

# Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK on Thursday, 2nd February, 2023 at 2.00 pm

## Councillors Present

County Councillor Lisa Dymock (Chairman)

County Councillors: Louise Brown, Emma Bryn, Ben Callard, Ian Chandler, Tomos Davies, Jane Lucas, Su McConnel, Maria Stevens, Jackie Strong, Fay Bromfield, Rachel Garrick, Angela Sandles, Mary Ann Brocklesby and Sara Burch

## Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager  
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer  
Paul Matthews, Chief Executive  
Peter Davies, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer, Resources  
Will McLean, Chief Officer for Children and Young People  
Frances O'Brien, Chief Officer, Communities and Place  
Matt Phillips, Chief Officer People and Governance and Monitoring Officer  
Matthew Gatehouse, Head of Policy, Performance and Scrutiny  
Ian Saunders, Chief Operating Officer, MonLife  
Jonathan Davies, Head of Finance  
Nikki Wellington, Finance Manager  
Dave Loder, Finance Manager  
Carl Touhig, Head of Neighbourhood Services  
Tyrone Stokes, Accountant  
Stacey Jones, Senior Accountant

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor Paul Griffiths

### **1. Declarations of Interest**

None.

### **2. Public Open Forum**

No submissions were received.

### **3. Budget Scrutiny: Scrutiny of the Budget proposals for 2023/24**

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented to the committee the proposals for 2023-2024 (presentation available online) prior to the committee asking questions.

#### **Challenge:**

*What reassurance is there that the proposed reductions, especially for grounds maintenance and the community improvement team, won't undermine the ambition for the county to be a greener place to live? What is the potential impact on rural villages?*

Cabinet Member for Resources: We have committed £750k towards decarbonisation as part of this budget, which is the principal goal of reducing environmental impact in the county. We also have bio-diversity written into this budget.

Recycling Strategy Manager: In terms of the reduction in the Community Improvement Team, we did have two teams, largely recruiting prisoners from Prescoed, but it has been increasingly difficult to recruit them, so we now have one team operating. We want to channel that work into the Council's grounds maintenance functions, so the public shouldn't notice a reduction. Where we have reduced mowing as part of the 'Nature isn't Neat' programme, we do have a little more capacity there to do more planting with community involvement. We currently mow 14 times a year but plan to reduce it to 10, but still cutting paths through green amenity spaces that are used, whilst also continuing the 'Nature isn't Neat' programme.

*Is the Cabinet Member satisfied that the 'reconfiguration of sweeping functions across the county' won't undermine the positive contribution to addressing the climate and nature emergency?*

Recycling Strategy Manager: The reason for reconfiguring the sweeping function is to provide a greater sweeping function. Currently we have 2 part-time staff undertaking sweeping and a litter picking, but we feel that losing the two part-time posts and having a full-time mechanical sweeper which will undertake the litter picking will be more beneficial and save costs. The town councils have also bought into the expanded town teams, and this has given us more cover in Chepstow and Abergavenny, so we have seen great improvements there and we would like to implement the approach elsewhere, backed up with more mechanical sweeping.

*To what extent can the mechanical solution be applied to littering in more rural areas? Would a physical solution be more effective in this context?*

Recycling Strategy Manager: There are no changes to how we manage sweeping in rural areas. We have 3 large sweepers for the rural areas and 3 small ones in the town centres and there is capacity for the smaller ones that are sometimes parked up to do more sweeping in out-of-town areas, so the intention is to increase, not reduce sweeping.

*In the preceding financial year, Monmouthshire was one of only a handful of authorities to not issue a single penalty notice for littering – is there resource to pursue those, particularly given the increase in littering and fly tipping? Were budgetary allocations considered made for these and, if so, why were they discarded?*

Recycling Strategy Manager: We are not aware of a large increase in flytipping, not at a level that would indicate an upward trend, although there is a slight increase across Wales, but I can return to the committee with the date. (**Action:** Carl Touhig). In terms of issuing Fixed Penalty Notices for littering, we have long wanted to adopt this for littering and dog fouling and Welsh Government were developing a national strategy and we had hoped for an 'all Wales' approach, with enforcement backed by Welsh Government, but this hasn't materialised. We remain hopeful for the strategic direction nationally.

