

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Thursday, 19th September, 2024 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor Su McConnel
County Councillor Peter Strong (Vice Chairman, as Chair)

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, Meirion Howells, Paul Griffiths, Jackie Strong, Rachel Garrick, Maria Stevens, Steven Garratt, Angela Sandles, Ben Callard, John Crook, Tomos Davies, Dale Rooke, Sue Riley, Jayne McKenna, Jill Bond, Louise Brown, Lisa Dymock, Tony Easson, Christopher Edwards, Martyn Groucutt, Richard John, David Jones, Penny Jones, Malcolm Lane, Phil Murphy, Paul Pavia, Maureen Powell, Frances Taylor, Tudor Thomas, Armand Watts and Ann Webb

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

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	Chief Officer People, Performance and Partnerships.
Ian Saunders	Chief Officer Customer, Culture and Wellbeing.
James Williams	Chief Officer Law & Governance

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors Simon Howarth

1. Declarations of interest

None.

2. Chair's Announcement

Noted.

3. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 18th July 2024

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as an accurate record.

4. Petition to Council - Restore Night Shelter in Monmouth

County Councillor Louise Brown presented a petition to restore the night shelter in Monmouth on behalf of County Councillor Jane Lucas.

The Deputy Leader, County Councillor Paul Griffiths thanked the Churches in Monmouth Housing Group for bringing the petition, welcoming the opportunity to discuss, in public debate, the homelessness situation in Monmouthshire.

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The Deputy Leader offered a commitment to meet with Churches in Monmouth so that an agreement could be made on how to work together to find suitable accommodation and provide support to homeless people in Monmouth. Following this, progress will be reported to Place Scrutiny Committee.

A motion was proposed and seconded that the petition be referred to Cabinet.

https://www.youtube.com/live/xlPra7V_a9o?si=JJ1rWnwblEE92dBy&t=271

5. Reports to Council:

6. Governance and Audit Committee Annual Report 2023/24

Andrew Blackmore, Chair of the Governance & Audit Committee presented the Annual Report to Council explaining that the Committee had discharged its responsibilities and had been effective in holding officers to account and also supporting them in making targeted improvements.

There were concerns that restructures of Finance and Audit departments were not yet fully implemented. It was of particular concern that a permanent Chief Internal Auditor had not been appointed. The Committee thought this disappointing and should be of concern to Council.

In terms of risk, Mr. Blackmore expressed concern around the uncertainty the lack of this appointment is causing on the existing team within the internal audit function, but added, that, more importantly, it sets a tone around leadership, particularly given the financial challenges being faced by the Council.

https://www.youtube.com/live/xlPra7V_a9o?si=M6LNWMrtrDp2wYUV&t=1240

7. Appointment to Outside Body

The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement, County Councillor Angela Sandles presented the report to appoint a Monmouthshire Councillor to be a representative on the Rachel Herbert's School Endowment Charity.

Council resolved to approve the appointment of the member for the Grofield Ward, County Councillor Laura Wright, as representative to the outside body.

https://www.youtube.com/live/xlPra7V_a9o?si=FN2pbETOEjvaAEYW&t=1705

8. Self-Assessment 2023/24

The Leader of the Council presented the report to seek Council approval of the self-assessment report 2023/24 to ensure that members have a clear and transparent assessment of the authority's performance during the year ending 31 March 2024 in line with requirements outlined in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

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

That the self-assessment for 2023/24 be approved.

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https://www.youtube.com/live/xlPra7V_a9o?si=i_VfAOmlZy6KJKt4&t=1769

9. People with Care Experience

County Councillor Ian Chandler, Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health Services presented the report for Council to consider proposed measures that the Council may implement to help care experienced people (people who have spent time in care when they were under 18 years old) overcome the disadvantages and discrimination they experience.

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

That 'care experienced people' is added to the Council's Integrated Impact Assessment, so that any impact of policy decisions on people with care experience is identified and taken into account when those decisions are made.

In relation to recruitment, currently the Council guarantees an interview to individuals who have been in the care of the Monmouthshire County Council provided they meet the selection criteria set out in the job description. It is proposed that this be expanded to individuals who have been in the care of other Local Authorities.

When setting and reviewing the Council's Strategic Equality Objectives, it is proposed that the Council include consideration of how it might overcome the disadvantages and discrimination experienced by care experienced people.

https://www.youtube.com/live/xlPra7V_a9o?si=LaaCYc5k2bl2B0C9&t=2968

10. Motions to Council:

11. Submitted by County Councillor Frances Taylor

That this Council recognise the significant concern of Magor with Undy residents about the curtailment of local GP practice services and the afternoon closure of Magor Surgery.

This Council notes that the Health Board's "Change to Service Provision Policy" has previously not made provision for patient engagement or wider stakeholder engagement such as local councillors, and welcomes that following recent discourse, the Health Board has recognised the value and importance of such engagement and will update the policy for future changes.

