

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Thursday, 19th January, 2023 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor Laura Wright (Chair)
County Councillor Ann Webb (Vice Chair)

County Councillors: Tony Kear, Catrin Maby, Jan Butler, Ian Chandler, Sara Burch, Alistair Neill, Su McConnel, Mary Ann Brocklesby, Fay Bromfield, Jane Lucas, Emma Bryn, Peter Strong, Paul Griffiths, Jackie Strong, Rachel Garrick, Maria Stevens, Steven Garratt, Angela Sandles, Ben Callard, John Crook, Tomos Davies, Dale Rooke, Catherine Fookes, Sue Riley, Jayne McKenna, Jill Bond, Louise Brown, Lisa Dymock, Tony Easson, Christopher Edwards, Martyn Groucutt, Simon Howarth, Richard John, David Jones, Penny Jones, Malcolm Lane, Phil Murphy, Paul Pavia, Maureen Powell, Frances Taylor, Tudor Thomas, Armand Watts and Rachel Buckler

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
Jane Rodgers	Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Frances O'Brien	Chief Officer, Communities and Place
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy and Governance

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors Meirion Howells

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 1st December 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 1st December 2022 were confirmed as an accurate record with the following addition to agenda item 7:

The ward members for St Kingsmark, Mount Pleasant and Shirenewton felt unable to support the plan due to the lack of progress in relation to several areas of infrastructure, impacting on traffic congestion, education provision, and healthcare provision; before any further substantial housebuilding in the Chepstow and surrounding area should be considered. They felt that Chepstow and its surrounding area has long needed vital investment in several areas of infrastructure and has already contributed a significant number of new homes to the county in the original plan period, the impact of which has yet to be felt but can only increase congestion, pollution and demand on already overstretched services.

2. Declarations of interest

County Councillor Paul Pavia declared a non-prejudicial interest in relation to agenda item 6a, as a self-employed public affairs consultant who has worked with Practice Solutions who are undertaking the commissioned work for My Day My Life.

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3. Public Questions

Members of the public were in attendance to present questions in relation to item 6.1: The Call In of Tudor Street Day Centre.

4. Chairs Announcement

Members paid tribute to former County Councillor, Town Councillor David Evans who had recently passed.

The Leader of the Council offered her thanks and respect to the efforts of colleagues through recent flood issues.

The Deputy Leader reported, with regret, the UK Government announcement on the allocation of Levelling-Up funding did not include any of the three bids submitted by MCC. UK Government announced that there will be a further round of bids but as yet there is no timetable. The Deputy Leader suggest that a single bid should be made at the next round of bids and alternative funding routes would be sought in the meantime.

The Cabinet Member for Education delivered a statement regarding strikes announced by members of the National Education Union in Wales, dates being 1st and 14th February 2023 and 15th and 16th March 2023 adding that the administration were aware of the difficulties this would cause families across Monmouthshire, and the disruption to learners.

Through the current budget MCC afforded funding equivalent to 3% of teachers costs to meet the expected teacher pay award. The Independent Welsh Pay Review Body determined a pay award of 5% which was agreed by the Minister in November 2022. That remaining 2% was met by schools, from their reserves.

The new draft budget proposes to cover the remaining cost of the 5% award from April to August 2024, and a modelled assumption for 2023-24 of 3.5%.

He added that teachers were not required to disclose their trade union membership, or whether they would be participating in forthcoming industrial action. MCC await WG guidance on the proposed industrial action and will move forward inline with the guidance. It was hoped that the dispute could be resolved as quickly as possible so that any further disruption to education is minimised.

5. Council Reports:

6. REPORT OF THE PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: CALL-IN OF TUDOR STREET DAY CENTRE

The Chair of People Scrutiny Committee presented the report in order to refer the Individual Cabinet Member Decision taken on 30th November 2022 on Tudor Street Day Centre to full Council, as the formal outcome of the calling in of the decision and the subsequent scrutiny undertaken by the People Scrutiny Committee at the Special Meeting held on 3rd January 2023. The report sought to provide Council with an overview of the public contributions to the scrutiny process via the Public Open Forum, prior to presentation of the Call-in and the subsequent debate by the committee held on 3rd January 2023.