*In the Cabinet paper, fig.1 gives a total expenditure of £311m, but fig.4 shows £208m. What is the difference between the two tables as it's unclear to the casual observer?*

Finance Manager: Quite simply, it's that the second figure is taking into account specific grants that are expected to be received, but I understand this could be better explained.

*What is the additional revenue gained by the council for each 1% of council tax increase, so that we can gain a sense of scale?*

Cabinet Member for Resources: 1% according to our calculations is in the region of £630k.

*There is concern about the robustness of the figures in the Decarbonisation 1 and 2 proposals: the energy awareness campaign's projected saving is based on a 5% saving across the board – how was that figure tested? Why 5%? How predictable are the savings, and what is the margin of error?*

Chief Officer: Officers have looked at other organisations to see what we could achieve if we did things like switching lights off and using some buildings less, so that is an estimate, but we will be establishing a forum across the council of relevant officers to ensure we are all aware of how we can make those saving and we will raise awareness through a communication campaign.

*The increase from the income of the solar farm is not specifically decarbonisation of our existing footprint. What is the margin of error on the £150k as it says it is uncertain? Has there been any further investigation?*

Cabinet Member for Resources: I believe the solar farm figures are uncertain due to the uncertainty and fluctuation in process, but the Chief Officer can clarify.

Chief Officer: We are trying to set a prudent level, but we have achieved over and above this figure to date.

*Capital investment is required for some things: e.g. pool covers and HVAC changes. What's the return on investment – how many years before we get money back?*

Chief Operating Officer for Mon-Life: The cost of heating pool water is astronomic at the moment, with 75% of the Mon Life budget being utilised for energy costs, but pool covers do more than just keep the water temperature stable, as they also enable us to reduce the temperature in the buildings. We previously had pool covers which for various reasons were removed and we believe the costs of outlay will quickly be recovered, as currently we have to keep the heating on for a day to move the pool temperature up by 2 or 3 degrees, so it's a huge energy drain and having to remove and replace water also then incurs more cost to reheat it, but we have to drain and replace water to meet environmental health standards. We will return to the committee with the 'return on investment' figure (**Action:** Ian Saunders).

*To achieve £70k for additional walking routes, it doesn't say what capital investment is required? It's £150k, which would have been useful to have in the paper at that point.*

Cabinet Member for Resources: I think you answered your own question, but I note your point about the difficulty in finding the figure.

*More specifically, away from just pool covers, my point was more about whether we applying any benchmark for measuring return on investment, so that we have clarity on how revenue expenditure is delivering a return on investment for capital investments (Action: Jonathon Davies).*

*What is the impact on increased car use and possibly reduced enrolment in sixth forms of raising the price for concessionary travel? And reverting to statutory distances for free school transport? There's no assessment for that in the report. Does it take into account where there are no available walking routes?*

Chief Officer: This will depend on whether families decide not to use the discretionary concessionary fares and pay the additional charge in order to provide transport for their children. The consequence will be whether they are able to walk to school or use other modes of transport, or whether the family determine that the best route would be to use a car. I would suspect that whilst there is an increase in the cost, the increased charge would still be cheaper than driving the children to school. It is in line with what the Public Bus Network charges, so we have tried to set it at a sensible level.

*Some of the Monlife savings involve transferring costs between budgets, which are not then real savings.*

Chief Operating Officer for MonLife: It does depend on the lens through which you look at this, as there's no profit being made, it's more cost recovery for a service that was very valuable. Schools do go outside of Monmouthshire for courses and pay huge costs, so this is a small cost for the service they get and the headteachers seem very supportive of the service.

*Under ML22, Gilwern, there is no explanation of where the £100k saving will come from?*

Cabinet Member for Housing: We have started a review of the Gilwern Outdoor Education Service in the context of the new education curriculum, noting the appetite of schools to return to the residential experience that was so popular with families, so we want to keep this affordable. We also want to make sure the service to contribute to cost avoidance elsewhere, for example, for providing education to a few young people and if weren't able to do this, we would probably have to seek other options to provide education out of school, which would be more expensive. So the reason it is non-specific, is because all options are on the table and we need to explore various options. We want to make the best use of that resource.

