

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of County Council held
at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Thursday, 23rd September, 2021 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor M.Feakins (Chairman)
County Councillor A. Webb (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: P. Clarke, D. Batrouni, J.Becker, L.Brown, L.Dymock, A. Easson, C.Edwards, R. Edwards, P.A. Fox, R.J.W. Greenland, M.Groucutt, L. Guppy, R. Harris, G. Howard, S. Howarth, R.John, L.Jones, P. Jones, S. Jones, P. Jordan, M.Lane, P. Murphy, P.Pavia, M. Powell, J.Pratt, R.Roden, V. Smith, B. Strong, T.Thomas, J.Treharne, J.Watkins, A. Watts, K. Williams and S. Woodhouse

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Matt Phillips	Chief Officer People and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Peter Davies	Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer, Resources
Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Frances O'Brien	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Julie Boothroyd	Chief Officer Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy and Governance

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors D. Blakebrough, A.Davies, D. Evans, J. Higginson, D. Jones, S.B. Jones and F. Taylor

1. Declarations of interest

None.

2. Public Questions

None.

3. Chairman's announcement and receipt of petitions

No petitions received.

4. Reports for Council:

5. SOCIAL CARE, SAFEGUARDING AND HEALTH ANNUAL DIRECTORS PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020/2021

The Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health presented the Annual Statutory Report on Performance 2020/21.

Members welcomed the presentation and were invited to comment.

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During discussion Members were keen to congratulate Julie Boothroyd, Chief Officer Social Care, Safeguarding and Health on her achievements, and wish her well in her retirement.

The Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health commended the excellent and inspirational report adding that it highlighted all that the Officer and her teams have accomplished, to the benefit of so many people.

Questions were raised regarding future-proofing Monmouthshire, considering the demographics. The Chief Officer responded that she is confident that we have an approach which is about futureproofing and ensuring communities are as resilient and strong as they can be. A suite of early intervention and prevention work is very strong and very driven.

With regards to Chepstow Community Hospital, the Chief Officer confirmed that we want to see as much maximised into the space as possible.

There are approximately 200 people in receipt of direct payments across the County. People often want to be in a position where they are in control of their own support. This is run by a small but passionate team and Council were assured that there is a good hold on this service.

There were concerns around the issue of bed-blocking and it was stated that we should find a way of providing more sustainable care at home.

Council resolved to accept the statutory report.

County Councillor Simon Howarth left the meeting at 14:56pm

6. GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

The Chair of Governance and Audit Committee was in attendance to present the Audit Committee Annual Report for 2020/2021.

In doing so we heard that the committee had met 5 times over the year and had fulfilled its role as determined in the terms of reference.

It was suggested that consideration be given to the extending membership of the committee to 15 or 16 members, to maintain political balance as well as the four co-opted members.

Council resolved to accept the report.

7. CORPORATE PLAN ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

The Leader presented the report to seek Council approval of the Corporate Plan Annual Report 2020/21. The report sought to ensure that members have a clear understanding of progress made against the aspirations within the Corporate Plan and the subsequent 'plan on a page' documents which have provided clear direction and accountability during the different stages of the pandemic.

The Leader of the Opposition expressed disappointment at the reality of the report, particularly noting the lack of qualitative measures in place.

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It was stated that there is a set of indicators at the end of each section demonstrating progress.

County Councillor Tudor Thomas highlighted concerns around the distribution of the levelling-up funding, stating that Abergavenny had received nothing from the funding. The Leader referred to the new school development in Abergavenny. The Cabinet Member for Social Justice was disappointed in the comment and highlighted the investments in Abergavenny Leisure Centre and Borough Theatre.

Members were keen to hear plans for Chepstow area.

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

That the Corporate Plan Annual Report 2020/21 be approved.

8. BOROUGH THEATRE, ABERGAVENNY- REFURBISHMENT PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Member for Social Justice and Community presented the report to seek approval for the proposed investment at the Borough Theatre, Abergavenny to ensure that the theatre remains fit for purpose for future generations and attractive to existing user groups and theatre goers.

There was wide support for the proposal and agreement that this was beneficial to the entire County, not just Abergavenny.

County Councillor Sheila Woodhouse declared a personal interest as part of an amateur theatre group that utilises the Borough Theatre. She provided detail of the history of the theatre and was keen to add her support.

County Councillor Martyn Groucutt, as Chair of Policy and Resources Committee, Abergavenny Town Council, expressed the Town Council had also contributed £50,000 to the theatre and entered into a long-term commitment to support the Melville Arts Centre.

The Leader of the Opposition expressed concern around the financial management and rationale of the proposal as opposed to other cultural opportunities across the County.

It was noted that there were increased costs due to the pandemic.

Upon being put the vote Council resolved to recommend the recommendation:

To support the proposed investment at the Borough Theatre, Abergavenny.

The Authority conclude discussions with Abergavenny Town Council regarding any further contribution to meeting the funding gap and the Council to underwrite any remaining shortfall.

In the event of the Council underwriting any remaining shortfall, that the Section 151 officer decides upon the most appropriate capital funding in the form of capital receipts or borrowing, and; in the event that borrowing is undertaken whether the service revenue budget or corporate financing budget will bear the associated financing costs.

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9. Notices of motion:

10. Submitted by County Councillor Kevin Williams

This council commends the contribution to community life by our young care leavers during their time in care. It acknowledges the positive impact we, as a council, can make to enhancing their lives upon leaving the care system and furthermore will continue to offer support and guidance to them after they Public Document Pack leave the care system, including the financial support they will need.

