES). It is also recognised that this Section 33 Agreement will be on a much larger scale than anything that has been undertaken previously. This is one of the key reasons that the pooled fund recommended does not include a financial risk sharing arrangement at this stage.

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Member Scrutiny:

The Head of Social Care, Safeguarding and Health introduced the report and invited questions:

A Member questioned if the proposals would result in a reduction in care for dementia patients. The Head of Social Care, Safeguarding and Health stated that working together as a group of five authorities with the Health Board will provide opportunities through joint commissioning to redesign dementia care home facilities for the future.

The meeting ended at 12.38 pm