

# MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of County Council held  
at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Thursday, 27th January, 2022 at 2.00 pm**

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

County Councillors: D. Batrouni, J.Becker, D. Blakebrough, L.Brown, A.Davies, L.Dymock, A. Easson, C.Edwards, R. Edwards, D. Evans, P.A. Fox, M.Groucutt, L. Guppy, R. Harris, J. Higginson, G. Howard, S. Howarth, R.John, D. 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. Watts and S. Woodhouse

## **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Matt Phillips	Chief Officer People and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Alan Burkitt	Policy Officer Equalities and Welsh Language
Peter Davies	Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer, Resources
Jane Rodgers	Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
John Pearson	Local Democracy Manager
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Frances O'Brien	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy and Governance
Mark Hand	Head of Place-making, Housing, Highways and Flood

## **APOLOGIES:**

County Councillors R.J.W. Greenland, L.Jones and K. Williams

### **1. Declarations of interest**

County Councillor Dimitri Batrouni declared a personal, prejudicial interest in relation to 7.3 as this involves discussion on an issue that comes under the remit of his employment.

### **2. Public Questions**

None.

### **3. Chairman's announcement and receipt of petitions**

The Chairman opened the meeting and reflected on Holocaust Memorial Day, and also the passing of dear friend and colleague, County Councillor Peter Clarke.

Members of Council expressed sadness and condolences and took the opportunity to share memories of County Councillor Clarke. A period of silence followed.

Petitions presented:

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County Councillor Dimitri Batrouni presented a petition on behalf of Chepstow and Bulwark residents in relation to the lack of consultation on the closure of Chepstow High Street.

County Councillor Debby Blakebrough presented a petition on behalf of residents North Community in the Trellech United ward. The petition sought a reduction of speed limit, to below the 60mph national limit.

### **4. Reports to Council:**

#### **4.1. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2022/23**

The Cabinet Member for Resources introduced the report to present arrangements for the implementation of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and to approve it for 2022/23

Council was asked to agree to adopt the amendments to the Regulations, proposed by Welsh Government, as detailed in point 3.7 and affirm that annual uprating amendments will be carried out each year without a requirement to adopt the whole Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

**Upon being put to the vote Council resolved to accept the recommendations:**

**To note the making of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Prescribed Requirements (Wales) Regulations ("the Prescribed Requirements Regulations") 2013 by the Welsh Government on 26 November 2013.**

**To adopt the provisions within the Regulations above ("the Prescribed Requirements Regulations") and any 'annual uprating regulations' in respect of its Scheme for the financial year 2022/23 including the discretionary elements previously approved as the Council's local scheme from 1 st April 2022.**

### **5. IMPLEMENTING THE SOUTH EAST WALES CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEE**

The Leader of the Council presented the report to set out an interim governance and delivery model sufficient to implement the statutory requirements for establishment of the South-East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC). The report sought to set out the 'twin-track' approach to operating the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) City Deal alongside the initial 'bare minimum' phase of CJC mobilisation ahead of the SE Wales CJC setting its first statutory budget on 31 January 2022.

Council was appraised of the next phases of progress in line with resolving the current barriers to full implementation of an integrated 'lift and shift' approach which seeks to eventually, bring together the CCR City Deal and the CJC into one coherent model of regional economic governance.

Members encouraged updates on the City Deal, and the Leader was urged to ensure Members were involved as decision makers.

Reassurance was sought over the governance of the committee, and the Chief Executive Officer explained that scrutiny is still in a formative stage, but there would be a regional scrutiny function.

