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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of County Council held
at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Thursday, 21st September, 2017 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor M. Powell (Chairman)
County Councillor P. Clarke (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Batrouni, D. Blakebrough, V. Smith, D. Dovey, A. Easson, R. Edwards, D. Evans, P.A. Fox, R.J.W. Greenland, R. Harris, J. Higginson, G. Howard, D. Jones, P. Jones, S. Jones, S.B. Jones, P. Jordan, B. Strong, F. Taylor, K. Williams, J.Becker, L.Brown, A.Davies, M.Feakins, M.Groucutt, R.John, L.Jones, M.Lane, P.Pavia, J.Pratt, R.Roden, T.Thomas, J.Treharne and J.Watkins

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Kellie Beirne	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Peter Davies	Chief Officer, Resources
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Joy Robson	Head of Finance/Section 151 Officer
Robert Tranter	Head of Legal Services & Monitoring Officer
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy and Governance

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors L. Guppy, S. Howarth, P. Murphy, A. Webb, L.Dymock and S. Woodhouse

2. Public Open Forum

No public open forum items were received.

3. Chairman's Announcement and Receipt of Petitions

County Councillor P. Jones presented a petition to the Chairman on behalf of the residents of Raglan signed by 1067 signatories requested safety measures on the A40 bypass.

County Councillor J. Watkins presented a petition to the Chairman on behalf of the residents of Church Road, Caldicot and users of the school situated on the road, requesting a safe crossing location for children and a drop off point for the school.

4. Declarations of Interest

Declarations of interest were received from County Councillors P. Clarke, B. Strong, S.B. Jones in relation to item 10c, Vetholon 2018.

Declarations of interest were received from County Councillor D. Evans in relation to item 9a, MHA changes in rules and extension to VAT shelter.

5. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on the 27th July 2017

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The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 27th July 2017 were approved and signed by the Chair.

In doing so County Councillor Batrouni made an amendment to page 10, which stated Welsh Government had contributed £2m in total. Cllr Batrouni had intended this to refer to the leisure offer for the pool, and in total had actually been a contribution of £40m.

6. To note the action list of the meeting held on the 27th July 2017

County Councillor D. Blakebrough thanked the leader for writing to the Welsh Government in relation to a previous motion regarding '63 is the new 60' pension proposals however stressed her disappointment at the response received from the Government. The leader agreed to the request from Councillor Blakebrough to respond to the Government requesting a more detailed response.

7. Notices of Motion

7.1. Motion from County Councillor G. Howard

County Councillor G. Howard put forward his motion to Council regarding the pedestrians access at Llanellen Bridge.

The motion was duly seconded.

8. Reports of the Chief Officer, Resources

8.1. MCC audited accounts 2016/17 (Formal Approval) / ISA260 Report - MCC Accounts

Council were presented with the reports, MCC audited accounts 2016/17 (Formal Approval) and ISA260 Report - MCC Accounts by the leader of the Council on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Resources.

Terry Lewis attended the meeting on behalf of the Wales Audit Office and provided members with an overview of the accounts. He informed members that they were happy with the accounts and raised no concerns. He also thanked officer for their support throughout the review and welcomed the accounts being submitted to them earlier than expected.

Members raised concerns in relation to school budget in particular school deficits going forward. The Chief Officer for Children and Young People informed Council that significant improvements are being made on reducing the deficits and there is ongoing support and commitment with head to teachers to continue to the reduction.

Councillor Batrouni questioned why the authority received more council tax than originally anticipated and also why the authority didn't pay out as much as expected on council tax benefits. The Head of Finance informed Council that the council tax base and estimates are formed in December the previous year and can alter depending on the number of houses built/inhabited within the area. The Head of Finance also confirmed that council tax benefits is led by demand so can depend on the number of people who rely on the service as to the actual expenditure incurred.

Council resolved to accept the recommendations as set out in the report.

9. Report of the Chief Officer, Social Care, Health and Housing

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9.1. MHA - Change in rules and extension to VAT Shelter

Council was presented with the report in relation to Monmouthshire Housing Association (MHA) changes in rules and VAT shelter by the Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Innovation and Leisure. The Cabinet Member also welcomed the Chief Executive of MHA, John Keegan and Deputy CEO Steve Higginson to the meeting.

John Keegan outlined the report and informed Council that due to changes in the way Welsh Government are legislating in respect of registered social landlords (RSL) there is a need to review its regulatory framework and reduce the Council membership on the MHA board.

Members raised concerns around the reduction in members of the board and their ability to hold MHA to account. Additionally, members wanted a commitment from MHA that their focus would remain within the local authority area and that they would not seek to expand outside of the County.

The Cabinet member for Enterprise, Innovation and Leisure proposed amendments to the recommendations contained in the report and members voted on each recommendation separately.

First, it was put to a vote that members agree to enter into a deed of variation to extend the VAT Set-Off Agreement which members agreed. County Councillor V Smith abstained from all votes on this item.

Secondly, the amendment proposed by the Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Innovation and Leisure, which was seconded, stated that the recommendation should read 'that members agree to MHA making rules changes to reduce the current 4 Council nominees to 2, and in making the appointments Monmouthshire County Council will endeavour to meet the skillset required by MHA.' Upon being put to the vote members agreed to the recommendation.

Finally, a new recommendation was proposed and seconded, also by the Cabinet Member which stated that 'MHA will enter into a memorandum of understanding that their commitment to Monmouthshire remains and welcome a report from a senior manager of MHA to Council annually.' Upon being put to the vote members agreed to the recommendation.

