

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Special Meeting of Adults Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk on Friday 31st July 2015 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT: County Councillor P. Farley (Chair)

County Councillors: R. Harris, P. Jones and A. Wintle.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

County Councillors R.J.W. Greenland and V. Smith

CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Mrs. D. Hudson

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

D. Hill-Howells	-	Head of Community Led Delivery
A. Charles	-	Community Learning Manager
R. Tranter	-	Head of Legal Services
N. Perry	-	Democratic Services Officer

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Victoria Bailey
Sandra Hanbury

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors R. Chapman and R. Edwards, M. Hickman, P. Hobson and D. Hill.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

County Councillor V. Smith declared a personal non-prejudicial interest under the Members Code of Conduct as Chairman of Usk Campus Community Liaison Committee, Coleg Gwent.

3. CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION DATED 15TH JULY 2015: RESTRUCTURE OF COMMUNITY LEARNING.

The Chairman advised that the Adults Select Committee meeting had been arranged in order to consider a call in request in respect of the decision taken by Cabinet on 15th July 2015 regarding the restructure of Community Learning.

The purpose of the meeting was to consider alternative proposals submitted by a member of the public which required serious consideration, and to take further advice from Officers.

The Head of Legal Services advised the Committee of the call-in procedure and advised Members of the decision made by Cabinet on 15th July 2015 as follows:

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- Cabinet agree to the proposed Community Learning Staffing Structures.
- Any amendments to the structure or proposals that may arise through the consultation exercise, or any recommendations made by Adults Select Committee on 20th July be approved by the Chief Officer for Enterprise in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member subject to any alterations continuing to provide the savings required to achieve a cost neutral budget.
- Cabinet agrees to Caldicot and Monmouth Community Learning venues operating as satellite centres.
- Cabinet approve to reserve fund the redundancy costs (yet to be determined), if redeployment is not possible and the costs cannot be met through existing service budgets.

The Chairman invited the Members who had called in the Cabinet decision to comment. All were content to comment further into the meeting.

The Chairman invited Victoria Bailey, a member of the public who had submitted comments and observations regarding Community Learning Restructure, to address the Committee. The Committee were presented with concerns relating to:

- Financial Data: manpower costs, maintenance costs, building costs.
- Community Learning Centres: appropriateness of satellite centres.
- Employees: reduction of staff, number of management, number of caretakers.
- Provision of Service: franchise funding from Coleg Gwent, self-funding, learner numbers, and tuition.
- Impact on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable citizens of Monmouthshire.

Members also heard from Sandra Hanbury, of Monmouthshire Community Learning who wished to express a major concern regarding the ability of the Authority to continue to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people of Monmouthshire. It was noted that disadvantaged people were most likely to access the service through the current way in terms of familiarity.

The Chairman invited Officers and the Cabinet Member to outline the differences between the original Cabinet report and the proposals in the addendum.

The Community Learning Manager presented information to the committee outlining the following responses to the proposal:

- There were no proposals to remove the Caldicot Centres.
- We were looking to recruit administrative staff.

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- Community Hubs were considered the best way to progress.
- Managers, one in north and one in south of the County, were Managers in name only, as the post involved a wide range of roles.
- It was not considered appropriate to combine the roles of administration, reception and caretaking.
- It was acknowledged that there was a reduction in staff numbers. There was not a proposal for deputy managers.
- For Tutor posts it was suggested to have 2 x 18.5 hour posts for 40 weeks per year.
- The new proposal reflected the feedback from consultations.

The Cabinet Member explained that the service was suffering one of the biggest cuts in any service, but it was clear that the service could not continue as it had been doing. Officers were commended on the work undertaken to create the restructure. We were advised that there should not be a concern regarding the 2 managerial posts as these were in name only and covered additional responsibilities. The Cabinet Member also wished to reiterate that Community Hubs would be the key solution moving forward. We heard that Cabinet were very conscious of how damaging cuts like this could be, and the challenges faced by the Community Learning Manager. It was noted that the responsible Cabinet Member was content with the amended proposals.

The Cabinet Member advised that the Authority would continue to look for improvements, and a focus would always remain on disadvantaged and vulnerable citizens.

The Chairman invited Members of Adults Select Committee to comment. In doing so the following points were noted:

- Members noted that change often brings dissent but unfortunately savings needed to be delivered and difficult decisions needed to be made. The Committee were keen to express their appreciation of the amount of work carried out by Officers.
- Members agreed that the Community Hubs were the best way to proceed.
- It was agreed that with appropriate encouragement and publicity the service would continue as normal.
- Members appreciated the views put forward by the members of the public and considered the call in an appropriate form of scrutiny.
- A Member requested clarification on the locations and facilities used for Community Learning.
- Clarification was sought on the age funding could be received. We were informed that the provision of basic skills was funded by Welsh Government as a franchise arrangement, from age 16 onwards.

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- It was considered regrettable that Tutor posts would be 40 weeks per year as basic education could suffer with such a gap.
- Members expressed disappointment that as Local Members, they felt unaware of services in the area. Officers confirmed that a regular information bulletin was circulated to Members.
- Officers expected that, due to funding cuts, we could expect to be in the same position next year, but that lessons would be learned from the process this year.
- Members questioned if the funding was fairly allocated. In response we heard that the level of funding for basic skills was adequate. The rurality issue was not factored in the allocation of funding.
- The Chairman suggested that Adults Select Committee should invite representatives from Coleg Gwent to a future meeting for further discussion.
- Officers clarified that the funding received was specifically for essential skills, and Welsh education, and were satisfied that the funds were allocated accordingly.

The Chairman informed Select Committee Members that in terms of the call in procedure, three options were available:

1. Accept the Cabinet's Decision.
2. Refer the matter back to Cabinet for re-consideration (with reasons).
3. Refer the matter to Council for consideration.

We heard that the responsible Cabinet Member and Chief Officer for Enterprise were content to support the proposals, and therefore to accept the Cabinet's decision would be inclusive of the amended proposals.

A Member proposed that the Committee accepted the Cabinet's decision, which was seconded. Upon being put to the vote all Members agreed unanimously to accept the Cabinet's decision, with the expectation that the Chief Officer take on board the proposed amendments:

For the proposal	-	4
Against the proposal	-	0
Abstentions	-	0

The proposition was carried.

The Chairman thanked the members of public, Officers and Cabinet Member, and declared the meeting closed.

The meeting ended at 11:55 am.