

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held on Thursday, 17th July, 2025 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor Peter Strong (Chair)
County Councillor Martyn Groucutt (Vice Chair)

County Councillors: Rachel Buckler, Laura Wright, Tony Kear, Catrin Maby, Jan Butler, Sara Burch, Alistair Neill, Su McConnel, Mary Ann Brocklesby, Fay Bromfield, Jane Lucas, Emma Bryn, Meirion Howells, Paul Griffiths, Jackie Strong, Rachel Garrick, 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, Simon Howarth, Richard John, David Jones, Penny Jones, Malcolm Lane, Phil Murphy, M. Newell, Paul Pavia, Maureen Powell, Frances Taylor, Tudor Thomas and Ann Webb

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
James Williams	Chief Officer Law & Governance
Deb Hill-Howells	Chief Officer Infrastructure
Craig O'Connor	Chief Officer, Place and Community Well-being

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors Ian Chandler, Maria Stevens and Armand Watts

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Chair's Announcement

Noted.

3. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on the 26th June 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th June 2025 were accepted as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

4. Reports to Council

5. Chepstow Integrated Transport LUF Project

The Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development presented the report to seek approval from the County Council to proceed with the Chepstow LUF project and the allocation of £1,407,692 of capital match funding.

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

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- Council agrees to proceed with the Chepstow LUF project and authorises officers to commence the on-boarding process.
- Council agrees to underwrite capital match funding of £1,407,692 to be drawn down between the financial years 25/26 and 28/29.
- Council asks the Cabinet Member and Officers to use best endeavours to displace the need to draw on capital through the alternative funding mechanisms.
- Council delegates to the Chief Officer Infrastructure, in consultation with the Cabinet Member, discretion to develop the overall project through ongoing engagement with local Members, Chepstow Town Council and community stakeholders to maximise the benefits of the scheme within the approved budget and LUF parameters.

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6. Strategic Director, Children, Learning and Economy Annual Report

The Strategic Director, Learning, Skills and Economy presented his annual report to provide members with a strategic overview of the status and performance of Monmouthshire's education system, highlighting an informed perspective on MCC system's key strengths, areas for development, emerging risks, and opportunities for development.

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7. Motions to Council

8. Submitted by County Councillor Frances Taylor

Withdrawn.

9. Submitted by County Councillor Lisa Dymock

This Council:

- *Regrets that the administration's adoption of statutory distances to qualify for home to school transport will cause financial hardship and logistical difficulties for many Monmouthshire families.*
- *Instructs the cabinet to ensure that all families whose eligibility has changed are directly contacted, setting out their rights to appeal, committing to an assessment of whether a safe walking route exists, and expediting all appeals and complaints processes in light of the short notice to many parents ahead of the September school year.*
- *Commits to working with schools, parents, and community groups to explore safe, affordable transport alternatives for those affected.*

Upon being put to a vote Council resolved to accept the motion.

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10. Member Questions

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11. From County Councillor Emma Bryn to County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

Can the Cabinet Member please provide an update on what the Council is doing to ensure the safety of pedestrians who are forced to walk the 200m along the 60mph pavement-less section of A466 at Redbrook. Residents and visitors have had to run the gauntlet on this stretch of road to access or leave the village along Wye Valley Walk for many years and the road is not getting any quieter.

The Cabinet Member had spoken with highways and the countryside team about the matter and they were trying to find and implement a solution. They were looking at both interim and long-term improvements. The corridor is quite constrained and unlikely to be wide enough for a fully compliant footway, but one possible solution would be a narrower metalled service surface to make it a little bit better than the existing muddy verge which would improve pedestrian safety and accessibility, particularly during periods of wet weather.

In the short term, additional signage was being installed to alert motorists to the presence of pedestrians in the carriageway. Vegetation management also needs to be prioritised so that people don't have to step out into the road. She added that there was an alternative route via Duffield Lane and Wyesham Lane which provides a restricted by-way into Wyesham but this was not a direct riverside route so may not be suitable for all users.

