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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held
on Thursday, 19th April, 2018 at 5.00 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, P.A. Fox, L. Guppy, R. Harris, J. Higginson, S. Howarth, D. Jones, P. Jones, S. Jones, S.B. Jones, P. Jordan, P. Murphy, B. Strong, A. Watts, A. Webb, K. Williams, J.Becker, L.Brown, A.Davies, M.Feakins, M.Groucutt, R.John, L.Jones, M.Lane, P.Pavia, J.Pratt, R.Roden, J.Treharne, J.Watkins and S. Woodhouse

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Kellie Beirne	Deputy Chief Executive
Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Robert Tranter	Head of Legal Services & Monitoring Officer
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy and Governance

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors D. Evans, R.J.W. Greenland, G. Howard, F. Taylor, L.Dymock and T.Thomas

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations made by Members.

3. Chairman's Announcement and receipt of petitions

Council received the Chairman's announcement.

There were no petitions.

4. Public Open Forum

There were no matters for the public open forum.

5. To confirm the minutes of the meetings of County Council:

5.1. 6th March 2018

The minutes of the meeting of County Council held on 6th March 2018 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

5.2. 19th March 2018

The minutes of the meeting of County Council held on 19th March were approved and signed by the Chairman.

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In doing so, Councillor S. Jones stated that she had presented the petition on behalf of Councillor L. Dymock.

6. To receive the minutes of the Public Service Board 30th January 2018

Council noted the minutes of the Public Service Board meeting held on 30th January 2018.

7. To receive the minutes of Democratic Services Committee 15th January 2018

Council noted the minutes of the Democratic Services Committee meeting held on 15th January 2018.

It was agreed to continue to receive these minutes at Council.

8. To receive the minutes of Audit Committee 11th January 2018

Council noted the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 11th January 2018.

It was agreed to continue to receive these minutes at Council

9. To note the County Council Action List

Council noted the action list.

10. Report of the Chief Officer for Children and Young People:

10.1. Annual Report of the Chief Officer for Children and Young People

The Chief Officer for Children and Young People presented the Annual Report, the purpose being to inform Council of the progress that the education system has made in the past twelve months since the last report. This reporting period includes the examination period that ended in August 2017.

Following the presentation comments were welcomed.

Officers recognised the importance of reviewing the catchment policy.

Indicators are being developed around Flying Start and Families First which are better at identifying progression among those young people. Flying Start colleagues work closely with schools with early identification of children part of the programme, enabling school support to continue to work with those families.

The Chair of the CYP Select Committee welcomed the report and commended the achievements, but recognised the areas for improvement, namely families challenged economically, and disadvantaged or looked after children. He added there is a need for a detailed study at Free School Meals performance, where there is a consistent pattern over time, where Monmouthshire is one of the worst performers in Wales. The Chief Officer agreed that the performance gap at Key Stage 4 is too wide, and there is a need to gain understanding of what happens between KS3 and KS4.

The Leader of the Opposition thanked the Chief Officer for the report and said we should be particularly proud of KS3 statistics, and this would be a test as they move into KS4. He required more reassurance on the levels around FSM. He raised concerns regarding the wellbeing of staff, and how that is measured, stating that circa 77 teaching assistant posts have been lost

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over the last 3 or 4 years, resulting in pressures with 1 to 1 service with disadvantaged children. He also highlighted caution around the social justice area.

The Chief Officer explained that in terms of the wellbeing of staff, meetings with headteachers were held on an ongoing basis. A wellbeing event held recently highlighted the importance of this area. He added that FSM is a key area of focus especially at KS4.

Officers were urged to recognise the importance of diagnosis of dyslexia and dyspraxia, as it was suggested that state schools were allowing these pupils to fall through the net. Clarification was sought on the policy for identifying and supporting those with dyslexia, and detail of statistics. The Officer agreed to provide a written response.

The Officer recognised challenges highlighted regarding the Gilwern School admissions policy and recognised the importance of attending a local school. The dynamics of the policy would be addressed.

Members highlighted the importance of physical education particularly in light of childhood obesity. We heard of the success and effects of the Sport Leadership Programme. We recognised the benefits of outdoor activities.

Changes in the inspection framework were noted.

Concerns were raised regarding the lack of development of a 21st Century School in Chepstow, and reassurance was sought around retaining the children of Chepstow. The Chief Officer assured that Chepstow School remains on the programme, and the commitment remains that it will be ready at the start of band C to have the investment.

In response to a question it was predicted that 12 schools would be in deficit at the end of the year. It was acknowledged a 3rd of schools across the County were in deficit.

The importance of equipping young people with the skills to move into the work place was agreed. Talks were held with secondary schools to agree better collaboration post 16 to ensure a better, broader offer. Also conversations with Coleg Gwent were held on access to vocational learning.

The Leader highlighted the need to consider future school organisation and planning for future school places in both primary and secondary schools. He expected acute pressure in primary schools across the south of the region. He encouraged the Cabinet Member and Chief Officer to give that considerable thought.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People welcomed the constructive debate. He emphasised the importance of protecting the more vulnerable students in our county and the risk of complacency. He agreed it was important to stretch every child to reach their full potential. He expressed the thanks of Council to the teaching staff across Monmouthshire, and added he has seen fantastic examples of education across the schools. He reiterated the commitment to renew all secondary schools, stating Abergavenny would be next, followed by Chepstow.

