

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Thursday, 18th January, 2024 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor Meirion Howells (Chairman)
County Councillor Su McConnel (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: Rachel Buckler, Laura Wright, Tony Kear, Catrin Maby, Jan Butler, Ian Chandler, Sara Burch, Alistair Neill, 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, Phil Murphy, Paul Pavia, Maureen Powell, Frances Taylor, Tudor Thomas, Armand Watts and Ann Webb

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Jonathan Davies	Head of Finance
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
Amy Gullick	Local Democracy Officer
Frances O'Brien	Chief Officer, Communities and Place
Matthew Gatehouse	Chief Officer People, Performance and Partnerships.
Ian Saunders	Chief Officer Customer, Culture and Wellbeing.
James Williams	Chief Officer Law & Governance
Ruth Donovan	Assistant Head of Finance
Nicholas Keyse	Estates Development Manager
Tianna Thomas	Shared Benefits Service Manager Resources – Torfaen County Borough Council

1. Apologies for Absence

County Councillor Malcolm Lane.

2. Declarations of Interest

County Councillor Richard John declared a personal, non prejudicial interest in relation to agenda item 10, as he holds a part time role as a public affairs consultant and a client is the Railway Industry Association.

County Councillor Fay Bromfield declared a personal and prejudicial interest in relation to agenda item 6. She left the meeting taking no part in the discussion or voting thereon in respect of this item.

County Councillor Rachel Buckler declared a personal and prejudicial in relation to agenda item 6. She left the meeting taking no part in the discussion or voting thereon in respect of this item.

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County Councillor Jayne McKenna declared a personal and prejudicial in relation to agenda item 6, explaining that she has a family member who has a holiday let in Monmouthshire. She left the meeting taking no part in the discussion or voting thereon in respect of this item.

3. Chair's Announcement

The Chair's announcement was noted.

In doing so, the Chair thanked the many Primary Schools in the County that had invited him to their foundation phase nativity plays over the Christmas period. It was a delight to watch the children, who were a credit to their teachers, in the way that they interacted with each other when things went wrong.

4. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on the 7th December 2023

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 7th December 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record.

In doing so, County Councillor Louise Brown moved an amendment to the minutes in relation to agenda item 5 – Relocation of Pupil Referral Service South Monmouthshire. To include a sentence above the recorded vote to explain why members voted against the report as follows:

Members who voted against the report, did so, on the basis that the item had not gone to a scrutiny committee.

County Councillor Jan Bulter seconded the amendment.

Upon being put to a vote, Council resolved to reject the amendment.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/ndNmrf9E2QQ?feature=shared&t=243>

5. AGE FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

The Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health Services presented the Age Friendly Communities report. The purpose of which, was to take steps to ensure that Monmouthshire is a great place to grow old in and promote action at a local level to support full participation of older people in community life and promote healthy and active ageing.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/ndNmrf9E2QQ?feature=shared&t=565>

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

- **That the Council commits to work with partner organisations and the wider community to make Monmouthshire an Age-Friendly County and join the World Health Organisation's global network of age-friendly communities.**
- **That Council agrees to create the role of member champion for older people, and encourages town and community councils to do the same.**
- **To engage with older members of our county to inform and shape the actions to be taken by the council, partners and other stakeholders.**

6. REVIEW OF THE DECISION TO CHARGE A COUNCIL TAX PREMIUM ON SECOND HOMES IN THE COUNTY FROM 1ST APRIL 2024

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County Councillors Fay Bromfield, Rachel Buckler and Jayne McKenna left the meeting for the duration of the item, as per their declaration of interest, pursuant to the Members' Code of Conduct.

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented to members the review of the decision to charge a 100% council tax premium on second homes in the County from 1st April 2024. Members were also asked to consider the likely effect that a council tax premium on second homes will have on the tourism industry in the county.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/ndNmrf9E2QQ?feature=shared&t=1752>

The Chair accepted a request to vote on each recommendation separately, as follows:

- **Recommendation 2.1 - That Council go ahead with the decision to introduce a 100% council tax premium for second homes from 1st April 2024.**

Upon being put to a vote, Council resolved to accept recommendation 2.1.

- **Recommendation 2.2 - That Council use its discretionary powers under Section 12B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to introduce a specific exception to help support businesses moving from the commercial list to the domestic list. The exception will exempt these businesses from the second home council tax premium for a period of 12 months. During this time standard council tax will still be payable.**

Upon being put to a vote, Council resolved to accept recommendation 2.2.

*County Councillor Simon Howarth left meeting at the start of the item..
County Councillor Paul Pavia joined the meeting at 14:37pm*

7. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2024/25

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented to members the council tax reduction scheme 2024/25. Which presented arrangements for the implementation of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and to approve it for 2024/25.