As a supplementary Councillor Bryn asked for a timeframe, especially regarding the road signs. The Cabinet Member replied that she could not provide a time frame but could talk to officers and ask them to confirm what is possible.

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12. From County Councillor Rachel Buckler to County Councillor Ian Chandler, Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health Services

Does the Cabinet Member for Social Care believe the new domiciliary care arrangements in South Monmouthshire are progressing as expected and does he still consider his decision the right one?

The Chair advised that the Cabinet Member was not in attendance and would provide a written response to the question. He invited Councillor Buckler to add a supplementary which was that Council acknowledge the distress and risk this caused and that assurance is given that such chaotic transitions do not happen again.

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Councillors Howarth, Kear, Bromfield, Rooke and Thomas left the meeting at 17:27

13. From County Councillor Alistair Neill to County Councillor Ben Callard, Cabinet Member for Resources

In 2024/25 our Monmouthshire pupils were funded at nearly £600 per pupil below the Wales average, a substantial gap. For the previous year, 2023/24, funding was £400 per pupil below the Wales average, making a two-year total of Monmouthshire pupils being funded at £1,000 below the Wales average. Funding per pupil is determined by each local authority and in those

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2 years Monmouthshire County Council increased council tax by 14%. Should this large increase in council tax not have ensured our funding per pupil was at least at the Wales average?

The Cabinet Member responded that the authority has faced financial challenges, and pupils in Monmouthshire schools have not been funded above the average since 2017. He added that in this year's budget, with the additional £1,000,000 put into schools budget which was on top of the full pay awards for both teaching and non-teaching staff, based on the latest Welsh Government statistics, we were now funding above the Welsh average and are committed to continue to seek further investment in our schools.

As a supplementary Councillor Neill asked that the Administration recognise that our schools and our pupils deserve the very best and prioritise support for our pupils and our teachers. Councillor Callard replied that in investing the additional £1,000,000 they have shown support towards our schools, that this Council carries many priorities which are of obvious importance to various sections of our society. Education is one of the most important and their responsibility was to balance those priorities. He added that we were working with our schools to address the deficit balances which they carry.

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14. From County Councillor Louise Brown to County Councillor Laura Wright, Cabinet Member for Education

How many Primary and Secondary School Children who live in Monmouthshire County Council area will lose their free school bus this September 2025 based on both the change to statutory distances and having an initial route assessment of an available walking route to school and when were parents informed?

The Cabinet Member explained that changes to distance eligibility will result in 51 primary and 64 secondary learners losing entitlements to free home to school transport. 3 learners lost entitlement to transport as their route has now been assessed as safe. She continued that ward members and parents or guardians of learners impacted by the changes were contacted on the 18th of June with a copy of The Walking Route Assessment.

As a supplementary Councillor Brown asked for information on wards and schools impacted? Councillor Wright agreed to send a copy of the information.

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15. From County Councillor Louise Brown to County Councillor Angela Sandles, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement

How will the Cabinet Member ensure that key decisions which are significant in terms of its effects on the wellbeing of individuals living or working in the council area are published and made available to members on the Council website to allow for Call in, in accordance with paragraph 24 of the Council's Constitution?

The Cabinet Member responded that the Council's constitution requires that where a chief officer makes a key decision within the definition set out in paragraph 24.2.3 of the Constitution,

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that the decision is posted on the Council's website within 2 clear days of the decision being made and cannot be implemented for a further 5 clear days in order to allow Members to call in that decision if they wish. She continued to explain that isn't a matter of choice for as it is a constitutional requirement. Therefore, where a chief officer, makes a key decision the Constitution requires that the decision will be published for all members to see and call in if they choose.

As a supplementary Councillor Brown asked when key decisions being published would be implemented. Councillor Sandles agreed to provide the information following the meeting.

