

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of People Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA with remote attendance on Wednesday, 17th July, 2024 at 2.00 pm

Councillors Present

County Councillor Laura Wright (Chairman)
County Councillors: Jan Butler, Simon Howarth, Maureen Powell, Sue Riley, Jackie Strong, Ian Chandler and Peter Strong

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Jane Rodgers, Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Jane Oates, Housing Options Officer

APOLOGIES: Councillors Christopher Edwards, Penny Jones and Maria Stevens

1. Election of Chair

Councillor Laura Wright was nominated by Councillor Jackie Strong, seconded by Councillor Butler.

2. Appointment of Vice Chair

Councillor Jackie Strong was nominated by Councillor Sue Riley, seconded by Councillor Wright.

3. Declarations of Interest

None.

4. Public Open Forum

None.

5. Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan 2022-2027

Ian Bakewell and Rebecca Cresswell delivered a detailed presentation (available on the Council's website with the agenda), introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Jane Oates.

Key points made by Members:

- Clarification was sought as to whether the leasing scheme applies to Monmouthshire Housing as well, the response being that it did.
- Questions were asked about the number of affordable homes (approximately 130 affordable homes anticipated), the promotion of the Monmouthshire letting

service, the accommodation for families, and the local housing allowance rates. Members were advised that families are usually placed in self-contained properties, and that the local housing allowance rates are based on 2011 data and are much lower than market rents. Members queried the use of 2011 data for assessing Local Housing Grant.

- A Member commented that take up of the Monmouthshire Letting Service in her ward was low and that perhaps it could be better promoted via town and community councils. Officers acknowledged that contacting town and community councils to promote the Monmouthshire Letting Service would be an action they could take forward (**Action: Rebecca Cresswell**).
- A member queried the average wait for social housing, the domestic abuse figures, and the leasing properties.
- Members asked for clarification on the housing stock for families, given that Severn View is for single persons.
- Members asked about whether domestic abuse within households was leading to increasing homelessness.
- A Member asked for clarity on whether the purpose of leasing properties was to alleviate Bed and Breakfast and temporary demand, rather than to offer a long-term solution.
- A Member questioned whether somebody who has been assessed as being in unsuitable accommodation qualifies as being at risk of homelessness and the officer agreed to discuss the individual circumstance with the Member following the meeting.
- Another Member asked for clarification on people with protected characteristics as defined by the Equalities Act and also members of the armed forces in terms of their priority in gaining a property.
- Clarity was sought as to whether a 'single person' referred to a single individual without children ~ it was confirmed it applied to a single person without children and that these represented the highest proportion of homeless applications, coupled with a severe shortage of one-bedroom properties.
- A Member queried how many affordable homes were delivered in Monmouthshire in 2023-2024, the figure being sixty-three.
- A Member suggested that we consider the terminology when promoting properties for people in need of a home, to avoid the stigma associated with homelessness, which may also attract more landlords. Officers confirmed that for the purpose of the report, it was necessary to use the term 'homeless' to refer to people who are eligible for assistance under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and that it defines homelessness as "not having a suitable accommodation or being at risk of losing it within 56 days". However, marketing and promotion of homes for everyone is taken into consideration.

- It was questioned whether we receive sufficient grant monies from Welsh Government, and whether Registered Social Landlords could do more. Officers confirmed that they had held a meeting with Welsh Government about the condition of the TAC pay grants that requires property purchased to be prioritised for people in temporary accommodation. They had raised that it disadvantages other households who are not in temporary accommodation but have a homeless status and a high need for suitable housing. They also advised that they have a good working relationship with Registered Social Landlords and had recently been focussing on town centres.

Chair's Summary:

The Cabinet Member and Officers have answered the Committee's questions in full and the Committee is satisfied with the detailed responses given and the work being undertaken to alleviate homelessness outlined in the Rapid Rehousing Update Report. A further update will be brought to the Committee in due course.

6. People with Care Experience

Cabinet Member Ian Chandler and Jane Rodgers introduced the report and answered the members' questions.

Key points made by Members:

- A Member commented that whilst they had no questions about the report, it was pleasing to see the Council taking tangible steps to demonstrate it is serious about the support given to people who have been through the care system.
- It was queried whether this will involve a specific question on an application form to identify an applicant who has care experience, and whether it would be made clear as to why the question was being asked.
- A Member asked what assistance is given to people after the age of 25.
- Another Councillor suggested the report could perhaps reference some of the lifelong disadvantages of being care-experienced.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair confirmed that there was full support from the Committee for the direction of the report and thanked officers and the Cabinet Members for attending.

7. People Scrutiny Forward Work Programme and Action List

Noted.

8. Cabinet and Council Planner

Noted.

9. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16th April 2024

The Minutes were approved as a true and accurate record.

10. Next Meeting

23rd July 2024.