

# Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee held at on Wednesday, 22nd November, 2023 at 10.00 am

## Councillors Present

County Councillor Alistair Neill (Chairman)  
County Councillor Laura Wright, (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: Alistair Neill, Peter Strong, Ann Webb, Laura Wright, Rachel Buckler, Catherine Fookes, Meirion Howells, Ben Callard and Paul Griffiths

Also in attendance County Councillors:  
Ben Callard, Cabinet Member for Resources and Paul Griffiths, Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development

## Officers in Attendance

Peter Davies, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer, Resources  
Frances O'Brien, Chief Officer, Communities and Place  
Will McLean, Chief Officer for Children and Young People  
Jane Rodgers, Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health  
Matthew Gatehouse, Chief Officer People, Performance and Partnerships.  
Richard Jones, Performance and Data Insight Manager  
Jonathan Davies, Head of Finance  
Hannah Carter, Performance Analyst  
Dave Loder, Finance Manager  
Daniel Fordham, Project Manager  
Craig O'Connor, Head of Planning

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Jill Bond and Paul Pavia

**Note: the following minutes focus on the challenge from members – for the full discussion, the recording of the meeting is at**

**[www.youtube.com/watch?v=muEyGu4rQC8&list=PLLMqn4nAaFJDsC93C-EKJZrFkDEQBdiXK&index=13](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muEyGu4rQC8&list=PLLMqn4nAaFJDsC93C-EKJZrFkDEQBdiXK&index=13)**

### 1. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Fookes declared a non-prejudicial interest as a Governor of Monmouth Comprehensive School.

### 2. Public Open Forum

None.

### 3. Month 5 Budget Monitoring

Cabinet Member Ben Callard and Peter Davies introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Jonathan Davies, Frances O'Brien, Paul Griffiths, Jane Rodgers and Nikki Wellington.

**Key Questions from Members:**

- How are the responsibilities split between the two Cabinet Members for Resources?
- Pressures on providing accommodation for homeless are increasing and the costs seem to be reactive – are there plans to mitigate this and be more proactive? – **ACTION (provide members with trend data and information on B&Bs and Homelessness)**
- There are shortfalls in Social Care and Health because of complex demand and children with ALN provision – what implications are there for users of these services and what plans are in place to manage these factors?
- The report indicates a target of £550k savings relating to continuing healthcare (p22); we've achieved £141k at Month 5, so falling short of the target. Is there a power imbalance between MCC and the health board? Are we doing enough to equip our staff to challenge the health board?
- Has the reduction in the hours of unmet care need been because we had more carers and hours provided or have people who would have qualified for care packages in the past been ruled out? If so, are we failing to serve the most vulnerable people?
- We hear anecdotally that smaller care packages go to full panels, and social workers are tied up for hours in panel meetings rather than being out on the frontline – is that the case?
- Is the overspend of £111k related to Castle Gate business park an actual loss?
- Item 3.12, why has there been a delay in resourcing the team to meet the energy targets reduction and when can we expect to see the reduction?
- Are the shortfall in mileage reduction and delays to the rollout of the pool car scheme now being addressed?
- Note that in regard to homelessness (p27), it's important for people recovering from addiction to stay in their networks of support
- Can we be reassured that there won't be a reduction in the Housing Support Grant and that the charities that benefit from it, such as Mind Monmouthshire, won't be affected?
- What's the latest indication on the likelihood of the unbudgeted grant of £1m being awarded?
- How is funding from Welsh Government that is not materialising – e.g. for universal free school meals for primary pupils – being followed up?
- Regarding the Housing Support Grant, would it be constructive to send a letter to the Welsh Government director reiterating the importance of knowing MCC's funding allocation as soon as possible? – **ACTION**
- The forecast overspend for services is £6.2m, the recovery to bring that down to a pressure of £124k are to be met by non service-related items, of which some are 'one-off' – would we expect plans to come forward that we can look at in advance of next year's budget discussions?
- P8 of the cover report, schools catering, £2.90 per meal is identified as not sufficient – what is the actual cost that we would look to be retrospectively funded by Welsh Government?
- Schools balances are down 86% in-year – is that a very significant exposure for next year?
- The Chair commented that if committee members can contribute in any way, e.g. if Aneurin Bevan colleagues could join us for a meeting to

understand how they are applying continuing healthcare and enhance understanding, they would be happy to do so

#### **Chair's Summary:**

Thank you to the Cabinet Member and officers. The committee was asked to scrutinize the revenue budget forecast for 23-24 up to Month 5, to assess whether effective budget monitoring is in place and the extent to which budgets are spent within the agreed budget and policy framework, including the reasonableness of the explanation for variances, and to consider the achievement of progress to meeting budget savings targets. We have done so thoroughly and therefore the report is moved.