The Chair read questions submitted by members of the public:

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Can the Council give an assurance that the Tudor Street building in question will be reopened to provide a service for adults with learning disabilities unless and until alternative provision is made which is considered to be acceptable by service users?

My Day My Life has been open for decades you are letting the people of Abergavenny down. Abergavenny won't have its original creations, like they did. Where is the next landmark of disabled friendly place, as I don't see one in Abergavenny?

The admission by Councillors Tudor Thomas and Sarah Burch at the Scrutiny Committee on 3rd January that the WC facilities for people with severe disabilities in Abergavenny are completely inadequate is just one reason why a service "in the community" will not work for everyone. Given that people with a wide range of complex care needs and their families have been without a much valued service for more than 2 years, surely the Tudor Street Centre should be reopened without delay for a minimum of three days a week while the review and wider deliberations continue?

Can you outline the specific ways in which learning disabled people have been informed about and engaged with directly up to this point please? Can you outline the ways in which you will do this in the future?

Why they chose to get rid of a building before asking people in reviews if they wanted to still use it? The scrutiny committee agreed that this should have gone to full committee, not be one man's decision, and our petition to save the centre has reached over 900 signatures. Surely that shows what this place means to the community and from these statistics it's clear Tudor Street Centre needs to stay. People want this hub. When Tudor Thomas said the number of people using Tudor Street had decreased, I think this is inaccurate. In 2014 I was still working there, and I worked with a lot of service users then. Also, Adults with complex disabilities had been moved from Coed Glas to use Tudor Street and now they have nothing. This isn't acceptable. These people need somewhere safe and warm to spend their day within our community.

Why were vulnerable people not supported during the pandemic and since coming out of lockdown not been allowed back to Tudor Street? Adults with learning difficulties and mental health problems should be supported. That Hub is the perfect place to have to develop activities and social interaction with people in a safe environment. It has disability access, and disabled toilet facilities. Vulnerable people should have a choice to spend their day in and out of the community. There needs to be somewhere vulnerable people can go when it's raining to spend time with their friends.

What other facilities in the area of Abergavenny have everything that is required for disabled people to use.

To enable people with severe disabilities to be out in the community rather than at the Tudor Street site, community locations will need to offer specialist toilet facilities. These would feature not only accessible toilets, but also adult-sized changing benches, hoists, curtains, and space for carers. Is the Council confident that sufficient toilet facilities of this type will be built around the community? Otherwise, despite best intentions, service users who could previously attend the Tudor Street site may not be able to leave home.

County Councillor Tudor Thomas, the Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health Services was grateful to those in attendance and was pleased to hear their views. He went on to explain that the closure of the centre was part of a wider review of facilities. The review commenced in October 2022 and was due to close in March 2023, at which point a report would be taken to Scrutiny Committee for consideration, after which it would be taken as a full Cabinet decision.

The following points were highlighted in response to the questions raised:

- The current My Day My Life review will make recommendations for the future of the service including the buildings. It was not possible to commit to the reopening until the review is published.

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- My Day My Life came into being in 2014 and the ethos of My Day My Life is to be fully involved in communities, and not only about accessible buildings.
- The centre had been limited to 3 days per week, since March 2020, and support in the community has been provided through a number of different activities.
- It was accepted that there were no other changing facilities other than the Leisure Centre and that should be looked into.
- The review would cover a number of buildings.
- Tudor Street Centre has a tracked hoist which could be transferred to another location.

Members of the public were invited to ask supplementary questions which highlighted the ongoing concerns of the service users, and their families.

People were assured that there is no development or planning in place, and nothing would be considered until the review had been published and been considered at Scrutiny and Cabinet.

We heard that the building is not in a good enough conditioned to be re-opened and would have to be recommissioned.

In response to a comment around the lack of easy read documents it was confirmed that the review outcome would be published in an easy read version and a conversation could be had with Practice Solutions around other easy read material.

The Chair reminded the chamber that the matter would come back for future scrutiny and invited Members to comment.

