

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Monmouthshire County Council held at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 30th July at 5.00 p.m.

PRESENT: County Councillor B. Strong (Chairman)
County Councillor R.J. Higginson (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Batrouni, G.C. Burrows, J.E. Crook, D.L.S. Dovey, G.L. Down, A. Easson, R.M. Edwards, D.J. Evans, P.S. Farley, P.A. Fox, R. J. W. Greenland, L. Guppy, E. J. Hacket Pain, R.G. Harris, R.J.C. Hayward, M. Hickman, P.A.D. Hobson, S.G.M. Howarth, D.W.H. Jones, P. Jones, S. Jones, S.B. Jones, P. Murphy, M. Powell, J.L. Prosser, V.E. Smith, B. Strong, F. Taylor, A.C. Watts, P.A. Watts, A.E. Webb, S. White, K. Williams and A. Wintle.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

P. Matthews	Chief Executive
S. McGuinness	Chief Officer, Children and Young People
S. Burch	Chief Officer, Social Care and Health
J. Robson	Head of Finance/Section 151 Officer
M. Howcroft	Assistant Head of Finance
D. Hill Howells	Head of Community Led Delivery
S. Hayward	Digital and Technology Manager
J. Pearson	Local Democracy Manager
R. Tranter	Head of Legal/Monitoring Officer
S. King	Senior Democratic Services Officer

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors D. Blakebrough, R. Chapman, P.R. Clarke, D.L. Edwards and G. Howard.

The Chairman announced that it would be the last meeting attended by Simon Burch, the Chief Officer, Social Care and Health. The Council wished Mr Burch best wishes and a Happy Birthday.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Fox, conveyed best wishes for future endeavours, to a sterling officer with honesty and integrity. The Leader continued that Mr Burch had undertaken an excellent job in all past roles, most recently as Chief Officer.

The group leaders, Councillor Batrouni, Councillor Hobson and Councillor Howarth, commended Mr Burch on the service that had been delivered and conveyed best wishes for the future.

The Cabinet Member, Councillor Burrows, thanked Mr Burch. Councillor Burrows explained that there had been a close working relationship and Mr Burch had been understanding and professional.

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Mr Burch thanked the Council for the statements, which were generous and kind. The direction for the authority had been set, working collaboratively with the Cabinet Member and good relationships had been established.

The Chairman confirmed that there had been some changes to the publicised agenda, which were noted as follows:

- Item 8. Chief Officer, Children and Young People Annual report - to be considered before notices of motion
- Item 11 Solar Farm Business Case report – to be considered at the end of the meeting, due to exempt information
- Item 12 Member Questions – questions d, e and f withdrawn

2. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT AND RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

We received and noted the Chairman's report.

There were no petitions presented.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were noted under the relevant agenda item.

4. MINUTES DATED 25TH JUNE 2015

We resolved that the minutes of the Annual Meeting of the County Council held on 25th June 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. PUBLIC FORUM ITEMS

There were no public forum items received.

6. CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIRECTORATE ANNUAL REPORT 2015

The Chief Officer presented the Children & Young People's Directorate Annual Report 2015 and outlined highlights, progress and key priorities for the forthcoming year. Council were informed that the directorate were proactive, robust processes and procedures were in place, and outcomes had improved.

Members were better informed and leadership was better understood, along with the vision and ethos of progress.

Managerial tools were more aligned with corporate and directorate goals, key priorities were identified as vulnerable groups and under achievement.

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The report recognised the strengths in partnership working, in order to understand key priorities. The relationship with the Education Achievement Service (EAS) was central in attainment, with drive and challenge set out by the Executive Member. Through the Cabinet portfolio holder, there had been focus and shift in standards, which had ensured delivery on priorities.

Within directorate work emphasis had been placed on safeguarding, which was core to the authority. There had been significant attention to detail, progress had been made as a result of work from a dedicated team and leadership, challenge from the cabinet member.

Council were invited to ask questions and the following points were noted:

- In response to a question raised regarding progress of the ICT strategy development plan, we were informed that further information would be presented during the Schools ICT Business Case, which had been included on the agenda. However, it was imperative to ensure that the infrastructure was in place. The timeline was feasible and learning of staff had to be considered.
- Members commended the detail within the report.
- A question was raised regarding the approach to 'closing the attainment gap' we were advised that focus would be placed on individual pupil tracking, in order for the gap to be addressed.
- Members discussed school balances and were advised that officers worked in conjunction to establish that healthy balances were achieved. The number of deficit schools had decreased and the position had improved, there was a developing trend which ensured that schools understood finances. Governing bodies were responsible for making decisions in relation to schools, advice and guidance would be provided by the local authority.
- Members were informed that the annual report provided broader information on the directorate, however, comparative and detailed data had been considered, in terms of how it could be presented in future.
- An area of focus, related to safeguarding resources capabilities. There was a need to ensure that countywide staff, schools and educational settings were appropriately trained and aware.
- The Leader thanked the Chief Officer for the clear and succinct report. The Chief Officer and team were commended for work and partnership collaborations. It was recognised that the relationship with the EAS was used effectively to drive up standards and that closing the gap was an area to be prioritised for improvement. It was acknowledged that each individual pupil was important.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Officer for the report and detail presented.