*Part of the saving of £215k in RES24 involves disposing of Tudor St., but the situation has changed – will we update the proposal on that? It also includes places like Drybridge House and Melville Theatre as priority 2 – what consultation was taken with the charities and users of those centres? There is the suggestion that some activities will transfer to Market Hall but that is also to be disposed of – so there is a very concerning lack of coherence between the proposals.*

Cabinet Member for Housing: Similarly to the previous answer, the lack of clarity in relation to the buildings is because the council has a large number of buildings across the county, some of which are being used differently to how they were pre-pandemic. Many are not energy efficient and whilst we have a multiplicity of relationships with community organisations, there is a need to rationalise our use of buildings both short and long term. Before any disposals are made, we would complete a full options appraisal which would be brought to this committee.

*The concern is that we're putting into a budget proposal specific savings in relation to the disposals of assets. We are expected to sign off those figures at council but I would feel very uncomfortable signing off those figures when those appraisals haven't happened, and with a very uncertain outcome. The budget is prejudging some of those decisions by putting them in the proposals, regardless of any process you put in place in the future.*

Deputy Chief Executive: The mandate talks to 21 specific assets that have been identified with the potential opportunity to lead to increased income or reduced cost, or the potential for disposal as part of an exercise of rationalisation of the Council's estate. For each of those, we would need to go through a proper and robust process in order to look to achieve the level of mandate savings that have been positioned within the budget. Clearly the savings figure is not predicated on all of the 21 being brought forward and delivered. We have taken a measured assessment of the levels of risk depending on the level of use of those buildings, the potential to be able to rationalise in some form and for some of those buildings that are currently occupied, they are coming to the end of their respective lease terms, which in any event, offers an opportunity to be able to look to review and as necessary, renegotiate leases. So let us not fall into the trap of thinking that each one of these assets will be closed or disposed of. It's about exploring the live opportunities in front of us to reduce cost, increase income and where relevant and applicable, consider the potential for disposal.

*For clarity, for RES24, the table projects that the savings include 4 of the 6 Priority 1 properties, some of which are still subject to review – so can we have clarity on that? The same case for the savings projected for 2024-2025, so that's my point about pre-judging.*

Deputy Chief Executive: We are in agreement with you. The sizing of the potential saving and in respect of the years, is predicated on the assets that are in our immediate line of sight, as they have been ranked accordingly and the ones that you have referred to, they are not all 'givens', for the reasons that you have outlined and there are processes that need to be worked through, but it is why officers are extending their radar as widely as possible in the first instance to look at assets that potentially offer some opportunity. Clearly, if we rightly come to the conclusion that some assets are not right for rationalisation, we will look further and beyond, which is part of the process, which is why 21 assets have been initially identified. Work will extend over a 2-year period, so we will monitor and update that as needed. In the context of the budgetary challenges that we are facing, the asset management strategy and plan that we will be looking to develop following approval of the corporate plan will need to ensure our estate is fit for purpose, running optimally and at lowest cost, whilst meeting the needs of our communities at the same time.

*Withdrawing the Gwent Music subsidy is a great concern, an example of a 9-year-old being able to borrow a saxophone via the subsidy and achieve a Grade 6. This an example of the importance of the fund. I don't think £9k is a great amount as a hardship fund to cover the whole county for low-income families?*

Finance Manager for Schools: This was a very hard decision and we maintained the subsidy after other authorities withdrew. The hardship fund of £9k has been in place for a number of years and has actually been underspent, so we will continue to work with Gwent Music to ensure that families that need to access that fund can access it. In terms of the other support we provide to Gwent Music, we provide a subsidy through schools' budgets, which supports whole class provision, so is the scheme your resident's child would have benefitted from, whereby pupils can try out different instruments and we want to still maintain that. One of the decisions we need to make with Gwent Music is whether the music lessons will increase, as we don't want to pass that burden on to families, but we will be working very closely with them to ensure we can provide the best support possible. At the moment there is a budget of £44k across schools to provide the whole class provision, which will form part of the reduction, but we are going to be working with Gwent Music to see what they are going to still be able to provide in terms of whole class provision for schools. Schools can request that and we will be working with schools to see if they want to top that back up to the £44k so that they continue with the whole class provision.