Upon being put to the vote Council resolved to accept the Chief Officer Annual Report.

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11. Reports of the Deputy Chief Executive, Chief Officer for Enterprise

11.1. Council diary of meetings for 2018/19

Council received a report in order to approve the draft diary of meetings for 2018/19.

We noted the diary should be brought to Council for approval at an earlier date to allow timely printing of paper copies.

Members requested that we avoid changing dates of meetings.

Upon being put to the vote Council resolved to agree the recommendation:

That the diary of meetings for 2018/19, as attached, be approved.

11.2. Bryn y Cwm Area Committee Name Change

Council were presented with a report in order to seek approval to change the name of Bryn y Cwm Area Committee, from September 2018.

Upon being put to the vote, Council resolved to agree the recommendation:

That Council approve a change of name from Bryn y Cwm Area Committee to North Monmouthshire Area Committee.

12. Members Questions:

12.1. From County Councillor P. Pavia to County Councillor R. John

Will the Cabinet Member for Education provide an update on the development of Authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan?

County Councillor John responded that the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan had been approved by Cabinet in October 2017. Since then there have been discussions with Welsh Government on a number of minor amendments regarding our commitments to working with communities to examine evidence of demand for Welsh Medium Education particularly in Monmouth area. He welcomed any contributions from Members regarding demand for Welsh Medium Education

As a supplement Councillor Pavia asked that given the recent WG statement that 15 out of 22 authorities had been signed off, what barriers were preventing the authority progressing to sign off. Also given that the original WESP significantly underpinned the strategic outline plan regarding 21st Century Schools funding, what impact does any delay or potential changes have to developing the business case for King Henry VIII School?

Councillor John responded that discussions have been held with WG about how to stimulate demand of Welsh medium provision and how we evidence that demand. He added that there has been no impact on our band B proposals which have been approved by WG. WG have also confirmed they are very supportive of the type of expansion of Welsh medium provision we are proposing for band B. Wide consultations continue, instigating positive and interesting discussions.

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12.2. From County Councillor P. Pavia to County Councillor P. Jones

Will the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health make a statement regarding Aneurin Bevan Health Board's decision to withdraw Older Adult Mental Health inpatient provision from the County?

County Councillor P. Jones responded that MCC endorsed fully a response to ABUHB consultation into the future of Older Adult Mental Health which set out a series of evidenced objections to the consultation into the inpatient services across Gwent. Councillor Jones responded on behalf of the Council with a formal request that the current interim arrangements remain in place to allow integrated work to take place between local authorities, the Health Board and other partners. Unfortunately the Health Board took a decision on 21st March 2018 to approve the preferred option which has resulted in the closure of St. Pierre Ward in Chepstow Hospital. Monmouthshire residents who need inpatient dementia services are receiving these services in either Blaenau Gwent or Newport. It was a concern that all views had not been presented at the time of decision making.

Councillor Jones stated she remains deeply disappointed at the decision of the Health Board and we are of the view that the decision is not of the best interest of the most vulnerable people in Monmouthshire. It was requested that the Health Board attend this meeting of the Council to further explain their position. They declined to attend Council but will attend Select meetings in the future. Consideration has been given to whether there is a strong case for the Health Board to be challenged legally via a judicial review process, but we are conscious of the long term relationship with a key partner.

In relation to the future of Chepstow Hospital broad work is underway to develop an integrated health and social care hub for the South Monmouthshire population. This work will be reported back to Council in September 2018.

Councillor Pavia believed that the whole process was predetermined from the start and the fact that senior leaders of the Health Board were not prepared to come to Council to justify their decision and update on the closure demonstrates arrogance and how out of touch they are as a public body. As a supplement he asked if Councillor Jones was in a position to share the legal advice received.

Councillor Jones agreed to obtain and share the information requested.

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

Will the Leader of the Council make a statement following the launch of the Welsh Government's Green Paper on Local Government reform?

County Councillor Fox responded that the Green Paper named Strengthening Local Government and Delivering for People was published on 20th March 2018 and responses are expected back by 12th June 2018. The Cabinet Secretary want to devolve more powers and freedoms to local councils. The paper talks of wanting to see sustainable councils and believes that local government should be respected by and representative of their communities. The Leader welcomed these sentiments.

However he added that the Green Paper is more a re-hash of plans Leighton Andrews had previously tried to implement. The Leader disagreed with comments in the paper and had shared his thoughts with the Cabinet Secretary directly. Monmouthshire is proof that smaller authorities can deliver and can do well. So when we get to the meat of the paper the focus turns to the same old arguments and quotes that WG believes it is time to seriously examine creating fewer larger local authorities, and the paper suggests the following 3 options:

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1. Voluntary mergers
2. Phased approach with early adopters merging first.
3. Single comprehensive merger programme. It was thought this was the preferred option.

The Leader stated that raising this debate again is unsettling for all in Local Government, and a distraction. He reiterated his continued view that creating large authorities is not the panacea WG believe it is. In the scale of the financial constraints we have they would be minimal against the costs of merging. We are already moving ahead on a regional platform, the City Deal a prime example. To undermine these now would be wrong and set service delivery back not take it forward. Creating new councils would threaten the established City Deal.

The Leader recommended that Council hold a full debate or hold a seminar to shape a response.

Council took the opportunity to congratulate the Deputy Chief Executive on her appointment as City Deal Programme Director.

The meeting ended at 7.30 pm