

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee held at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Thursday, 14th April, 2016 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor S. Jones (Chairman)
County Councillor S. White (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Dovey, D. Evans, J. Prosser and A. Wintle

Also in attendance County Councillor(s): R. Chapman, R.J.W. Greenland, P.A.D. Hobson, P. Jordan, P. Murphy and V. Smith

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Nicola Perry	Democratic Services Officer
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Peter Davies	Head of Commercial & People Development

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Martin Jones	Superfast Cymru Programme Manager
Susan Ward	Marketing Manager Superfast Cymru
Lee Gripton	Partnership Manager, Superfast Business Wales

APOLOGIES:

Councillors D. Edwards

1. Declarations of Interest

County Councillor S. Jones declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest under the Members Code of Conduct as a Director of the Welsh Retail Consortium.

County Councillor S. White declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest under the Members Code of Conduct as a member of Monmouth Town Council, and a family member is a blue badge holder.

County Councillor declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest under the Members Code of Conduct as a member of Abergavenny Town Council.

County Councillor D. Dovey declare a personal, non-prejudicial interest under the Members Code of Conduct as a member of Chepstow Town Council, and the Chamber of Commerce.

County Councillor D. Evans declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest under the Members Code of Conduct as a member of Caldicot Town Council.

2. Public Open Forum

There were no members of the public present.

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3. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Economy and Development Select Committee held on 3rd March 2016 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman, with the following amendment:

We acknowledged that the problems of the Velothon 2015 had been addressed and looked forward to the 2016 Velothon event.

4. Broadband and Superfast Business ICT Exploitation Programme - British Telecom invited to discuss progress of the programme

Superfast Cymru Update

We welcomed visitors from BT Superfast Cymru, who were in attendance to discuss progress of the programme.

The Head of People and Commercial Development highlighted that we were at an important stage of the Superfast Cymru roll-out, with around 15 months left on the contract. There was significant remaining infrastructure to be put in place, and officers were working closely with Welsh Government, BT and other providers to ensure connectivity.

Following a presentation from the Superfast Cymru Programme Manager Members were invited to comment and discuss.

The Chair noted that the presentation was a welcome follow on from an iCounty Item discussed at a previous meeting, and recognised the importance that in order to meet our aspirations under our digital strategy we need the infrastructure to be in place. The Chair then asked who had determined the intervention areas of the roll-out of the programme, and expressed that as a gateway to Wales, Monmouthshire would have liked to have been further up the plan.

In response we heard that Welsh Government had requested that all local authorities had submitted feedback on priorities, and due to the response time Monmouthshire had been a latter area to get started. There was also consideration of the way the infrastructure was built, Monmouthshire would be a later area for roll-out. The amount of people benefitting from FTTP (Fibre to the Premises) would have also meant Monmouthshire would have been at the back end of the programme.

A member raised a question regarding the lack of access to broadband. It was explained that there should be no reason for lack of access, and BT advisors would address any technical issues. There was a misconception that people would automatically get an increase in speed. This was not the case, as an order needed to be placed with the provider.

A Member expressed that the progress was pleasing, and added as a point of interest that Abergavenny was embarking on an Agri-Urban Project, a European project aimed at generating sustainability and innovation in the agricultural industry in Abergavenny town. It was stressed that the availability of broadband was a vital element of this project. Assurances were requested that, in respect of the updated pavements in the town centre, work would be inter-linked with MCC Operations department. In response, Members were reassured that BT would engage with the local authority prior to infrastructure works, resulting in extended planning periods, hence why projects may be delayed.

The Chair suggested that in order to improve communication, it would be beneficial for Councillors to receive correspondence of updates in their wards. The Head of Operations

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advised that as a Highway Authority we publish a weekly list of works within highways, and would ensure officers distributed this to Members accordingly.

The Cabinet Member for Enterprise expressed disappointment with regards to the comment made suggesting that MCC had not seemed interested in the uptake of the roll-out. We were informed that MCC had been at the forefront at the outset to ensure Monmouthshire were at the front of the programme. The Cabinet Member had met with the then director of BT Wales on at least two occasions to discuss the position on the roll-out. The Cabinet Member would be looking into the misunderstanding regarding the misinformation that there was a lack of enthusiasm from Monmouthshire. Mr Jones of BT explained that he may have mis-worded his comment and explained that Monmouthshire had always been at the forefront of build but when it came to identifying priority areas from a Welsh Government perspective, there were areas around growth zone which needed to be prioritised first.