*Regarding school transport, there is concern about the levels of mileage going down. There is a discretionary element as to whether it's a safe route to school. Can we have reassurance that a safe route to school will still be considered? On the concessionary side, it is £880 for a family with 2 kids for the bus, so the car will be used instead, increasing pollution and congestion – what level is being proposed for this increase in concessionary travel and whether there is an allowance for the number of children involved?*

Chief Officer: Yes, it is still part of the assessment process to determine whether there is a safe route to school when the consideration of the application comes in from the family of a pupil, so there is no change there. With regard to the concessionary charge, at present, it is £440 for the whole academic year. The proposal set out within the budget mandate is to increase that charge from £440 to £550 for a Monmouthshire resident and to increase it to £650 for a non-Monmouthshire resident. In terms of the mileage limits, this isn't something that will be implemented during this academic year, as there would need to be a full public consultation and engagement exercise, so this will be brought back as a separate report to commence the consultation exercise, with the proposed implementation being in October 2023. So the proposal being considered here is to revert back to the statutory limits set by Welsh Government, which are currently more favourable for primary and secondary children, so that would revert from 2 miles for primary children to 1.5 miles and from 3 miles to 2 miles for secondary children, so those are the proposed changes. Our calculations based on current pupil numbers are that it would affect approximately 127 learners who would then not be eligible for free transport. One of the key things we want to do is improve the access for pupils to be able to access active travel routes for walking, cycling and scooter use.

*Is the safe route independent from the mileage, or are they considered together?*

Chief Officer: It will depend if they are entitled to that transport, because if they were entitled to the transport, we wouldn't need to undertake an assessment on the safe route to school, but for pupils within that mileage, we would undertake an assessment of the safe routes to school first. Within the budget mandates, there are some routes which we think could be improved, which could prevent the need for home to school transport.

*With regard to the 21 council assets detailed on page 524, are all of these part of the savings reductions? I would like to see Severn View go to affordable housing, as it is in a perfect location.*

Cabinet Member for Resources: The priority 2 and 3 assets are there as estimates and would need much greater consideration, so no, we are not looking to dispose 21 properties.

Cabinet Member for Housing: In terms of Severn View, there is the question of what we will do with Severn View Care Home when Crick Road Care Home opens and will need further consideration in terms of the capacity, so it's an open question at the moment as to whether it would be brought forward for affordable housing or other use.

*The report isn't clear about the reduction in opening hours for libraries and leisure centres. and how it will affect different users e.g. older people wanting to access in the day – will one group be affected more than others? I would appreciate more detailed analysis on this budget overall and impacts on people. For example, changing opening times of libraires could an impact for older people who may seek to access warm spaces.*

Cabinet Member: In terms of community hubs and libraries, we are liaising with staff at present and we may be reducing staffing levels but not affecting the opening hours.

Cabinet Member for Housing: We are reviewing the opening hours of leisure centres, because we are conscious that people use the leisure centres more in the winter and less in the summer, so we are looking to make any reductions in the times of lesser use.

*Are we confident that enough funding has been allocated for school traffic management improvements, especially as cuts in school transport service budget will mean more children finding their own way to school? Will the children be encouraged to walk, scoot or cycle independently, and how will we monitor the effect of those changes? Are distances measured 'as the crow flies' or 'as walked'?*

Chief Officer: We are hoping the funding will be sufficient to make the improvements needed within the constraints we have. Yes we will monitor it, but as it would be difficult to monitor for each school individually, we will be relying on elected Members and the schools to provide us with feedback. Distances measured are 'as the crow flies', but we try to take into account that in a rural county, we need to take into account the actual route.

*Regarding the Newport Retail Park and Castlegate Business Park, are the figures shown a true representation of costs incurred, including officer time? What are the future plans for these sites? How do they sit with the ambitions in the corporate plan to*

*reduce commuting out of county? How to explain raising or creating car parking fees in county while funding somewhere out of county with free parking?*

Cabinet Member for Resources: The numbers are correct. Newport Retail Park is out of county and has been contentious as an investment, with questions raised. It's not an investment this administration would have chosen to make and we are not seeing the returns we would like, but the economic situation means it's not entirely prudent to divest them either. So yes, we have an out of county investment with an element of risk, but we are where we are and it is part of the Council's asset programme.