- There was disappointment regarding the decision process, and it was not considered an appropriate decision for a single Cabinet Member.
- My Day My Life is about empowering people, and this process has had the opposite effect.
- The decision was undemocratic and immoral and could be open to legal challenge.
- Clarification was sought around the wording in the review regarding service users.
- There was disappointment that the facility had been earmarked for closure.
- Members need to see a full and detailed review.
- It was important to take accessible public transport into consideration when making the decision.
- Families of service users had expressed their disappointment to Members which was expressed in the Chamber.
- Was the review just a paper exercise given that the decision had been made before the review was completed?
- Why had there not been a quicker decision to why the centre had not re-opened?
- There was still a need to provide a central, safe, and fully accessible and equipped venue to support people with complex needs in North Monmouthshire and as per the request from users, Tudor Street should be reopened and operational whilst due process takes place.
- A lack of pre-decision scrutiny.
- A weak integrated (Equalities and Future Generations) assessment which failed to highlight all the potential disproportionate negative impacts on people with complex physical and or learning disabilities and users with mental health issues. Disability is a protected characteristic under the equalities act 2010.
- There had been no formal and comprehensive engagement and consultation on the specific matter of Tudor Street Hub.
- Service users should be fully involved in developing and shaping the future service offer.

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County Councillor Mary Ann Brocklesby, Leader of the Council thanked the public in attendance for their contributions. She apologised and admitted that they had got the process wrong. She added that the call-in process had shown how democracy should work and how all comments should form part of the review. County Councillor Brocklesby stated that no action would be taken, and no proposals would be looked at until the review is complete, published and debated, and current and future needs were addressed.

County Councillor Tudor Thomas joined the Leader in apologising and regretted the decision being taken ahead of the review.

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

That Council considers the discussion held at the People Scrutiny Committee and refers the decision to Cabinet for reconsideration.

7. COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE PLAN

The Leader, County Councillor Mary Ann Brocklesby presented the report to seek approval of a new Community and Corporate Plan that sets the direction for the Council and County of Monmouthshire, articulating the authority's purpose and priorities alongside the steps we will take to deliver these, the accountable Cabinet member and the measures that will be used to track progress.

Seconded by County Councillor Ben Callard who added that focus on active travel, walking and cycling, would be a great help in his ward of Llanfoist & Govilon.

The Leader of the Opposition welcomed the revised document considering it heading in the right direction but still lacking substance. He commended the section on supporting people from Ukraine and was proud of the significant contribution that Monmouthshire has made. County Councillor John highlighted many areas of concern within the plan.

County Councillor Catherine Fookes, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement commended the plan stating that many of the actions will support reducing inequality.

There was frustration around a lack of information on the education workforce and the lack of vision on early years provision.

There was disappointment around the lack of tangible actions in the Severnside area.

It was thought that too much detail could be off-putting, but a simple mention of places would cover anomalies and residents may then feel included.

Upon being put to a recorded vote Council resolved to refuse the recommendations:

That Council approve the Community and Corporate Plan.

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That Council adopt the six goals in the plan as the Council's Well-being Objectives in accordance with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

That Council receive the provisional measures and targets which feature as an appendix to the Community and Corporate Plan and agree that any changes to them, required as a result of the approval of the 2023-24 budget, will be made available to members in the first quarter for 2023-24.

8. DIARY OF MEETINGS FOR 2023/24

The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement, County Councillor Angela Sandles presented the report for Council to approve the diary of meetings for 2023/2024.

Members were urged to respond to a survey issued through Democratic Services Committee.

Suggestion was made that the date of Full Council for budget approval in 2024 be amended and brought forward.

It was noted that Performance and Overview Scrutiny meetings would be held on Tuesdays, and the diary would be amended.

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

That the diary of meetings for 2023/2024 be approved.

9. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR LEARNING PROGRAMME - ABERGAVENNY 3-19 SCHOOL NAME

County Councillor Martyn Groucutt, the Cabinet Member for Education presented the report to allow Council to agree the name of the new 3-19 School in Abergavenny currently under construction on the King Henry VIII School Site.

Upon being put to a vote Council resolved to accept the recommendation that the school be named King Henry VIII 3-19 School

10. APPOINTMENTS

The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement, County Councillor Angela Sandles presented the report to seek Council ratification or appointment for Council Committees, roles and external bodies.

County Councillor Ian Chandler was honoured and delighted to be nominated and shared personal experiences with Council.