The Cabinet Member for Community Development added that over the next 5 years with the takeover of EE, there would be a Quadplay provider, meaning internet, telephone, broadband and mobile coming together in one package. When it comes to enthusiasm for Monmouthshire, we would want Quadplay for all, and 5G, as we are not satisfied with 4G. Monmouthshire could be a rural example of how 5G can transform, and would be keen to be part of a pilot programme.

A Member raised concerns regarding old cabling restricting connections. In response we heard BT were building the infrastructure but were aware of issues on copper connection, which had been highlighted as a service issue.

A Member highlighted Llanbadoc as an area with very poor reception. We were asked to provide specifics which would be addressed.

A member stressed that with the growth of the technology industry in Chepstow, there was a keen need for the best possible services in order to develop industries. It was asked that this be recognised as prime importance.

In response to query regarding the new mast at Parkwall, we heard this was part of the AB Internet pilot scheme to provide broadband to the hardest to reach areas. The aim was to reach most of the 1500 households identified.

Susan Ward explained that anyone who requested it would receive a newsletter providing information on progress. Also a request could be made to receive notification as soon as fibre becomes available. The Chair suggested that this information should be made available to ensure that members of the public are aware of this registration process, funding from Welsh Government would be beneficial.

The Head of People and Commercial Development advised that all information would be pushed through social media, and would ensure that any e-shots be circulated to all Members.

In response to a request for clarification we heard that by the build was due to complete by June 2017, a 12 month extension due to the addition of 50,000 properties, with a 95% coverage. Monmouthshire was expected to be over 90%.

Superfast Business ICT Exploitation Programme

We received a presentation from Mr. L. Gripton, the Partnership Manager of Superfast Business Wales in order to provide the Committee with information on the five year fully funded

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programme by Welsh Government and Superfast Business Wales designed to work with Small and Medium Enterprises in order to help grow their business.

Following the presentation Members were invited to discuss and comment, during which time the following points were noted:

A Member expressed how people in agricultural areas would benefit greatly through this scheme. Members were welcomed to contact Mr. Gripton with further detail of groups and events in the Monmouthshire area.

We were advised of an Agri-Urban presentation that afternoon which would be beneficial for Mr. Gripton to attend. This would address networking with 10 towns throughout Europe.

In comparison to other authorities, we were informed that Monmouthshire was in line with the rest of Wales, and the enthusiasm seen from officers was very encouraging and outshone other authorities. As far as take up was concerned, Monmouthshire were at 25% of the services offered.

A member raised a concern that Caldicot may be at risk of missing opportunities and extended an invitation to the next Severnside Area Committee, and would encourage business owners to attend also.

The Head of People and Commercial Development would look into how best to ensure maximise awareness across Councillors.

A Member invited Mr. Gripton to the next meeting of Central Monmouthshire Area Committee.

The Chair thanked BT colleagues for their attendance and welcomed the opportunity to engage, key for ongoing communication with residents and businesses. Communication would continue in terms of resident, or business, issues.

The Chair concluded that the discussion with BT had been highly useful in clarifying the timescale and process for the rollout across Monmouthshire which would assist Members in advising their communities on progress. She advised that Members are receiving many requests for information on the likely completion of the rollout and that there is a need for clearer engagement with the public on expected timescales. The Chair highlighted the need to improve communication of progress of works within their wards and reminded Members that the Council publishes a weekly list of works within highways. She asked that this be distributed to Members by email each week.

The Chair reminded the Committee that whilst the rollout is progressing steadily, there remains a significant amount of infrastructure to be put in place and that this is a critical requirement for the Council if it is to achieve its aspirations in terms of its digital strategy. She highlighted that broadband is a fundamental requirement for key projects such as Abergavenny's Agri-Urban Project and that the success of such projects will hinge on the availability of broadband infrastructure.

The Committee supported the Cabinet Member's suggestion that there is a clear opportunity for Monmouthshire to become an example of how 5G can transform a rural area and offered their support to the Cabinet Member in taking forward the idea of Monmouthshire being part of a pilot programme.

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5. Car Parking Charges - Scrutiny of progress against recommendations made by the Select Committee - ALL MEMBERS INVITED

Context:

We received a report from the Head of Operations in order for Members to scrutinize the feedback arising from the statutory consultation exercise in relation to the proposed new car park order for MCC public car parks and comment as members see fit.

Key Issues:

In 2014 the Economy and Development Select Committee scrutinized proposals to introduce numerous changes to the MCC car parking regime.