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

**That Council**

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**Notes the interim governance and delivery model for implementation of the SE Wales Corporate Joint Committee and the 'twin track' arrangements proposed across operation of CCR City Deal, alongside initial enactment of a 'bare minimum' CJC – and until such time the proposed 'lift and shift' approach can occur**

**Notes the requirement for the CJC to set and approve a budget on or before 31 January 2022 and the steps set out in the report to enable this**

**Notes the risks and issues set out in the report which require ongoing monitoring, mitigation and management**

**Notes the request made by CCR of WG to amend the CJC regulations to change the date on which immediate duties commence under the Regulations from 28 February 2022 to 30 June 2022**

**Notes the draft Standing Orders at Appendix 1 which set out the initial requirements and operating model for the CJC as well as initial business for the inaugural meeting on 31 January 2022**

**Notes the work ongoing by CCR and its constituent Councils to work with WG, Audit Wales and advisors as appropriate, to help inform resolution of the remaining issues wherever possible.**

**Supports the Leader of the Council in his duty to consider and set the first budget of the SE Wales CJC on 31 January 2022 in order to ensure the Council is complying with the legislation as required.**

## **6. RESPONDING TO INSUFFICIENCIES WITHIN THE PROVIDER MARKET FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH COMPLEX NEEDS**

The Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health presented the report to set out a proposal that allows Council to respond flexibly and promptly to emergency situations that arise to safeguard children and young people with very complex needs when there are no available 'looked after child' placements within the provider market.

The Cabinet Member for Resources considered the proposal an effective use of resources.

The Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health assured Members that in-house accommodation would ensure children and young people have access to their families, friends and education.

It was expressed that the role of Corporate Parent should ensure that no child is forgotten, even if placed out the County. Care must be taken to ensure that young people are well looked after.

The Chief Officer explained that some children are placed out of County as it is in keeping with their individual needs. Numbers could be provided following the meeting.

**Upon being put to a vote Council resolved to accept the recommendations:**

**Council agrees to establish £2m borrowing headroom to enable specific property acquisition and remodelling to take place and where the Council is unable to identify suitable supply in the provider market for children and young people with very complex needs.**

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The Chief Officer Social Care and Health's delegated power to "secure" accommodation for children looked after, when necessary, includes the ability to purchase appropriate property or land following an appropriate business case and consultation with the Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health. 2.2 Delegated authority is given to the Deputy Chief Executive / Chief Officer for Resources (as S151 officer of the Council), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources, to consider business cases that look to draw on the borrowing headroom for the stated purpose.

The Council continues to work in partnership with Welsh Government, the Aneurin Bevan Health Board, Registered Social Landlords and other Local Authorities, such as to secure funding and/or suitable alternative provision that would look to mitigate or avoid the need for the borrowing headroom to be drawn upon.

The decision reports and business cases that support any properties acquisitions made and that fall within the circumstances outlined in this report are reported into the next available meeting of the Children and Young People's Select Committee.

## **7. Motions to Council:**

### **8. Submitted by County Councillor Martyn Groucutt**

*This council acknowledges that many families in Monmouthshire will soon find themselves facing increasing financial hardship. Consequentially this will also lead to increases in wider social, Public Document Pack emotional, and medical difficulties that will have the potential to blight the lives of residents and their families. The dramatic increases in the cost of fuel for cooking, and for heating and lighting our homes, the significant rise in the rate of inflation, and increases in some taxation from the start of April will put huge financial pressure on domestic budgets that has the potential to create a social crisis across our county.*

*Council welcomes the current Money Matters campaign, but also believes that we need to use emerging data coming from this and from other relevant evidence gathered from agencies such as Citizens' Advice, Mind Monmouthshire, and the Abergavenny Community Enterprise Centre in order to make the best possible response. It might also be possible to gather useful information from organisations such as the Bevan Foundation on the wider impacts of the developing cost of living crisis.*

*Council commits itself to respond to this potential crisis, and to working with other relevant groups and agencies. This will allow officers to best identify the main causes of immediate financial hardship, identifying communities that are being most severely affected and the groups who are being most damaged, as well as other, wider consequences of increasing financial hardships across the county.*

*Officers will report to council over the course of this year on ways in which they have developed their response to the crisis and how they have measured its effectiveness. This will include informing council on the ways in which support has being targeted to meet identified need, and the ways in which professionals from the range of agencies have collaborated to bring about the most effective response possible*