County Councillor Tomos Davies left the meeting at 18:49pm
County Councillor Tony Easson left the meeting at 19:18pm

There were comments around equality with regards to representation of all protected groups.

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There was concern that due process had not been undertaken and that nominations should have been called for through all groups.

The appointment was thought to be inclusive and any need for champions in other areas could be addressed in the future.

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

Councillors Armand Watts and Penny Jones be appointed to the regional scrutiny function for the Gwent Public Service Board (PSB)

Councillor Ian Chandler be ratified as the MCC LGBTQI+ Champion

Mr Richard Stow be appointed to serve for a further 4-year term as an Independent Member of the MCC Standards Committee

Mr Rhodri Guest is appointed to the MCC Governance and Audit Committee.

11. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2023/24

County Councillor Rachel Garrick, Cabinet Member for Resources presented the report to inform of the arrangements for the implementation of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and to gain approval for 2023/24. Council were asked to agree to adopt the amendments to the Regulations, proposed by Welsh Government, as detailed in point 3.7, and to affirm that annual uprating amendments will be carried out each year without a requirement to adopt the whole Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

The Cabinet Member reminded Council that if the CTRS was not approved a default scheme would be imposed upon the Council under WG regulations.

With regards to advising residents on the eligibility criteria for financial benefits, information would be sought and disseminated to Members following the meeting.

It was confirmed that concessionary rates for those hosting Ukrainian families have been included in the Council Tax calculations.

Upon being put to a 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 2023/24 including the discretionary elements previously approved as the Council's local scheme from 1st April 2022.

12. Members Questions:

13. From County Councillor Ian Chandler to County Councillor Paul Griffiths, Cabinet Member for a Sustainable Economy

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An MCC report to the Place Scrutiny Committee in November stated that Llantilio Crossenny ward is in the worst 10% of areas in the whole of the UK when it comes to many measures of broadband connectivity. Over 12% of its households are unable to get any decent broadband (compared with 0.3% for the UK, 0.8% for Wales and 2.5% for Monmouthshire). Less than half of households are able to get Superfast Broadband (over 30Mbps) compared with 76.3% for Wales overall. Only 15% are able to get the latest gigabit connectivity, even though the UK Government has a target for gigabit broadband to be available across the UK by 2030, with 85% coverage by 2025.

Lack of access to decent broadband has a serious detrimental effect on farms, tourist accommodation and other rural businesses, as well as limiting opportunities for rural residents to work from home. Our rural economy and community life are suffering as a result.

As Broadband Connectivity is part of his cabinet portfolio, what actions will Cllr Griffiths take (and when will he take them) to ensure that all residents and businesses in Llantilio Crossenny ward are able to access Superfast and Gigabit speed broadband as soon as possible?

The Cabinet Member thanked Councillor Chandler for the question and explained that a report had gone to Place Scrutiny Committee recently which provided evidence that much has improved in Monmouthshire in recent years. This being a result of the hard work of officers and the fact that this is a shared priority with the current and former administrations.

Most recent data indicate that about 80% of premises do not have broadband of 30 megabytes, and this is half the figure of 2019 and leads to us comparing well to the rest of Wales. It was understood that this would be of no consolation to those who remain poorly connected.

When Ward Members, working with their residents, identify gaps, this should be communicated to officers, allowing liaison with providers to seek better connections.

Standards and technology are changing, and the Cabinet Member thanked Councillor Chandler for joining him in a meeting with Broadway, who are expanding their provision in rural Monmouthshire through the provision of fibre to the door. Broadway were confident that they could reach the most isolated premises, but we will need to test this in practice.

As a supplementary Councillor Chandler asked for a commitment that there would be close scrutiny of the rollout, particularly in the rural areas where commercial solutions are not viable, and to ensure residents in his ward of Llantilio Crossenny, and all rural parts of the County do not lose out and become disconnected.

The Cabinet Member responded that the provider is ambitious and giving positive projections but relies on every Member to find evidence of where it is and is not working.

14. From County Councillor Emma Bryn to County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

I am speaking on behalf of the residents of Wyesham ward who rely heavily on the Wye Bridge in order to access the world beyond, regardless on their mode of travel. Residents have had to face a seriously degraded road surface on the bridge for a prolonged period, with quick fixes lasting little time, the soft tarmac quickly getting thrust onto the pavements causing issues for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers alike.