10. Report of the Chief Officer, Enterprise

10.1. Stage 2 Improvement Plan - 2016/17

Council was presented with the Stage 2 Improvement Plan by the Cabinet Member for Governance.

Members were provided with an overview of the report which sets out how well the authority performs against five set measures. Overall three objectives were classified as making good progress and two measures making adequate progress. Monmouthshire is one of the top performing council in Wales with many services performing well however there are still areas for improvement including visit to leisure centres and affordable housing.

Councillor Batrouni questioned whether for future improvement plans Housing should contain its own section given the pressures in the area and the authority's wellbeing goals. He also added that now there is a Cabinet Member for Social Justice, it could be useful to develop key measures to assess the success of the portfolio against the wellbeing act. The Councillor was also disappointed to see the highest gap in Wales for young people in Wales attaining GCSE's between those pupils who are entitled to free school meals and those who are not.

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Members also raised concerns around future funding arrangements for the authority and how standards could be maintained within the improvement plan if funding is not available to deliver the services, particularly in schools.

The Leader agreed with members that the authority cannot rely on the Welsh Government for additional funding to keep delivering services in the same way.

The Cabinet Member for Governance summarised that the authority has to do things differently to maintain the current standards.

Upon being put to the vote members resolved to agree the recommendations in the report.

10.2. Approval of a Capital Budget for the provision of Waste and Recycling Vehicles

This item was deferred.

10.3. Velethon 2018

County Councillor A. Easson left the meeting at 15:26

County Councillor B. Strong, S.B.Jones and P. Clarke left the room for consideration of this item due to personal or prejudicial interests.

Council were presented with the report on the Velethon 2018 by the Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Innovation and Leisure. The cabinet member informed Council that the event has already received approval from the other four local authorities involved in the event.

It was noted that whilst there were challenges initially with organising the event, significant improvements have been made year on year to address the concerns of the authority. For 2018, the organisers have removed the pro race which should reduce delays in areas due to road closures, particularly in the Govilon area. Officers are also working with the event organisers to try and hold a short race beginning in Usk and ending in Cardiff.

The Cabinet Member praised the communication team within the authority for their initiative of placing bright coloured bikes around the Usk area which has engaged visitors to the area even outside the event.

Members raised concerns of supporting the event without knowing the proposed road closures and timings. Concerns were also raised regarding litter and toilet facilities and the need for the authority to undertake cleaning exercises that should be completed by the event organisers.

Upon being put to the vote the Council resolved to accept the report.

11. Members Questions

11.1. From County Councillor D.Batrouni to County Councillor P. Murphy

The leader of the Council responded to the question in the absence of the Cabinet Member for Resources as follows;

The Council has sold a total of 170.4 acres since 2014. 155 acres was the sale of two Council owned farms. 6.08 acres were sold for housing purposes. 9.05 acres were sold for commercial development. The authority is currently working on the disposal of Rockfield Farm and Crick Road sites which equates to an additional 16 acres.

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Councillor Batrouni followed up requesting how much land has been sold under S123 of the Local Government Act 1972. The leader agreed to forward the information on following the meeting but it was noted that any sale under this arrangement must be agreed by full Council beforehand.

12. From County Councillor P. Pavia to County Councillor P. Fox

The leader responded to the question as follows:

Monmouthshire County Council has a local transport plan which sets out key areas and flow of traffic through the County. Included in the plan is a review of the train and bus services from Chepstow as well as the upgrade of cycle and footpaths.

The Cabinet has also set up a Strategic Transport Group which lobbies service providers to increase access to services.

The leader confirmed he had already met with the leaders of Forest of Dean and Gloucestershire Council to discuss the Chepstow Bypass and the need to review infrastructure within the area due to the opportunities of the City Deal arrangement, as well as the proposal to remove tolls on the Severn Bridge.

The leader also agreed to give a commitment to meet with the Welsh Government, along with the Cabinet Member for Transport, to highlight these issues.

10.4. Payment Guarantee to Welsh Government - City Deal Compound Semiconductor Project

Council received the report Payment Guarantee to Welsh Government – City Deal Compound Semiconductor Project from the Leader. The report outlined the need for Monmouthshire, as the lead authority on the project with City Deal, to provide a payment guarantee to Welsh Government of £2million to purchase premises to be used for the Compound Semiconductor project. It was noted that whilst Monmouthshire were approving the guarantee as the lead authority on the project, the liability for the amount would be shared amongst all authorities that have signed up to the City Deal.

The Chief Executive addressed Council and informed that due to time extremely tight timescales on the project, Cabinet approved a decision that would otherwise have been made by Full Council. Members expressed concerns at the process and were keen to ensure that decisions weren't taken away from Full Council regularly going forward. The Chief Executive re-affirmed that decisions that need to be made by Full Council, will be made at Full Council.

The Chief Executive summarised that the project is a big opportunity for the area and has taken 16 months of Chief Officer time to deliver. Additionally, whilst the project is to be delivered outside the area and the authority will not be able to claim benefit for the project or see direct impacts in the authority's improvement plan, the tangible benefits of thousands of new jobs and business opportunities will have a positive impact in the area.

The Deputy Chief Executive informed the committee that businesses in Monmouthshire are already seeing benefits due to the project and engaging in manufacturing supply chains and opportunities.

On the whole, members were in full support of the project and the opportunities it brings to the area.

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The meeting ended at 17:30