

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Thursday, 9th March, 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, Meirion Howells, 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:

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, Performance and Scrutiny
Ian Saunders	Chief Operating Officer, MonLife

APOLOGIES: None

1. Declarations of interest

None.

2. Public Questions

The Chair invited Cllr Matt Sidwell of Mathern Community Council to present a question to County Council in relation to proposed budget cuts for School Transport.

Expecting children as young as 4 to walk for an hour each way from Mathern to their school, along a busy trunk road where the footpath width doesn't allow 2 people to walk side by side for safety, and without safe crossing points on the A48 seems both dangerous and impractical.

Barriers to school transport could result in an additional 25 vehicles each journey on Pwllmeyric hill and Larkfield roundabout, 2 already heavily congested pinch points for Chepstow, resulting in significantly increased congestion and pollution for a town already crippled by such problems.

How do MCC intend to manage their health & safety obligations, environmental impact guidelines, and protect families already struggling with the current cost of living crisis and rising bills?

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The Cabinet Member for education, County Councillor Martyn Groucutt advised of an assessment carried out by qualified independent road safety experts and any suggestion that there is an unsafe route, transport would be provided at no cost. He went on to explain that in the public consultation around the budget, three things around home to school transport had been looked at being:

1. *Increasing charges for discretionary payments, where parents could pay a charge for their child to take a seat on a bus where available.* This proposal has been withdrawn
2. *To bring the distances at which we would start to provide free transport into line with those set out by WG.* This could not be done as part of the budget as it would be a change of policy, which could only be done after a public consultation.
3. *Development of safer routes to schools.* MonLife are developing safe routes to school as part of the decarbonisation campaign and where route to school, within the distance that would not qualify for transport, becomes safe, parents are given one terms notice that it is a safe route and that free transport would no longer be provided.

As a supplementary:

With regards to the decarbonisation strategy being implemented, how would it affect a child walking up Pwllmeyric Hill, which is congested to Mathern Junction, for 45 minutes, and inhaling toxic emissions from stationary heavy traffic.

The Cabinet Member reiterated that assessments were carried out by independent road safety experts and if their advice was that a child would be put at medical risk we would listen to the advice and that would be any area of discretion.

3. Chair's Announcement

Noted.

County Councillor Simon Howarth led a minute silence in respect of those in Syria and Turkey affected by the recent earthquake.

4. Presentation by MCC Youth Council

The Cabinet Member for Inclusive and Active Communities welcomed and introduced two members of Monmouthshire Youth Council who were in attendance to present results of an annual survey of young people across the County called 'Make Your Mark', to which there had been over 2000 responses.

Following the presentation, the Youth Council Members explained that they hoped to collaborate with County Council to further champion the topics highlighted. Members were asked to use the results to shape and develop services; apply for and allocate funding; share with relevant people who can help to engage young people and initiate change.

The Youth Members were congratulated and commended on their presentation and encouraged to continue their work.

5. Minutes of the meeting held on 19th January 2023

The minutes of the meeting of County Council held on 19th January 2023 were approved.

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6. Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd March 2023

The minutes of the meeting of County Council held on 2nd March 2023 were approved. was noted that County Councillor Rachel Buckler had not been recorded as being in attendance.

8. COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION and REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS FOR 2023/24

The Leader of the Council presented the report highlighting the proposed changes to the revenue budget that had been incorporated since the budget was presented to Council on the 2nd March (appendix 4).

County Councillor Frances Taylor proposed the following amendment:

That the revenue budget is amended to include a further £49K to retain the 0.6 post in the Educational Psychology team over and above the provisions in the addendum provided today.

The budget proposals suggested that 1 full time equivalent would be found out of the ALN grant which was recently confirmed by Welsh Government. However, the new ALN system expands the role of the Educational Psychology team to include both CYP aged 0-3 years and 16-25 years. The ALN Code refers to the role of the Educational Psychologist throughout the whole ALN process with wide ranging consultative, and interventionist responsibilities. It was thought that the current budget proposals did not recognise the additional responsibilities of the Local Education Authority within the new ALNET Act 2018 and its associated Code.

