

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA with remote attendance on Thursday, 11th July, 2024 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor Jane Lucas (Chairman)

County Councillors: Louise Brown, Emma Bryn, Tomos Davies, Lisa Dymock, Jackie Strong, Laura Wright, Tudor Thomas, Peter Strong and Angela Sandles

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Pennie Walker, Equality & Welsh Language Manager

APOLOGIES: Councillor Maria Stevens

1. Election of Chair

Councillor Lucas was elected, proposed by Councillor Dymock and seconded by Councillor Brown.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chair

Councillor Dymock was appointed, proposed by Councillor Brown, seconded by Councillor Davies.

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Brown declared a non-prejudicial interest as previously volunteering in Chepstow with Night Shelter Churches Together.

4. Public Open Forum

A member of the public spoke about the first petition presented today, on restoring a night shelter in Monmouth.

A letter from a member of the public was read out by Scrutiny Manager Hazel Ilett, regarding Goldwire Lane in Monmouth. Following a discussion by members, it was agreed that a response would be sought on the matter from officers and the Cabinet Member – ACTION

5. Petitions received - to recommend actions to Cabinet

- **6a Restore night shelter in Monmouth.**
- **6b Change of use of empty retail and commercial property in Monmouth Town Centre.**
- **6c Introduce an 'Engagement Ring' system and triage process.**

Following a discussion, the committee agreed that Petition 6a should be referred to Council for a full debate. Petitions 6b and 6c require a detailed written response from the Cabinet Member and relevant officers within 6 weeks to the committee and Lead Petitioner. – **ACTION**

6. Strategic Equality Plan 23/24 Monitoring Report - To scrutinise the Council's progress

Cabinet Member Angela Sandles and Pennie Walker introduced the report and answered the members' questions:

Key points made by Members:

- Asking whether the Council plans to continue supporting Mind's rural mental health project, with the funding stream having ended on 31st May. – **ACTION: officers to come back with plans for next year**
- A member stated that Welsh speakers in the authority continue to lose out in terms of being able to converse in their first language when dealing with the Council, and that Monmouthshire is lagging behind other authorities in this regard.
- Particularly in the scenario of a resident calling with a complicated issue, he argued that the Council needs to make more progress in having an in-house capability in Welsh, specifically through better recruitment.
- Regarding work opportunities for disabled people, asking whether this included flexible working and part-time options.
- Suggesting using the actual protected characteristics from the Equality Act in the report instead of generic terms such as gender and race, and including the socio-economic duty as well.
- Asking how many debt organisations have been supported by the Council to overcome inequalities in access to economic prosperity and deal with child poverty.
- Stressing the importance of not developing a hierarchy of protected characteristics and considering them all equally.
- Welcoming the new Equalities and Welsh language manager and thanking her for the work that she is doing for the disabled.
- Proposing that the position of members of armed forces families and veterans be included in future equalities work, specifically in integrated impact assessments.
- Asking, as a Disability Confident Employer, what we are doing to reach Level 3.
- Enquiring about the future plans for the Building Stronger Families initiative.
- Asking what potential barriers are foreseen in achieving the plans and objectives, and how the plan can be adapted in challenging circumstances e.g. a future pandemic.

- Noting the importance of those affected having a mechanism to see how this plan will support them, asking how we will receive feedback from individuals on the plan's implementation and monitor its progress.
- Expressing the importance of fostering good relations between those who share a protected characteristic, and agreeing that there should be no hierarchy between protected characteristics.
- Noting that encouraging disabled people into work is very important but in order to do that carers need to be supported as well but support services have been cut, so it is very difficult for them.
- Expressing concern that Monmouthshire has an ageing population yet there is a drive towards digital services – we shouldn't leave people behind, and therefore there needs to be a way for people to interact with the Council without needing digital services to do so. Those with sensory impairments also need to be considered.

Chair's Summary:

Thank you to the Cabinet Member and Pennie Walker for the report and attending today. We have covered a number of points, namely protected characteristics, the move towards employment opportunities for disabled people, building stronger families, monitoring and feeding back what has been learned, including Armed forces status, there being no hierarchy amongst protected characteristics, support for carers, support for Mind and continued funding, digital services, and increasing the authority's Welsh language capability when communicating with residents.

7. Place Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Action List

The committee agreed to change the default time of meetings from 10am to 2pm –
ACTION

8. Council and Cabinet Work Planner

9. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting

A member asked about the more condensed version of the minutes that are being produced. The Scrutiny Manager reiterated that with full transcripts and recordings available separately, the minutes primarily serve to convey that the meeting took place, capture any recommendations or actions to be taken forward, and record what was discussed – with an onus on capturing the challenge from members, as requested by auditors.

The minutes were confirmed, proposed by Councillor Dymock and seconded by Councillor Strong.

10. Next Meeting

24th July 2024 at 4.30pm.

The meeting ended at 11.18 am.