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I understand works to improve the bridge are underway but we are seeking assurances that improvements will take place in the next financial year, and I am looking to you to give the community some peace of mind by providing us with a time-scale for these works.

The Cabinet Member thanked Councillor Bryn for raising the important issue and highlighted the progression of the plans for the new active travel bridge across the River Wye, and a planning application has now been submitted. Subject to gaining consent and funding it was hoped that construction would commence in 2024/25. This important improvement to active travel in Monmouth does not detract from the need to ensure the old Wye Bridge is fit for use. Following discussions with officers it was understood that the condition of the highway over the bridge had been a long standing concern to the Council but the improvement works had been on hold pending repairs to the structure of the railway arches and main utility pipes. These works are now complete and preparations to resurface the highway are being made. Temporary works in the last year were made to maintain safety while the resurfacing programme was scheduled and designed.

The Highway team are now in the process of preparing the contract for works to sample test the existing road-based material to assist with the design and specification for the refurbishment works. When completed, engineers will invite tenders for the work with an expected start date in Summer 2023. The works will be disruptive, and it may be necessary to close the road for a short period of time.

As a supplementary Councillor Bryn asked to be kept up to date with any developments or changes to the timetable.

15. From County Councillor Fay Bromfield to County Councillor Martyn Groucutt, Cabinet Member for Education:

Would the Cabinet Member explain why the review of primary school catchment areas promised for Autumn 2022 has not yet begun?

The Cabinet Member thanked Councillor Bromfield and explained that the last term had been a congested period of time for the admissions team with key pieces of existing work regarding the expansion of Welsh medium provision and the developments in the Caldicot area. He explained that he was aware of the need to review the primary catchment areas, reasons being the anomalies that exist in the current catchment areas, and the potential emergence of new considerations due to the RLDP.

Officers will be carrying out a full review of existing primary school catchment areas which will include the school areas for Tredunnoch, Llanhennock, Llansoar and Llangybi. The Schools Admissions Code states that all local authorities must consult on their admissions arrangements between 1st September and 1st March and must be set by 15th April. Consultation on the 2024-25 admission arrangements have begun. The review of primary school catchment areas will not be able to take place until after 1st September 2023 for the 2025-26 academic year.

Issues in Llandenny village have been identified as an area needing urgent attention and consultation on proposed changes have begun within this boundary.

A timeline for the review has been developed and it was hoped that Members would engage with officers in that process:

- Meetings with local Members – June/July 2023
- Report to Cabinet seeking approval to consult on proposed changes – September 2023
- Consultation – October/November 2023

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- Report to Cabinet with the results – January 2024
- Admission arrangements to be determined – by April 2024
- Consultees to be notified in writing by end of April 2024
- Changes implemented from 1st September 2025

16. From County Councillor Louise Brown to County Councillor Paul Griffiths, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for a Sustainable Economy

Would the Deputy Leader give a commitment to prioritise investment in key infrastructure in the Chepstow area in advance of delivery of the RLDP, including improvements to the Highbeech roundabout and M48, active travel schemes and a Chepstow bypass?

The Cabinet Member responded that the Transport Deputy Minister had been contacted to ask for a further study on Highbeech Roundabout. At the end of the month there would be a meeting with the Minister for Climate Change at which point the question would be raised again.

With regards to the connection to the M48, the Cabinet Member considered it essential to development plans for the south of the county. The Deputy Minister had said that it would be considered only in light of the conclusions of the roads review. The Cabinet Member wants this to be a part of our transport plan and would continue to raise its importance at every opportunity with WG.

The Chepstow Bypass is an unchanged objective of the Council and is primarily a matter for UK Government. The matter had been raised in a meeting with the Leader of Gloucestershire County Council, and a meeting with the Secretary of State for Wales, and a letter had been written to the Secretary of State for Transport. There has been no indication of any timescales for either a decision or an action.

As a supplementary County Councillor Brown asked that all correspondence between Council and Welsh Ministers are included within the publicly available evidence for the RLDP. The Cabinet Member agreed to do so.

17. Next Meeting 9th March 2023

Noted.

The meeting ended at 8.10 pm