Members were informed that the purpose of the report was to agree to adopt the amendments to the Regulations, proposed by Welsh Government, as detailed in point 3.7. Affirm that annual uprating amendments will be carried out each year without a requirement to adopt the whole Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

Members noted that on 17th January 2019 Council adopted the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2019/20, in accordance with the Council Tax Reduction Schemes and Prescribed Requirements (Wales) Regulations 2013.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/ndNmrf9E2QQ?feature=shared&t=3534>

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

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- 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 2024/25 including the discretionary elements previously approved as the Council's local scheme from 1st April 2023.

8. ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND SUPPORTING POLICIES

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented the asset management strategy and supporting policies, which asked members to approve the 2023-2027 Asset Management Strategy and associated policies.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/ndNmrf9E2QQ?feature=shared&t=4071>

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

That Council:

- Agrees to approve the Asset Management Strategy.
- Agrees to approve the supporting policies, namely the Rental Concessionary Policy, Community Asset Transfer Policy and Disposal Policy.
- To delegate authority to the Chief Officer for Resources, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources, to update the Asset Management Plan annually.

*County Councillor Simon Howarth rejoined the meeting at 15:14pm
County Councillor Ann Webb left the meeting at 15:30pm*

9. INVESTMENT COMMITTEE REVIEW

The Leader presented the Investment Committee review to members on the proposed governance changes for how the Council oversees its commercial investment portfolio.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/ndNmrf9E2QQ?feature=shared&t=7784>

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

- To receive verbal updates at the meeting following consideration of the proposed governance changes by Investment Committee, Governance and Audit Committee and Performance & Overview Scrutiny Committee from their meetings on 9th, 11th and 15th January respectively.
- To approve the proposed, revised governance arrangements contained in the revised Asset Investment Policy (appendix 1) and summarized in section 4 of this report.

County Councillor Ann Webb rejoined the meeting at 16:10pm.

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10. Motions to Council

11. Submitted by County Councillor Richard John

This Council:

Notes the publication of 'Our Local Transport Plan 2024-29'.

Regrets the lack of engagement with local community and business groups in the development of the plan.

Expresses disappointment that too many commitments are vague, impractical or even contrary to the interests of Monmouthshire residents.

Calls on the administration to make the following revisions:

- a) Remove the proposal to reinstate the Severn Bridge tolls*
- b) Withdraw plans for a parking levy on Monmouthshire businesses*
- c) Scrap plans for a strategy for congestion and emissions zones*
- d) Strengthen commitments to Magor Walkway Station, a Chepstow relief road, improvements to the Highbeech roundabout and lobby Welsh Government for financial support*
- e) Fully commit to protecting local bus routes*
- f) Agree to lobby Welsh Government to end the bias in active travel funding towards urban areas*

<https://www.youtube.com/live/ndNmrf9E2QQ?feature=shared&t=8610>

Upon being put to a vote, Council resolved to reject the motion.

County Councillor Simon Howarth left the meeting at 16:47pm.

County Councillor Armand Watts left the meeting at 17:48pm.

12. Members Questions

13. From County Councillor Lisa Dymock to County Councillor Angela Sandles, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement

Please can the cabinet member provide an update on the raid that took place at Lost Souls Sanctuary on August 2023 organised by MCC animal welfare team and resulted in 11 dogs being destroyed on site and 71 being seized?

<https://www.youtube.com/live/ndNmrf9E2QQ?feature=shared&t=14095>

County Councillor Tony Easson left the meeting at the start of the item.

County Councillor Lisa Dymock left the meeting at 18:03pm.

14. From County Councillor Richard John to County Councillor Ben Callard, Cabinet Member for Resources

Would the Cabinet Member make a statement on the administration's budget priorities for 2024-25?

<https://www.youtube.com/live/ndNmrf9E2QQ?feature=shared&t=14342>

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15. **From County Councillor Fay Bromfield to County Councillor Ben Callard, Cabinet Member for Resources**

What representations has the Cabinet Member made to Welsh Government about the burden of business rates on Monmouthshire businesses?

<https://www.youtube.com/live/ndNmrf9E2QQ?feature=shared&t=14567>

16. **From County Councillor Richard John to County Councillor Martyn Groucutt, Cabinet Member for Education**

What impact will the administration's budget proposals for 2024-25 have on children and young people in Monmouthshire?

<https://www.youtube.com/live/ndNmrf9E2QQ?feature=shared&t=14721>

County Councillor Frances Taylor left the meeting at 18:09pm.

17. **Date of Next Meeting - 29th February 2024**

Noted.

The meeting ended at 6.22 pm