Following scrutiny proposals went to Cabinet for approval in September 2014.

Various recommendations were approved (new car parks, increase in charges) including the drafting of a new car park order.

The proposed car park order has been published and is presently in a statutory consultation period, the formal consultation process closes on 22nd April 2016. The feedback from the consultation exercise showed a few predominant themes:

- Charging blue badge holders: 24 of the 62 pieces of correspondence have been received. The consistent response has been that to charge blue badge holders is unfair. In some instances mitigation has been suggested such as the first hour of parking being free.
- Creating short term (no return within 2 hours) car parks: The withdrawal of the opportunity to park all day in a short stay car park means that those wishing to park all day must now use an alternative car park which may be less convenient.
- Charging (Monday to Saturday) in Byefield Lane, Abergavenny: concern that this removes the only free car park in Abergavenny (other than Tuesday) resulting in those regularly using the car park moving to park on street to avoid charges.
- Charging for the station car park, Chepstow: concern that this might deter travellers from using the train and prompting drivers to park on street to avoid car park charges.

Member Scrutiny:

The Chair noted that a progress report would be received at future date. We were now given an opportunity to reflect upon the responses from the consultation. On the basis of the responses received today, Members should decide if they wish to comment further before the draft order is presented to Cabinet.

Members expressed concern surrounding the issue of blue Badge holders being charged for car parking, particularly as one of the Councils priorities is the protection of vulnerable people. In the Abergavenny area there were concerns from the police that this may result in parking on yellow lines, frustrating an already difficult situation. It was recommended that Cabinet reflect on the values, and contributions, and seriously reconsider the need to charge blue badge holders.

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The Cabinet Member for Community Development explained that the issue had been a struggle and after the previous meeting in 2014, Committee had agreed to the recommendation with a proviso that committee comments were included in the Cabinet report. Since the previous scrutiny Welsh Government had issued new criteria for blue badge holders, considerably tightening who can receive a badge. A full year set of figures show that 20-25% of renewals are being declined. We heard that Cabinet have serious reservations around introducing the charges and would be looking at the issue seriously again before making any final decisions.

We noted that through consultation responses there was concern regarding the position of payment machines. It was questioned if people needed to move to different car parks, would they have to pay each time. In response the Head of Operations highlighted the following points:

- Machines must be accessible and therefore would be replaced and improved. Money was to be re-invested into new machines to allow payment by different methods.
- The recommendation would be that blue badge holders would be able to move car parks on one ticket.
- Not all blue badge holders in Monmouthshire are from Monmouthshire.
- There are 7 authorities in Wales who apply a charge of some kind.

There were concerns regarding the qualification of people assessing if applicants met the criteria for blue badge.

A Member raised concern regarding the economic element in that not all blue badge holders are economically stretched and questioned how we could get to the point where the system was fair for all.

A Member requested clarification on the criteria for blue badge. The Cabinet Member explained automatic qualification related to any person on higher rate disability living allowance, Armed Service or Army Reserve Forces scheme due to medical retirement, severe sight impairment, and war pensioners mobility supplement. Discretionary qualification related to children under the age of three, disability in both arms, a severe cognitive impairment and walking disability.

A Member expressed that she did not support the recommendation but did welcome closer scrutiny on the issue of blue badges.

Members were keen to express concern for vulnerable people in Monmouthshire.

The Cabinet Member highlighted that there was concern surrounding the station car park at Chepstow. A proposal had been made by the ticket office which would be investigated further.

Recommendations:

The report recommended that Members note the contents of the draft car park order and the feedback arising from the consultation exercise.

Also, that Members reflect upon the outcome of their previous scrutiny and confirm if they wish to comment further as a result of the statutory consultation process.

Committee Conclusion:

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The Chair concluded that Members had commented sufficiently, and the focus had been around the blue badge issue, including the stress of the application process, affordability, enforcement.

In terms of the wider impact the Committee would welcome a progress report to ensure Members are updated.

Options would be investigated regarding Station Road, Chepstow to incentivise train users.

6. Economy and Development Select Forward Work Programme

We noted the next ordinary meeting would be Thursday 9th June 2016 at 2.00pm to discuss:

- Events update
- Monmouthshire Business and Enterprise Update
- Possible Chief Officer Annual Report

We confirmed a Business Breakfast would be held at County Hall, 4th May 2016.

7. To confirm the date and time of the next meeting

We noted the date of the next meeting as Thursday 9th June 2016, 2.00pm.

The meeting ended at 1.15 pm