Deputy Chief Executive: Just to confirm the figures are accurate and the position evolves on a regular basis and officers and advisers ensure we keep on top of the level of associated risk. This reported up through the Investment Committee and we receive regular performance updates on the portfolio and we continually take an assessment of whether the benchmark returns are met and if not, to determine through the options appraisal whether the asset is retained. The current economic climate is not conducive to disposal at this point and certainly with Castlegate, it's fair to say that it has been very resilient through the pandemic in terms of its occupancy and yet we have lost Mitel as a tenant, but in its place we have expanded significantly the footprint of other tenants, which is a good news story, with a lot of interest in the remaining occupancy to be let. Newport Retail Park is a different story and we acknowledge the point that it's outside of county, but it is on the periphery and if you look at the habits of Monmouthshire residents, particularly in the south of the county, they make heavy use of it. However, it is a little more volatile, given the nature of it and coming out of the pandemic and the tenancies that are positioned there, but nonetheless despite the levels of risk that you will naturally carry around investments like this, the interest in the retail park remain very strong, so as an investment asset, whether for continued future return or for sale, it is in a good place.

*Even with this price increase, are car parks still being subsidised? Is the funding raised ringfenced for their upkeep?*

Chief Officer: Car parks are not subsidised as we receive an income from them and this is then ringfenced and reinvested into the car park infrastructure, which is quite expensive.

*Residents are concerned about the raise in cost of the green waste collection service, specifically the single payment – if the use falls away will we assume a lack of demand rather than factoring in people being put off by the price? What scope is there for spreading the cost over a year?*

Recycling Strategy Manager: The scheme went live last week with over 3000 applicants, so we're on target. We've looked at the 3 payments system or Direct Debit, but technical difficulties are preventing it at present, but we could look to do it for next year, once we know how many service users we will have.

*What about staggering payments school transport?*

Chief Officer: We already offer spread the payments on this.



*Regarding lowering energy costs, can we turn off lights in some buildings, and street lights in certain areas after certain times? e.g. the lights at Osbaston School within the school grounds are on all night when there are no children there.*

Recycling Strategy Manager: Our street lights are all energy efficient LED technology and we have reduced lighting over the years through dimming programmes, but any shutting off completely would need consideration on an individual case by case basis. We are developing a corporate policy on energy use and are also working with schools to reduce lighting across all of our sites.

*There is a reference to having a litter picker in towns, but Monmouth Town Council pays for its litter picker.*

Recycling Strategy Manager: The repurposing of the cleansing regime is not to reduce cleansing but to make the mechanical sweeper more available more of the time, as it is very efficient. We still very much value the litter pickers and the work that they are doing funded by the town council.

*How would the closure of Bridges be implemented?*

Cabinet Member for Resources: We are not looking for disposal but we are looking at the income potential and as the lease is due for renewal, it would be about putting it on a more commercial fitting.

Deputy Chief Executive: Just to confirm that as we are nearing the renewal of the lease, Bridges have approached us, because they are undertaking very good work there but are keen to explore options. There are aspects of how the building is used that falls more into commercial use, so we might need to explore renewal on that footing.

*Increasing business rates and parking charges will further the decline of town centres. Regarding the Monmouth cattle market, can we not move those stallholders up to Agincourt Square and make the market there more active? Would it not increase the ability to get more people into Monmouth, as half the car park is closed off?*

Chief Officer: Business rates are not something that we as a local authority are in control of setting, this is outside of our remit. There was a commitment by the previous administration and this cabinet to undertake a review of car parking charges and the charging mechanism across the county and this will commence in the new financial year and will be subject to scrutiny. In terms of your suggestions around the cattle market, this is something we can take away and look at.

*If Market Hall is up for selling off, why is so much officer time being spent trying to get the levelling up fund?*

Deputy Chief Executive: Again, this is not about disposal, there are opportunities for income generation through secure tenancies.

*In respect of the £300k of cuts to those with learning disabilities – why are we cutting the support from those who need it most?*

Finance Manager for Social Services: In terms of the mandate, we are looking at the high-cost placements to see if we can strengthen our negotiation and look for alternatives to those high-cost placements. Another part of the mandate is looking at meeting triggers for continuing health care, to see if they can take over some of the funding, rather than it falling to the Council. This is the biggest part of the saving, and the client shouldn't see any impact, as the client is placed at the centre, but the Council needs to have the conversations around the budget and what it has to fund as opposed to health funding it.

*The increase in basic Councillors' pay to £818k creates a budget pressure of £45k. Would it be wise to reject this pay rise? Will the Cabinet Member and colleagues lead by example and forego their own salary increases for this financial year?*

Cabinet Member for Resources: It would not be my decision as to whether to reject it, this would require a full Council decision, so I'm not in a position to comment. If you would like to send a full motion to Council, you can do so.