7. NOTICES OF MOTION

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a) Submitted by County Councillor F. Taylor

'That this Council agree to use its influence to secure all information and plans relevant to Welsh Government's proposals relating to the M4 relief road for the benefit of those Monmouthshire residents potentially affected by the "Black Route". In addition, Monmouthshire Council will seek to ensure Welsh Government's active commitment to minimise and mitigate the environmental, social and wellbeing impact of Welsh Government's proposals on the Communities of Magor with Undy. Should the "Black Route" proceed, this Council will also seek to identify opportunities to secure benefits from Welsh Government for the communities of Magor with Undy as a means of off-setting impact.'

In presenting the motion, Councillor Taylor highlighted that there was a need for Council to take a proactive approach and do as much as possible for those directly affected by proposals and secure as much detailed information as possible.

Members discussed the motion and the following points were noted:

- Members expressed support for the motion, in that Council should be proactive in obtaining as much information as possible, regarding the scheme.

County Councillor Howarth, proposed an addition, which was duly seconded:

'That this Council agree to use its influence to secure all information and plans relevant to Welsh Government's proposals relating to the M4 relief road for the benefit of those Monmouthshire residents potentially affected by the "Black Route". In addition, Monmouthshire Council will seek to ensure Welsh Government's active commitment to minimise and mitigate the environmental, social and wellbeing impact of Welsh Government's proposals on the Communities of Magor with Undy. Should the "Black Route" proceed, this Council will also seek to identify opportunities to secure benefits from Welsh Government for the communities of Magor with Undy as a means of off-setting impact.'

Seek reassurances off Welsh Government that any officer time for the project is paid for by Welsh Government'

Upon being put to the vote the addition was carried and became the substantive motion.

The substantive motion was carried.

b) Submitted by County Councillor A. Easson

'The public bus services serving the community of Severnside are diminishing fast. The area is now gradually becoming isolated from the conurbations both to the east and to the west. Newport Transport, the current providers, have now reduced the No 74 Newport – Chepstow service from Caldicot to Chepstow to a two hourly

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frequency during the daytime. I move that this Council explores all possible options to restore the previous hourly frequency; as a regular bus service between the towns will help both towns to continue to grow and be successful. We need a bus service fit for the 21st Century to serve the public who live and work in the area.'

In presenting the motion, County Councillor Easson highlighted that there was a need for buses and services had been reduced in the local area, specifically Caldicot to Chepstow. Reduced services had a significant effect on people traveling to work and medical appointments.

During discussion of the motion we noted the following:

- There was awareness that business and commercial operators had used the service. AM's and MP's had expressed support, and that services were not diminished.
- We recognised the importance of the services, in terms of footfall into local areas and maintaining business and employment for towns.
- Benefits of the service included social and economic factors, for a wide range of members of the public.
- Concerns were expressed that significant numbers of the public would be disadvantaged by services being reduced. Local transport was an integral part of communities.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was carried.

c) Submitted by County Councillor D. Batrouni

'That this Council explores sensible and practical measures to discourage or prohibit the sale of single-use plastic water bottles in Council owned buildings.'

In presenting, Councillor Batrouni highlighted that the purpose of the motion related to the consequence of purchasing 'one use' bottles. There were significant environmental consequences for recycling plastic. It was important to move in the right direction and where possible to offer alternatives.

During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- Education was a significant and important part of the issue.
- Some members felt that the wider issue of recycling and litter was a big factor.
- It was recognised that the motion specifically related to plastic bottles, however, further work would have to be undertaken to explore alternatives. It was suggested that a broader approach was needed.

County Councillor Prosser proposed an amendment which was duly seconded:

'This council explores sensible and practical measures to reduce/eliminate sale of single use plastic bottles in council owned buildings, whilst maintaining adequate

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water supplies to communities, and the issue be referred to the relevant select committee.'

Upon being put to the vote the amendment was carried and became the substantive motion.

We resolved that the substantive motion was carried.

County Councillor D. Jones left 6.30pm

County Councillor Farley left the meeting at 6.32pm

County Councillors Clarke, Howarth, Webb, Hickman and B. Jones, left at 7pm

8. MINUTES OF MEETINGS:

We resolved that the following minutes be received:

1) Democratic Services 11th May 2015

We discussed the issue considered by Democratic Services, which related to out of hours ICT support. It was agreed that this issue would be referred and included on the next agenda of the Democratic Services Committee meeting.