Furthermore, that this council agrees to write to Aneurin Bevan Health Board and other relevant organisations such as Llais and NHS Wales to seek clarification on the relevant appeal process for the decision on Magor Surgery, and to secure detail of the proposed changes to the service change policy with particular reference to engagement and communication, Integrated Future Generations/Equalities Impact Assessment requirements.

Seconded by County Councillor David Jones.

https://www.youtube.com/live/xlPra7V_a9o?si=aeoIIPzVZTIXVgi3&t=3793

Upon being put to a vote the motion was carried.

County Councillor Frances Taylor left the meeting 15:40pm

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12. Submitted by County Councillor Richard John

Regrets the UK Government's decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension Credit.

Notes the estimated impact of this decision on over 20,000 Monmouthshire pensioners, some of whom are just above the threshold for Pension Credit and need the money to stay warm this winter.

Agrees to bring forward a Council-led local awareness campaign about eligibility for Pension Credit may help our poorest residents to access the Winter Fuel Payment.

Agrees that the Leader will write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer requesting a review of the decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.

Seconded by County Councillor Lisa Dymock.

https://www.youtube.com/live/xlPra7V_a9o?si=6XgHq_F0Yh0uKcQZ

County Councillor Ian Chandler proposed an amendment

This Council:

Regrets the UK Government's decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of Pension Credit and some other means-tested benefits.

Notes the estimated impact of this decision on many Monmouthshire pensioners, some of whom are just above the threshold for Pension Credit and need the money to stay warm this winter.

Applauds the work that the Council and its partners are doing to support residents vulnerable to fuel poverty, including local awareness campaigns and advice about eligibility for Pension Credit to help our poorest residents access the Winter Fuel Payment and other benefits

Calls upon the Chancellor of the Exchequer to review the decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment and ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.

Seconded by County Councillor Howells

Upon being put to a vote the amendment was carried and debate ensued on the motion, as amended.

https://www.youtube.com/live/xlPra7V_a9o?si=xd9vIFJNs39hNQWC&t=8085

Upon being to put to a vote the motion, as amended, was carried.

13. Submitted by County Councillor Richard John

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Notes that over 12% of school age pupils residing in Monmouthshire attend independent schools.

Expresses concern about the disruption to children's schooling that is likely to be caused by the UK Government's policy of charging VAT on school fees.

Instructs the administration to publish plans to mitigate the impact of this policy on Monmouthshire children including providing local school places and supporting children whose education has been disrupted.

Seconded by County Councillor Alistair Neill

https://www.youtube.com/live/xlPra7V_a9o?si=gsxCoVXE2XXRxv9J&t=9979

Upon being put to a vote the motion was defeated.

14. **Members Questions:**

15. **From County Councillor Jackie Strong to County Councillor Paul Griffiths Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development Deputy Leader**

Can the Cabinet member for Planning and Economic Development give an update on work done by MCC to facilitate the opening of a Post Office in Caldicot Town Centre?

The Cabinet Member reported that the new Post Office in Caldicot Town Centre was expected to open on Monday 14th October, in the former store known as Country Flowers. Members were reminded that the previous Post Office closed when the host premise closed. The Council negotiated with Monmouthshire Housing Association to reserve a unit at Holman House and worked in partnership with Post Office Ltd to market the opportunity to local businesses.

In undertaking the work, Council has been able to use the support of WG Placemaking Grant Programme and is providing grant funding to the new business to refurbish the unit.

As a supplementary County Councillor Jackie Strong asked that the Cabinet Member conveys thanks on behalf of residents and fellow councillors to the Chief Officer Communities and Place and her colleagues.

16. **From County Councillor Fay Bromfield to County Councillor Catrin Maby Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment**

Can the Cabinet Member please confirm what steps she is taking to combat the issue of Ragwort?

The Cabinet Member was aware of concerns and explained that Ragwort was native to the UK and is beneficial to wildlife and biodiversity, supporting a number of pollinators and insects. In the right environment Ragwort is positive and should not be destroyed. However, it is classed as an injurious weed as it is poisonous to livestock.

WG have a specific code of practice on Ragwort which can be found in full on the WG website. A key point being that most grazing animals such as cows, horses and sheep will avoid eating

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common Ragwort and is mainly a danger when included in hay. Current advice is that Ragwort should only be removed from areas that are cultivated for feed or where grazing is limited.

MCC does not have specific plans to clear Ragwort from road verges however large sections have been manually removed where concerns have been raised adjacent to land used for grazing. It was advised that members of the public do not attempt to remove plants or spray with weed killer.

17. From County Councillor Fay Bromfield to County Councillor Catrin Maby Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on any discussions that the administration is having with Welsh water regarding the health of our rivers?