*Can the Cabinet Member confirm that with a council tax increase of 6%, based on modelling is it still the case that a single parent with two dependent children will be £784 worse off next year, and a two-parent family with 2 children will be £1200 worse off?*

Cabinet Member for Resources: I'm afraid I would need to confirm this following the meeting (**Action:** Cabinet Member for Resources).

Cabinet Member for Housing: These really are 'worst case scenario' figures for a household using almost every conceivable service and assumes for the single parent household no single persons discount on Council tax, no free school meals eligibility and the use of both home to school transport and pre-school childcare, so I'm not sure that is possible or that it's entirely accurate and we need to refine those figures.

*Will staff have the training and support to be able to do the required continuing healthcare assessments and get proper NHS funding? Is it correct that continuing healthcare is not possible without a direct payment, and will that deter people from going down the continuing healthcare route?*

Finance Manager for Social Services: We have a quality panel that's been operating for many years between the Council and health partners and several years ago we set up a specific post that was an expert in this area and they are instrumental in passing on the knowledge on the requirements and triggers and the negotiations, so we have got this covered. I'm aware of the direct payments issue, and my understanding is that it's not that continuing health care can't take over the funding, it's that they can't pay for the direct payment, so the local authority would still have to service the direct payment, and then re-charge continuing health care. I will check this and let you know if any of my explanation is incorrect.

*Is it correct that the workforce development proposals are to merge the team with a neighbouring authority but be hosted in Monmouthshire?*

Finance Manager for Social Services: In terms of the savings, we are undergoing an exercise of where we can get efficiencies out of the workforce recognising the unmet

need. There are areas in the market around recruitment and retention so we are reviewing vacancies to see if we can do something differently and see if improvements could be made through other means.

*The CCTV scheme in Caldicot needs to be made fit for purpose – some of the changes are welcome but Community Safety remains a worry for people in the town.*

Cabinet Member for Housing: Community safety is one of the areas that has been historically under resourced and is one where we are proposing to spend a little more. We have a multiplicity of CCTV systems in the towns, so the proposal is to rationalise and coordinate the systems.

*The Grassroots scheme is very popular and valuable – rather than scrapping it can it be remodelled for our residents?*

Chief Officer: In the budget mandate, we have proposed two options, one being an annual subscription charge, the other being to cease the service entirely, but the subscription option is the recommended option.

*Please can we have more detail about the £550k set aside to fix Redbrook footbridge? Does Gloucestershire County Council have the funds for its half?*

Chief Officer: Within the capital side of the budget, we have identified the potential capital expenditure likely to be incurred over the next three years, so it's for the next financial year, not this year. We are discussing this with Gloucestershire County Council, so the figures are indicative for the next financial year, not this one. If something were to happen in this year, those figures may change.

*For clarity, in respect of Grassroots, will the £30 annual subscription be per household? The overwhelming majority of users are in Newport, Chepstow and Caldicot, areas that are already served by public transport – what plans are there to promote it to users in more rural areas, which was the original intention of the scheme? How many new registrations do we get each year?*

Chief Officer: It is very much something we want to promote because its original intention was for rural areas rather than those where there are public bus services. Some people are using it almost as a private taxi service for work. The charge proposed is per person rather than per household. I can obtain the number of registrations for you following the meeting (**Action: Frances O'Brien**).

*Public transport around Chepstow is poor, with only one bus on a Saturday from Mathern village, for example. One pensioner there uses the Grassroots service – any increase in charges would affect her. A breakdown of those charges and concessions would be useful.*

Chief Officer: I can provide the committee with a breakdown of charges and concessions following the meeting (**Action: Frances O'Brien**)

## Summary:

The Committee undertook thorough scrutiny of the budget proposals for 2023-2024, during which the following key issues and questions were raised:

- Whether there was reassurance that the proposed reductions, especially for grounds maintenance and the community improvement team, won't undermine the ambition for the county to be a greener place to live, and asking what the potential impact on rural villages would be.
- Asking if the 'reconfiguration of sweeping functions across the county' won't undermine the positive contribution to addressing the climate and nature emergency.
- Is there sufficient resource to pursue single penalty notices for littering? Were budgetary considerations made regarding tackling littering and fly tipping in this way and, if so, why were they discarded?
- Asking to what extent the mechanical solution can be applied to littering in more rural areas, and whether a physical solution would be more effective in this context.
- Clarifying the total expenditure figures in the report, and what the additional revenue is for the council for each 1% of council tax increase.
- Concern about the robustness of the figures in the Decarbonisation 1 and 2 proposals, asking how the figure of 5% was reached for the energy awareness campaign's projected saving, and what the margin of error is.
- Asking what the margin of error is on the £150k projected income increase for the solar farm
- What is the return on investment for the capital investment in things like pool covers and HVAC?
- Clarifying what capital investment is required to achieve £70k for additional walking routes.
- The possible impact on increased car use and reduced enrolment in sixth forms of raising the price for concessionary travel.
- Whether reverting to statutory distances for free school transport takes into account where there are no available walking routes.
- Noting that some of the Monlife savings involve transferring costs, which are not then real savings.
- Clarifying where the £100k saving will come from under ML22, Gilwern.
- Understanding why part of the £215k saving in RES24 involves places like Tudor Street, whose fate is not yet decided, and transferring activities to Market Hall, which is also set to close – does the budget prejudice those decisions by including them in the proposals?
- Asking what consultation was taken with the charities and users of the centres in places like Drybridge House and Melville Theatre.
- Regarding withdrawing the Gwent Music subsidy, whether £9k can be considered sufficient as a hardship fund, to cover the whole county for low-income families.
- Regarding school transport, whether there is reassurance that a safe route to school will still be considered, and for concessionary travel, whether there is an allowance for the number of children involved, given the cost of £880 for the bus for a family with 2 kids.

- Whether Severn View could become affordable housing, given its ideal location.
- Clarity about the reduction in opening hours for libraries and leisure centres etc. and how it will affect different users e.g. older people wanting to access in the day.
- Whether the safe route is independent from the mileage, or they are considered together.
- Asking how much confidence there is that enough funding has been allocated for school traffic management improvements, especially as cuts in school transport service budget will mean more children finding their own way to school, and how we will monitor the effect of those changes.
- Clarifying the costs incurred for Newport Retail Park and Castlegate Business park, and the future plans for those sites.
- Clarifying how those sites sit with the ambitions in the corporate plan to reduce commuting out of county, and how it can be explained that these sites are being funded with free parking while raising or creating car parking fees across Monmouthshire.
- If car parks are still being subsidised, and is the funding raised ringfenced for their upkeep.
- Whether payments for school transport or the green waste collection service can be staggered through the year.
- Whether more can be done to save energy by turning off lights and street lights when they aren't needed, such as at school sites.
- Clarification and further detail of how bridge closures would be implemented.
- Whether increasing business rates and parking charges will further the decline of town centres, and whether stallholders at Monmouth cattle market could be moved to Agincourt Square to make the market there more active and free up the car park.
- Clarifying why, if Market Hall is up for selling off, so much officer time is being spent trying to get the levelling up fund.
- Whether reducing hours for libraries and leisure centres will engender staff redundancies.
- Why £300k is being cut in support from those who need it most, i.e. those with learning disabilities.
- Whether members should reject the pay rise that is creating a £45k pressure, and whether the Cabinet Member and colleagues will lead by example and forego their own salary increases for this financial year.
- If the Cabinet Member can confirm that with a council tax increase of 6%, a single parent with two dependent children will be £784 worse off next year, and a two parent family will be £1200 worse off.
- Will staff have the training and support to be able to do the required continuing healthcare assessments and get proper NHS funding.
- Is it correct that continuing healthcare is not possible without a direct payment, and whether that will deter people from going down the continuing healthcare route.
- Clarifying that the workforce development proposals are to merge the team with a neighbouring authority but be hosted in Monmouthshire.
- Whether an impact on training might be that people decide to work for other authorities.
- If the CCTV scheme in Caldicot can be made fit for purpose.

- Whether the Grassroots scheme can be remodelled.
- If there is further detail about the £550k set aside to fix Redbrook footbridge, and whether Gloucestershire County Council has the funds for its half.
- Asking what plans there are to promote Grassroots to users in more rural areas, how many new registrations we get each year, and if the £30 annual subscription will be per household.
- Noting that a further breakdown of the Grassroots charges and concessions would be useful.
- Asking if the lease for Bridges Community Centre is negotiated, will there be grant facilities to cover any increase in rent.

#### **4. Next Meeting**

Wednesday 1st March 2023 at 10.00am.