9. TIMING OF MEETINGS

The Local Democracy Manager presented a report, which followed the trial period of Council Meetings being held at 5.00pm.

During discussion, several factors were considered which included:

- Member commitments and availability, during day time and evening.
- Flexibility for future and prospective candidates.
- Changing culture of authority.

It was proposed that meetings continued at 2.00pm.

An amendment was proposed and duly seconded that, meetings reverted back to 2.00pm, with the exception that 3 meetings during the summer (including the annual meeting), would be held at 5.00pm.

Upon being put to the vote the amendment became the substantive motion. The substantive motion was carried.

We resolved that Council meetings would be held at 2.00pm.

10. CORRESPONDENCE RESPONSE TIMES FOR MEMBERS

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The Monitoring Officer presented a report which recommended that members adhered to the Council's Corporate Customer Care Standards in respect of emails/letters received from the members of the public.

Council were informed that at a recent meeting of Standards Committee it was noted that elected members were not subject to the Council's Corporate Customer Care Standards in respect of response times to letter/emails received from the members of the public.

The Corporate Customer Care Standards stated that members of the public can expect a response from officers of the council within 5 working days or that the letter/email is acknowledged within 5 working days and a full reply is given within 15 working days. Standards Committee were of the view that elected members should be subject to the same response times although it acknowledged this must be a decision for a meeting of the full council.

A failure to meet the response times may result in a complaint being made to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales for a breach of paragraph 6(1)(a) of the members' code of conduct – *you must not conduct yourself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or authority into disrepute.*

During discussion we noted the following:

- Members generally accepted content within the report, however, highlighted that it was not always possible for elected members to respond within specific timeframes, this was due to a number of factors, which included, holidays/leave, no deputy/delegated access to email/phone, constituency business.
- It was suggested that the Customer Care Standard was considered in further detail, so that it related to elected members.

We resolved to agree to defer the item, for further consideration and it would be considered at a future meeting.

11. SCHOOLS ICT OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE FUND

The purpose of the report was for Council to agree the Outline Business Case and funding mechanisms for an investment in the upgrade and renewal of the ICT infrastructure in schools, enhancing the teaching and learning experience and bringing schools up to a common standard in line with WG and 21st century schools aspirations.

On 15th July Cabinet agreed the Schools ICT Outline Business Case and recommended that Council agree the funding mechanisms outlined within the recommendations and resource implications within the report.

The Authority's 21st Century Schools programme sets out a vision for ICT where ICT 'contributed sustainable and meaningful change to teaching and learning in

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Monmouthshire schools that will prepare students for further education, training and to live and work in a digital world’.

There was a need for a sustainable, resilient and robust ICT platform which met the needs of the 21st teaching and learning environment. There was a need for a more coherent structured and strategic approach to ICT provision in Monmouthshire schools. Schools in the primary sector particularly have spread in different directions in terms of kit, support, knowledge, aspiration, expertise and understanding.

ICT investment in schools in recent years had varied, and some schools had used their delegated budgets to benefit from improved infrastructure, together with enhanced connectivity and peripherals. However, primary schools in particular had suffered from lack of investment in ICT. This had impacted on how technology could be used to effectively deliver teaching and learning in schools, and ultimately on the level of digital expertise and knowledge when children move up into secondary education and careers.

An outline business case has been prepared, which proposed a single model and specification for ICT provision that will enable a consistent and adequate standard of technology and support.

During discussion we noted the following:

- Members welcomed the report and recognised that ICT in schools had to be developed.
- A query was raised regarding whether schools had not complied, we were informed that a letter of agreement would be sent to schools in the near future.
- Information regarding project timeline was contained within the report. Initial investment will take up to 1st April and would supply PSBA lines and upgrade WIFI plus technicians to roll programme forward. Roll out to all schools was expected to take 18 months.
- There was a need for agreement from all schools, going forward, to ensure that the project was economically viable. The project had been discussed with governing bodies.
- The new SLA would provide 4 technicians to implement ICT in classrooms. Additional technicians would support back office.
- Schools would receive significant infrastructure for investment and the important need for ICT in schools, to be developed, was recognised.

County Councillor Easson left the meeting at 8pm

We resolved to agree recommendations:

That Council -

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a) Adopt Option 3 of the Outline Business Case for the provision of ICT in Schools and

b) That Council agree to fund the proposed investment of £885,775 via:

- £50,000 of funding released through a reduction in the County Farms capital maintenance budget;
- £80,000 of Authority funding being released from the 21st Century Schools programme, and specifically the Raglan primary school scheme;
- A £250,000 contribution from the ICT Transformation reserve;
- The remaining balance of £505,775 being funded through prudential borrowing and the ongoing revenue impact of £46,700 being incorporated into the MTFP.

12. MEMBERS QUESTIONS

a) From County Councillor D. Batrouni to County Councillor G.