Seconded by County Councillor Simon Howarth.

The Cabinet Member for Education opposed the amendment, stating that it would affect those supporting the needs of contemporary education.

County Councillor Richard John recognised that the amendment was put forward in the best interest of residents. He welcomed moves to a more integrated inclusion service and considered the amendment to be a modest request, however it was the intention of the Conservative Group to abstain.

Upon being put to a vote the amendment was defeated and debate continued.

Concerns and expressions of disappointment were noted.

The importance of Gwent Music was noted.

There were concerns that the highways budget could not address the problem of potholes across the County.

The Administration was urged to ask WG to address the funding per capita.

The reserve position was an enormous concern.

The impacts on social care delivery were severe.

Upon being put to a vote the recommendations as set out in the report (7.1) were carried.

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9. COUNCIL TAX PREMIUMS FOR LONG TERM EMPTY PROPERTIES AND SECOND HOMES

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented the report for Council to consider the consultation responses regarding council tax premiums on long term empty properties and second homes. Council were required to consider the resulting proposals to introduce council tax premiums on long term empty properties and second homes from 1st April 2024.

There were concerns around the response to the consultation as circa 400 homes had been identified, and of 320 responses only 29 were one of the 400.

In response to comments on delaying the proposal, it was stated that there had been many conversations with residents who were keen to see the issue resolved. Also, Members were assured that MCC officers would not recommend the proposal if they were not certain that correct systems would be implemented.

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

To note the consultation responses received as detailed in this report.

That the Council use its discretionary powers to introduce a council tax premium for long term empty properties on a sliding scale from 100% to 300% effective from 1st April 2024. With a 100% premium applying to properties empty for 1 year, a 200% premium to properties empty for 2 years and a 300% premium to properties empty for 3 years or more.

That the Council use its discretionary powers to introduce a council tax premium for second homes of 100% from 1st April 2024 and will give further consideration to the impact on the local economy before utilising that power.

That Council note the feedback received from the Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee detailed in section 13 and agree to the substantive points raised, as part of the wider preparation for the introduction of the council tax premiums.

10. 2023/24 Capital Strategy and 2023/24 Treasury Management Strategy

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented the report in order for Council to approve the Capital and Treasury management strategies including the minimum revenue provision policy and borrowing & investment strategies for the 2023/24 financial year. The report summarised and highlighted the key areas relating to the strategies, alongside areas of key implications and risks resulting from it.

County Councillor Frances Taylor left the meeting at 17:38pm

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

That Council approves the Capital strategy for 2023/24 as found at Appendix 1.

That Council approves the Treasury management strategy for 2023/24 as found at Appendix 2, including the:

- **2023/24 Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement**
- **2023/24 Investment & Borrowing Strategies**

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To approve the Prudential Indicators as outlined throughout the strategies and summarised in Appendix 3 that will be used in the performance monitoring of the treasury function during 2023/24.

That Council receive confirmation that the Governance & Audit Committee reviewed the draft 2023/24 Strategies and subsequently endorsed them to full Council at its meeting on the 16th February 2023, and provided the feedback as noted in paragraph 5 of this report.

That Council agrees that Governance & Audit Committee should continue to review the Council's treasury activities for 2023/24 on behalf of the Council by receiving and considering quarterly treasury update reports and a year-end report.

11. PUBLICATION OF PAY POLICY STATEMENT AS REQUIRED BY THE LOCALISM ACT

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented the report in order for Council to approve the publication of Monmouthshire County Council's Pay Policy, in compliance with the Localism Act.

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

That Council approves the Pay Policy for the year 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

12. Next Meeting - 20th April 2023

Noted.

The meeting ended at 5.45 pm