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16. From County Councillor Louise Brown to County Councillor Angela Sandles, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement

How will the Cabinet Member ensure that the Council and Forward Planner lists items going to Cabinet in sufficient time to allow Scrutiny Committees/members to ask for a Scrutiny report prior to them going to Cabinet or Full Council?

The Cabinet Member responded that there were various mechanisms in place to ensure that Cabinet are aware of upcoming decisions and that they are included on the forward work plan at the earliest opportunity to help support scrutiny members. The content of the forward planner is currently being reviewed so that it will be clearer whether an item included on the forward work programme is scheduled to be heard at a scrutiny meeting or not. The changes will also provide a fuller time frame that the decision will follow as it goes through the various stages of the governance programme process. By including this information on the planner, members will be able to identify if a decision is tabled for scrutiny or not, and to consider in conjunction with the scrutiny manager and relevant scrutiny chair, whether there is scope to add it to the agenda for the relevant scrutiny committee.

As a supplementary Councillor Brown asked when this would be implemented? Councillor Sandles explained that there is work currently being undertaken and Democratic Services are pulling together a much more detailed back office for all councillors, which is planned to be implemented imminently.

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County Councillor Rachel Garrick left the meeting at 17:56pm

17. From County Councillor Paul Pavia to County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

Could the Cabinet Member please provide an update regarding the progress of both the Traffic Regulation Order and the road resurfacing works for High Street Chepstow?

The Cabinet Member explained that the High Street works is scheduled for the Autumn, but she was unable to provide a precise date. The Traffic Regulation Order will run concurrently, and it was expected that the new Traffic Regulation Order, in line with the programme, with double yellow lines being in place in October/November. It was complicated in that you could not have the no-parking signs and double yellow lines at the same time, so one traffic order would need to be revoked to introduce the other one. She added that we are starting to recruit additional civil enforcement officers to ensure compliance of no parking zones because this is such an issue across the county.

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18. From County Councillor Lisa Dymock to County Councillor Laura Wright, Cabinet Member for Education

Could the cabinet member please provide an update on the funding promised to ARW for their planned expansion?

The Cabinet Member was pleased to confirm that we have recently invoiced the developer for some of the section 106 money as the relevant number of houses were now either sold or occupied. However, the amount was not immediately sufficient to develop the classroom extension that is envisioned as being needed. When the remaining funds were received from the developer it would become feasible to undertake the work. This approach was usual in these circumstances. She added that Council remains committed to developing the expansion of Archbishop Rowan Williams Church in Wales Primary School.

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19. From County Councillor Lisa Dymock to County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

In light of a recent incident where a resident was knocked to the ground by a cyclist on an the Portskewett active travel path, will measures such as improved signage or lane markings to provide designated walking and cycling zones be considered to prevent further accidents?

The Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs, Housing & Tourism responded that she hoped the resident had recovered, and explained that whether or not to put markings on shared use paths to attempt to separate cyclists and pedestrians was one of the most thorny issues in the design of active travel routes. The current design thinking based on research was that it did not reduce the potential for incidents but could increase conflict and encourage cyclists to assume a priority that they don't have in terms of the hierarchy of road users. It is the responsibility of cyclists to keep out of the way of pedestrians. She was conscious that the Greenway and the other paths such as the new route in Monmouth, were used by families or groups of friends who naturally want to walk together, often with children and buggies on scooters. She has discussed with officers the need to remind the users of shared paths to share with care and agreed that signage is needed to that effect on routes, which was being worked on. It is a matter of cyclists being aware that pedestrians may or may not hear them or see them coming particularly well, and to cycle courteously. This is part of our cycle training for young people in schools.

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20. From County Councillor Richard John to County Councillor Sara Burch, Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs, Housing & Tourism

Has the Cabinet given further consideration to the Conservative Group's proposal that the Council should rule out introducing a tourism tax in Monmouthshire?