Howard:

'What is his assessment of the Chancellor Exchequer's summer budget (8th July 2015) on housing matters in Monmouthshire?'

In the absence of Councillor Howard, the question was withdrawn.

b) From County Councillor D. Batrouni to County Councillor E. Hackett

Pain:

'In primary school schools in Monmouthshire, how many classes containing different year groups have been formed in (a) 2014-15 (b) 2013-14 (c) 2012-13?'

In response the Cabinet member advised:

- a) 2014-15 - 36 mixed classes out of 233
- b) 2013-14 – 40 mixed classes out of 234
- c) 2012-13 – 34 mixed classes out of 237

c) From County Councillor D. Batrouni to County Councillor E. Hackett

Pain:

'How many children attended free school breakfast clubs in Monmouthshire in (a) 2014/15 (b) 2013/14 and (c) 2012/13.'

In response the Cabinet member advised:

- a) 2014-15 - 1258
- b) 2013-14 – 1196
- c) 2012-13 - 1033

d) From County Councillor D. Batrouni to County Councillor E. Hackett

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Pain:

'What is the total amount spent on (i) tribunal awards including pre-hearing settlements (COT3) (ii) compromise or settlement agreements (iii) redundancies across all Monmouthshire schools for the financial years (1) 2014-15, (2) 2013-14 and (3) 2012-13?'

The Chairman confirmed that the question had been withdrawn.

e) From County Councillor D. Batrouni to County Councillor E. Hackett

Pain:

'What is the total amount spent on (i) tribunal awards including pre-hearing settlements (COT3) (ii) compromise or settlement agreements (ii) redundancies for each Monmouthshire comprehensive for the financial years (1) 2014-15, (2) 2013-14 and (3) 2012-13?'

The Chairman confirmed that the question had been withdrawn.

f) From County Councillor D. Batrouni to County Councillor R.

Greenland:

'How many times has Monmouthshire's human resources department authorised a Monmouthshire school to provide an interest-free loan to secure the recruitment of (1) a teacher (2) a non-teacher in (a) 2015 to date, (b) 2014, (c) 2013, (d) 2012 and (e) 2011?'

The Chairman confirmed that the question had been withdrawn.

13. SOLAR FARM BUSINESS CASE REPORT

Council were presented with the Solar Farm Business Case report, the purpose of which was to secure financial approval for the construction of an Authority owned solar farm at Oak Grove Farm, Crick.

In presenting the report, the Cabinet member advised that background papers were exempt and this would have to be considered by members when issues were discussed.

The Council was required to identify new revenue funding streams, which would not impact on front line service provision but do maximise the value of the Councils land holdings. As part of the budget setting process an income target of £175,575 was allocated to renewable technologies. The Estates team had installed PV systems on roofs where it is financially prudent to do so. This amounts to a total of 21 retrofit schemes and 5 new build schemes, generating 381,135 kWh in 2014/15, with a further 61,951 kWh from the new build schemes. Gross income and savings from the 21 installations was £101,992 in 2014/15 (£78,714 income, £23,278 savings) with a further £13,735 (£10,257 income and £3,478 savings) from new build schemes.

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In order to meet the income, other renewable schemes were explored which has resulted in the identification of the solar farm proposal. The proposal is to site the solar farm on 25 acres of a Council owned agricultural holding and the tenant of the holding has been involved in the discussions from the start of the process. The technology proposed is a tried and tested and once the solar farm is up and running the FIT income stream is guaranteed.

The 5MWp solar farm proposed is projected to generate 4,990 MWh of electricity p.a. This is the equivalent of providing electricity for approximately 4,000 homes and saves 2,395 tonnes of CO₂ emissions every year. It is also more than 4 times the capacity of all renewable energy technologies installed by the Authority to date

During discussion we noted the following:

- We recognised the importance of requirement for return on investment, for protection of services.
- Questions were raised regarding the risks, return on investment, costs of decommissioning, maintenance costs and efficiency.
- It was believed that this was the correct renewable energy project and it was anticipated that further opportunities and income streams could be generated through market sales.

We resolved to agree recommendations:

1. Subject to planning approval, to construct a 5MW solar farm at Oak Grove Farm, on the basis of the information outlined in the Business Plan.
2. That the project cost is funded by prudential borrowing and added to the Authority's capital programme, and revenue budgets are created for the operating and maintenance costs.
3. To authorise an initial payment of £350,000 to commence work on the electricity grid connection as soon as possible, thereby confirming completion timescales allowing preferential FIT rates to be secured.
4. That delegated responsibility be given to the Chief Officer in consultation with the Head of Finance and the relevant Cabinet Members to take the final decision on investing in the project once there is more certainty through the contractor procurement process and the publication of the FIT rate applicable to projects completed after March 2016

The meeting ended at 9.00 p.m.