Seconded by County Councillor Lisa Dymock, Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing and Social Justice, added that the serious impact of the cost of living on households is recognised and the increased costs of fuel and utilities will affect the least well off the hardest. She highlighted the following areas where MCC are providing help:

- Through the provision of local benefits

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- Through help to claim Universal Credit
- Providing support to find work
- To improve skills to help people into better paid employment
- Through tailored advice and guidance

There was disappointment that a previous motion asking that Council write to Government to express concern around the removal of the Universal Credit uplift had not been better supported. However, it had been carried with opposition votes.

The Cabinet Member for Economy commended County Councillor Groucutt on bringing the motion to Council, and the Cabinet Member for her work in this area.

**Upon being put to a vote the motion was carried.**

#### **9. Submitted by County Councillor Tudor Thomas**

*It is imperative that all select committee chairs are provided with relevant and up-to-date information on all areas of a committee's portfolio particularly CYP on looked after children.*

County Councillor Dimitri Batrouni declared a prejudicial interest and left the meeting.

Seconded by County Councillor Martyn Groucutt.

County Councillor Paul Jordan proposed an amendment:

*It is imperative that all select committee chairs **continue to be** provided with relevant and up-to-date information, **where appropriate**, on all areas of a committee's portfolio particularly CYP on looked after children.*

Seconded by County Councillor Jane Pratt who referred to her time as Select Committee Chair and considered the scrutiny function to be first class

The amended motion was accepted and became the substantive motion.

The Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health was reassured that all our children and young people who were looked after, receive stable and excellent foster care, and their well-being is protected.

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

#### **10. Submitted by County Councillor Armand Watts**

*This Council agrees that it is immoral and unfair for employees to be fired and rehired. This motion requests that Monmouthshire County Council takes steps to end fire and rehire in the workplace. It looks to prevent the practice within the local authority and avoid entering into contracts with businesses known to use the tactic, where legally possible.*

Seconded by County Councillor Tudor Thomas.

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The Cabinet Member for Resources stated that there was no evidence that MCC fires and rehires employees whether directly or via third parties. He reassured Council that there had been no wholesale changes to terms and conditions during the pandemic.

**Upon being put to a vote the motion was defeated.**

**11. Members Questions:**

**12. From County Councillor Anthony Easson to County Councillor Jane Pratt, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Neighbourhood Services**

*After many months of waiting a clear response, would Cllr Pratt update me on progress for the following matters. Firstly, in relation to requests by Caldicot Town Council to install two redundant bus shelters along Woodstock Way, Caldicot. Both funded by the Town Council.*

The Cabinet Member thanked County Councillor Easson for his question and responded:

Officers had made arrangements for the bus shelters to be installed, but this has been paused to ensure the bus shelters are considered comprehensively as part of the Active Travel and Safe Routes study for the Mill Lane and Woodstock Way area. This study is looking at improving the area surrounding the schools and leisure centre including the location of crossings on Woodstock Way, a matter raised in a previous Council meeting by Councillor Easson.

This Active Travel study is ongoing. An initial stakeholder workshop was held earlier this month. The draft WelTAG1 study is expected this week to help support our bid for Welsh Government funding in 2022/23, which must be submitted on Monday. Although this study is not specifically about the bus stops, we think it is wise to consider the location of the bus stops alongside new crossing points and other possible improvements in this area. Local Members and the wider community will be involved in these proposals as they emerge.

As a supplementary County Councillor Easson asked that the Cabinet Member takes personal responsibility to ensure actions are taken forward.

The Cabinet Member respected the comments and added that it is important to consult local residents and the public, and if we have information that makes it clear that residents think the bus stops are not in the right place, it would be wrong of us to have already moved them. We need to make sure we have all the information from the consultation before we make the decision.