The Cabinet Member clarified that this referred to the visitor levy as introduced in the Visitor Accommodation (Register and Levy) Etc. (Wales) Bill passed in the last few days. She explained that there were no immediate plans to introduce a visitor levy in Monmouthshire, and

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we were currently working with the tourism sector and our towns to develop an ambitious destination management plan. We would then work closely with the local tourism providers to fully understand the advantages and disadvantages and understand whether a visitor levy would be right for Monmouthshire and how the money raised could improve our counties welcome for visitors. She added that the same legislation which has given councils the option to introduce a visitor levy has also introduced a registration scheme for visitor accommodation, which was welcome, and looked forward to further details of the licencing scheme for visitor accommodation which was planned.

As a supplementary Councillor John asked for a timescale for the work outlined. In response the Councillor Burch explained that the timescale for the destination management plan would go through scrutiny and into cabinet in the autumn.

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21. From County Councillor Richard John to County Councillor Sara Burch, Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs, Housing & Tourism

What steps is the Council taking to promote Monmouthshire as a tourist destination?

The Cabinet Member welcomed the opportunity to explain that there is an expert team working directly on tourism. The Visit Monmouthshire marketing plan targets independent explorers within a two-to-three-hour drive time along the M4/M5 corridors and there is a programme of marketing through digital channels, contact creation, asset libraries and business and visited database. There is collaboration on the South Wales Regional Marketing campaign promoting the area to UK and International group travel and travel trade audiences.

MCC provides responsive visitor information services, including handling enquiries via e-mail and social media. The tourism, signage and application team also advise on planning applications and keep reports on key management indicators, including bed stop and occupancy. Data which informs strategic planning and development provide tailored marketing and business development advice to tourism businesses, both individually and through group sessions.

Work on tourism is across to make life better for residents and also make Monmouthshire more attractive and a better experience for tourists, particularly within the brand of Monlife. It was hoped that this way of thinking would be elaborated on through the destination management plan, and through local businesses, town councils and through the partnerships within the county.

As a supplementary Councillor John asked if the Council was prepared to add its weight to the tourism sector campaigning against that 182 night threshold for self-catering operators, to support our businesses in Monmouthshire. Councillor Burch replied that a rural manifesto is being developed, but there was a balance to be struck and that we should support Welsh Government in striking that balance.

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22. From County Councillor Jane Lucas to County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

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What steps will the Council take to protect the 12 bat species, including rare and endangered bats, recently identified in the Dixon Bat Project, a citizen science initiative verified by qualified ecologists?

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development responded to the question and commended the residents of Monmouth who were using their time and effort to undertake the survey of the presence of those species. Although the consultation on the Replacement Local Development Plan ended last year, we have chosen to continue to receive and consider the survey information provided by residents. Our response to that information will be shared with all Council members in the response to consultation, which will be published in September in good time for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee and Full Council. To this end he offered reassurance that this information was welcomed and would be fully considered by Cabinet, the planning team, by Council, and potentially by the inspector.

He added that we were fortunate in Monmouthshire to have a rich diversity of species in our landscapes, and it was not uncommon in Monmouthshire for there to be a significant number of bat species in any one location. There was a responsibility on our planning process and a responsibility on all councillors to ensure that any development sustains and enhances our rich and extensive biodiversity. In responding to the consultation, he would only recommend development that he believed to achieve this objective.

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23. From County Councillor Richard John to County Councillor Laura Wright, Cabinet member for Education

Would the Cabinet Member set out the administration's expectations for the level of school balances at the end of the 25/26 financial year.

Question withdrawn.

24. To exclude the press and public from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information

Accepted.

25. APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF THE MONMOUTHSHIRE STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL (SAC) FOR RELIGION, VALUES AND ETHICS

The Cabinet Member for Education presented the report to appoint members of the Monmouthshire Standing Advisory Council (SAC) for Religion, Values and Ethics for a four-year period.

Upon being put to a vote Council resolved to accept the recommendation that the applicants set out in Appendix 1 be appointed as members of the Monmouthshire SAC for a term of four years with effect from 17 July 2025.

26. Date of next meeting - 18th September 2025

Noted.

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The meeting ended at 6.20 pm