The Cabinet Member explained that MCC is directly engaged in water quality discussions on a regular basis within the Usk and Wye Partnerships, which include Welsh Water, the regulatory agencies, neighbouring local authorities, farming and environmental groups. A major focus for these discussions tended to be on the excess nutrients, phosphates and nitrates, which are causing damage to river diversity.

As a supplementary County Councillor Bromfield welcomed further information, particularly around Public Health Wales. The Cabinet Member was asked to update Members quarterly, to which she agreed. County Councillor Maby also agreed to email an update on the issue around bacteria and swimming.

18. From County Councillor Tony Kear to County Councillor Paul Griffiths Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development Deputy Leader

Please can the Cabinet Member update Council on the proposed Countywide review of car park charges?

The Cabinet Member explained that a consultant has been appointed to support the car park review and is currently undertaking a base study, collecting data on current and historic usage. Following an upcoming meeting it was hoped that the study would move on to engagement with communities, businesses, town and community councils and Members. There would be public consultation should any proposals for change emerge from the process.

As a supplementary County Councillor Kear referred to a recent survey conducted by Usk Town Council which saw over 1600 responses and sought reassurances that the huge number of responses and strong views would be taken into consideration in the consultation period and that a charging regime would not be implemented to raise revenue.

The Cabinet Member responded that there were many objectives to a car park charge regime, one of which was to raise revenue, and noted that very few people favour paying charges.

19. From County Councillor Tony Kear to County Councillor Paul Griffiths Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development Deputy Leader

Please can the Cabinet Member advise of the current allocation of parking enforcement officers around Monmouthshire and the basis of the allocation?

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The Cabinet Member advised that there are 5 officers within the Civil Parking Enforcement team, but with staffing issues there is usually less than half this number patrolling. It was thought that the optimum level of enforcement was not taking place. The Cabinet Member was assured that the review on car parking charges includes a reflection on the regime for enforcement.

As a supplementary County Councillor Kear referred to the issue of double yellow parking in Usk and asked that the Cabinet Member agree to work with both ward members to ensure that when the review takes place there is a fairer allocation to Usk and greater time given to enforcement than is currently being spent in Usk. The Cabinet Member agreed to work with Councillors Kear, Howells and stakeholders in all aspects of the review.

20. From County Councillor Tony Kear to County Councillor Martyn Groucut Cabinet Member for Education

Could the Cabinet Member advise the reasons for the overcrowding on the school busses from Usk to Monmouth Comprehensive school this term?

The Cabinet Member was not aware of incidents of overcrowding on school buses and suggested this referred to secondary school pupils travelling on public service vehicles. The operating rules for public service vehicles permit passengers to stand if the capacity is not exceeded. MCC are currently allocating secondary learners three public service vehicles to access Monmouth Comprehensive.

It was thought that the question related to Number 60 service which is operated by Newport Bus. Capacity of the vehicles is between 61 and 70, with seating capacity for 29 to 33. 29 learners have been allocated bus passes on this service, and on average 20 fare paying customers.

As a supplementary County Councillor Kear expressed thanks to Becky Pritchard for efficiently dealing with a large number of complaints from Usk parents. He asked what steps were being taken to ensure that driving standards and the safety of pupils were being regularly reviewed. The Cabinet Member assured Members that officers in the PTU have responsibility to monitor standards on an unannounced regular basis.

21. From County Councillor Paul Pavia to County Councillor Paul Griffiths Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development Deputy Leader

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on what the Council is doing to relieve traffic congestion in and around Chepstow?

The Cabinet Member explained that WG is now undertaking a WELTAG study on the potential design for improvements at High Beech Roundabout. Last month Cabinet colleagues had met with WG Cabinet Secretary Ken Skates and had made the case that the M48 would be far more productive if there was access to it from Rogiet and Caldicot. The Cabinet Secretary wanted to seek ways of making better use of the existing network.

Railways are improving in Chepstow and by the end of the year Transport for Wales will be delivering an hourly service. When the cross-country service is included, there will be a half-hourly service. In addition, next month Transport for Wales will mbe consulting a fares proposal that caps the daily fare in the South Wales region to £7, and weekly fare to £20.

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With regards to buses the Cabinet Member commended Newport Bus for their range of new services in the Chepstow area.

As a supplementary County Councillor Pavia sought clarity on funding for WELTAG stage for Chepstow Bypass and asked if funding from Uk Government had been approved and if so when would the tendering process start.

The Cabinet Member explained that earlier this year UK Government allocated £5.9m in support of a range of transport proposals for Chepstow. The administration had responded that they could undertake a large part of the work specified but would seek to direct £500,000 to a joint study with Gloucestershire, not specifically on the Chepstow Bypass but a study on all options for mobility improvement across the Severn Estuary. Since submitting the response, the new UK Government is looking again at the whole funding envelope and the outstanding funding proposals.

22. Date of next meeting - 24th October 2024

The meeting ended at 6.20 pm