#### **4. Strategic Risk Register**

Richard Jones introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Peter Davies and Jane Rodgers.

#### **Key Questions from Members:**

- Can you clarify the categories of risk and what they mean?
- Why has the new risk of 'legal challenge' been added?
- Risk 12: when is the next Poverty Working Group and when was the last? How are we progressing on the Poverty Action Plan? – **ACTION (check when is the next meeting of the working group and send written response about the poverty working group to members)**
- It would be helpful if risk registers could be RAG-rated. Could high risks be put in red? It would be good to standardise RAG-ratings across the council and also introduce arrows indicating trajectory – **ACTION (for officers to take away and consider)**
- Risk 8: can you explain in more detail how a risk level of 16 can be mitigated down to 12?
- Risk 2, sustainability of services: how would we mitigate down from 16 to 12 when elsewhere in the report a budget shortfall of £14.4m is indicated?
- Have we given enough training to all our staff on a regular basis and to counsellors to reduce the level of risk around cyber attacks? – **ACTION (written response to members about the risk of cyberattack and further training)**
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#### **Chair's Summary:**

Thank you to the officers. Should members think of future risks that should be included, they are encouraged to contact the Chair or officers. The report is moved.

#### **5. LDP Annual Monitoring Report**

Craig O' Connor introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Cabinet Member Paul Griffiths and Daniel Fordham.

#### **Key Questions from Members:**

- P3-4,: is our plan moving forward to increase the level of affordable homes delivered from 22% of the total achieved to 50%?

- Would the phosphates improvements not clash directly with the intention to progress significant housing deliveries in the LDP as currently drafted? And do we know what level of improvements they would be?
- Have we considered what our bordering counties have in their LDPs in relation to the level of affordable homes?
- P94, reference to A48 rather than M48 – is that a typo? – **ACTION (officers to correct in report)**
- There is huge pressure on the B4245, with two sites set to increase it – what progress is being made in discussions relating to the link down to Severn Tunnel Junction and the link up to the M48?
- As this is a 10-year plan from 2011-21 why isn't there a line drawn under this as a final report?
- 3.8, what is being done to combat the high shop vacancy rate in Monmouth? Does the figure include banks?
- 3.18 mentions an audit of high street vacancies in Monmouth – can members see that report? – **ACTION (officers to share with members)**
- There is no further work on Monmouth Coach Station but it would be of great benefit if the National Express could stop in the town. Why is there no further work on that?
- A site for homeless people called Wheatfield was vacated during the pandemic – what's happening with that?
- To clarify, Wheatfield could not be rebuilt on the existing site?

**Chair's Summary:**

Thank you to officers and the Cabinet Member. The report was moved.

**6. Schools Funding Formula**

Nicola Wellington introduced the report and answered the members' questions.

**Key Questions from Members:**

- Councillor Fookes wished to thank officers for listening to Monmouth Comprehensive governors regarding concerns over the funding formula, with a solution now in place for 25/26
- The report contains a formula relating to maintenance of the new building – was that put in place before the experience of Caldicot and Monmouth schools were taken into account?
- Do we have a reasonable figure of how many people had access to the consultation?

**Chair's Summary:**

Thank you to officers. The report was moved.

**7. Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Action List**

School attendance and exam performance items have been added tentatively to 20<sup>th</sup> February (assuming the timely release of data). The items from the cancelled 29<sup>th</sup> November will move to 15<sup>th</sup> January, which will be arranged. 30<sup>th</sup> January will be for budget scrutiny.

Councillor Fookes proposed adding the Poverty Action Plan to the 26<sup>th</sup> March agenda; the committee agreed – **ACTION**

**8. Council and Cabinet Work Plan**

**9. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 24th October 2023**

The minutes were confirmed.

**10. Next Meeting: 29th November 2023 (Special) and 30th January 2024**

29<sup>th</sup> November is cancelled – the items will go to a meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> January.

The meeting ended at **12.39 pm**