**13. From County Councillor Anthony Easson to County Councillor Jane Pratt, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Neighbourhood Services**

*Would Cllr Pratt update me on progress made so far to bring the pedestrian crossings at both Sandy Lane, and Church Road back into proper working order? Both were installed as part of the "Safe Routes to school" when Castle Park School was opened. Both crossings should be fully maintained for the reasons that they were installed.*

The Cabinet Member thanked County Councillor Easson for the question and explained that Sandy Lane is a straight-forward repair and has been passed to the contractor to carry out the work. She continued to report that Officers had been on site at Church Road the previous day but unfortunately the beacons had failed to work. Officers will return next week when

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transformers have been delivered. The Cabinet Member arrange a meeting between County Councillor Easson and officers to ensure the Member is kept fully informed.

As a supplementary, County Councillor Easson asked that County Councillor Joanne Watkins be involved as the Ward Member.

#### **14. From County Councillor Tudor Thomas to County Councillor Jane Pratt, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Neighbourhood Services**

*Can the Cabinet Member clarify why the policy change has been made regarding keeping street name signs in English only and not over a period of time providing bilingual street signs across the authority. Monmouthshire is an authority in Wales and this change of policy will have a negative effect on the Welsh Language in the authority.*

The Cabinet Member thanked County Councillor Thomas for his question and responded that the Welsh language is an important part of the culture and heritage of our county. As a council we remain committed to ensure that new street names are Welsh only or bilingual. She added that she is very proud of the work done by our Street Naming Officer and Welsh Language Policy Officer who work closely to ensure that new street names reflect the Welsh history of the area rather than being translations of generic English language street names.

Our existing policy required updating as it mentioned the old Welsh Language Act 1993 which has been superseded by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and contained a reference to say that we were awaiting the Code of Practice from the Welsh Language Commissioner to inform our approach to the translation of *existing* street names. To clarify, the change made relates only to cases when existing street nameplate signs are damaged and need to be replaced. The update to the policy was carried out and is now fully compliant with the Welsh Language Standards.

Some press reports had inferred that Monmouthshire was alone in deciding that it would not translate existing street names which are currently in one language. One of our stated aspirations was to achieve a consistency of approach in South East Wales. Alongside our Gwent neighbours, those adopting the same approach to existing street names include Conwy, Denbighshire, Powys and Carmarthenshire.

The Cabinet Member concluded that we were not watering down our commitments on new street names and an examination of new street names can confirm that this is an authority which embraces the language, culture and heritage of Wales.

As a supplementary County Councillor Thomas asked if the change in policy reflected the deep seated negative of the Conservative Administration to the use of Welsh in everyday life in Monmouthshire?

The Cabinet Member responded that Welsh is a growing language in Monmouthshire and we are currently consulting on a new Welsh Language strategy that looks to capitalise on this and contribute to the Welsh Government's ambition for one million Welsh speakers by 2050. Last year Cabinet committed to increase the translation budget by more than 20%. We have worked with a local firm to develop the first bilingual local authority chatbot in Wales, which has now been taken up by other councils. The MyCouncil services app is fully bilingual, and a translator is being commissioned by the digital team to continue improvements.

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We have over 2500 streets in Monmouthshire, translating them accurately and sensitively is not a quick process. If a member of the public uses a Welsh version of a street name which had not been added to the Gazetteer, it could cause problems to the service. We are committed to ensure that Welsh street names are recorded properly on the Gazetteer for all our partners to access when needed.

### **15. Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2021 were approved.

In doing so the following amendment was noted to item 6.3:

The other 20mph zones agreed for this financial year are in Devauden, Mathern, Monmouth, Wyesham, Mynydd Bach, **Shirenewton** and two areas of Chepstow. The 21 day consultation period for these traffic orders will commence in early February 2022. Provided there are no objections raised that cannot be resolved, the 20mph zones will be implemented in March 2022.

### **16. Next Meeting: 3rd March 2022**

Noted.

**The meeting ended at 5.00 pm**