County Councillor Tudor Thomas seconded the motion and expressed how care leavers really need the support of Council. He explained the vulnerability of care leavers when they are catapulted into the wide world and added that suitable housing is a major issue and a vital part of the support Council could offer.

*County Councillor Phil Murphy left the meeting at 16:02pm
County Councillor Jez Becker left the meeting at 16:04pm*

The Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health explained that a main priority of the Corporate Parenting Strategy is to support all care leavers in education, training and employment to the age of 25. Care leavers have three personal advisors who provide advice and support in every aspect required.

The Leader of the opposition proposed an amendment:

This council commends the contribution to community life by our young care leavers during their time in care. It acknowledges the positive impact we, as a council, can make to enhancing their lives upon leaving the care system and furthermore will continue to offer support and guidance to them after they leave the care system, including the financial support they will need. ***Therefore, the Council welcomes the Welsh Government's announcement to pilot Universal Basic Income that will focus on care leavers and believes the Conservative administration should reverse its decision to prevent Monmouthshire care leavers to be part of any pilot.***

The Cabinet Member felt unhappy to support the motion without adequate information.

Upon being put to vote the amended motion was defeated and debate returned to the original motion.

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

11. Submitted by County Councillor Jane Pratt, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Neighbourhood Services

This Council calls upon Welsh Government to accelerate the provision of a railway station at Magor, to link up the M48 with a new junction to service Severn Tunnel Junction and make public transport links and hubs for buses, trains, cyclists and cars at our railway stations a priority. Time has passed and our response to the climate emergency needs to see a greater sense of urgency and more progress from Welsh Government if we are to get people out of their cars and onto public transport.

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County Councillor Richard John seconded and endorsed the motion.

County Councillor Dimitri Batrouni proposed and amendment:

This Council calls upon Welsh Government ***to continue to work with all interested parties*** to accelerate the provision of a railway station at Magor, to link up the M48 with a new junction to service Severn Tunnel Junction and make public transport links and hubs for buses, trains, cyclists and cars at our railway stations a priority. Time has passed and our response to the climate emergency needs to see a greater sense of urgency and more progress from Welsh Government if we are to get people out of their cars and onto public transport; ***and in recognising such urgency and demonstrating this Council's commitment to tackling climate change, the Council calls upon the Conservative administration to support Welsh Government's policy of no more road building in Monmouthshire and Wales.***

The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services and Infrastructure did not support the amendment as one of the things to be done in order to provide a fast bus road from M48 to Severn Tunnel Junction would involve building a road.

Upon being put to the vote the amended motion was defeated and debate returned to the original motion.

The Cabinet Member for Social Justice and Community welcomed the motion and highlighted it as a quick fix for WG. It would also see a decrease in traffic on the B4245.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was carried.

12. Submitted by County Councillor Dimitri Batrouni

For Monmouthshire County Council to work with other local Gwent authorities to help secure funding for sign language courses for Gwent families with hearing impaired children.

Seconded by County Councillor Martyn Groucutt.

The Cabinet Member for Education commended the timeliness of the motion with it being International Day of Sign Languages and was supportive of the motion.

He advised that WG is rolling out a BSL GSCE in the new curriculum from 2022, and while this will raise awareness of deaf community and deaf culture it is very different to achieving skilled language proficiency. However, it is hopeful that it would encourage those skills being achieved over the long term.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was carried.

13. Members Questions:

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14. From County Councillor Tony Easson to County Councillor Paul Pavia, Cabinet Member for Education

There are 30 primary and the 4 secondary schools in Monmouthshire, which suggests that there are about 400 School Governors. What is the actual number of Governors, and how many of those Governors had DBS checks in place at the start of the new school year?

The Cabinet Member responded that MCC is the only authority in Gwent that requires all its school governors to have a DBS check. This is done as it is part of our volunteering policy. There are currently 450 governors in post, 53 vacancies and as at this week there are 370, being 82% who have a current DBS check. A further 50, 11%, have a DBS application in process. This leaves 16, 4%, without a current DBS and we are working with those schools to understand this figure and to understand why the DBS checks are outstanding.

As a supplementary Councillor Easson asked who is responsible for monitoring the system and if the system is still fit for purpose.

In response the Cabinet Member agreed to clarify in a written response.

14.1. From County Councillor Tony Easson to County Councillor Jane Pratt, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Neighbourhood Services

With the Queens Jubilee approaching in 2022, I have been asked by constituents who wish to organise street parties next summer. I ask Cllr Pratt therefore, if logistic arrangements can be developed by Highways early rather than late, so that interested residents can plan ahead. These need to be developed by New Year at least.

The Cabinet Member responded that the matter of Platinum Jubilee celebrations had been discussed at the Event Safety Advisory Group on 2nd September 2021 and the extended bank holiday commences on 2nd June 2022. The most likely date for street parties is thought to be Sunday 5th June 2022. She agreed that earlier preparations would be encouraged, and previous advisory material prepared for the Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 2012 will be updated. Anyone interested in arranging a party next year will be signposted to this guidance, which will provide information on applying for a road closure, temporary event notices, food safety. MCC Event Safety Advisory Group are discussing this approach with other groups within the Gwent region to ensure a consistent and fair approach to all, and where possible events will be encouraged in light of their positive impact on bringing local communities together. The revised guidance will be published prior to Christmas.

As a supplementary Councillor Easson presented a potential problem with access and questioned if it would be more advisable to hold celebrations on both Saturday and Sunday?

In response, the Cabinet Member agreed that the logistics would have to be discussed and local communities will need to liaise with each other.

15. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd July 2021

The meeting ended at 5.20 pm