

Public Document Pack

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held
on Thursday, 20th September, 2018 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor P. Clarke (Chairman)
County Councillor S. Woodhouse (Vice Chairman)

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

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Hazel Clatworthy	Sustainability Policy Officer
Mark Hand	Head of Planning, Housing and Place-Shaping
Julie Boothroyd	Chief Officer Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy and Governance
Matthew Phillips	Head of Law/ Monitoring Officer
Frances Williams	Chief Officer, Enterprise

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors S. Howarth, A. Watts, A. Webb, J. Becker and R. Roden

2. Declarations of interest

County Councillor T. Thomas declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in relation to item 7, Statement of Accounts as a governor at Ysgol Gymraeg y Fenni.

County Councillor A. Easson declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in relation to Item 7, Statement of Accounts as a governor at Ysgol Yffin and Dewstow Schools.

3. Public Open Forum

4. Chairman's announcement and receipt of petitions

We noted the Chairman's announcement.

County Councillor D. Blakebrough presented a petition in respect of speeding traffic and road safety on A466, Llandogo.

County Councillor G. Howard advised Members of an upcoming 50th anniversary concert of Monmouth Band taking place on Saturday 22nd September 2018 at the Savoy Theatre.

County Councillor R. John delivered a statement in respect of Increasing Welsh Medium Provision Capital Grant. In doing so we heard of Welsh Government funding for a new Welsh Medium school in Monmouth.

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Members reminded of an update delivered to Council on 19th April on the progress of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). This had informed Members that the Welsh Government had not approved our WESP and had asked us to develop proposals to expand Welsh medium primary education, specifically in the Monmouth area. The development of WESPs across Wales in this cycle has been longer than before as the Welsh Government looks to deliver its policy commitment of a million Welsh speakers by 2050.

A key part of that strategy is the expansion of Welsh Medium education especially in those areas where there has not been provision previously; in essence it is these areas that must make a larger contribution if the target of a million Welsh speakers is to be achieved. Throughout our consultation process around the WESP and especially through discussions with the Welsh Government and our local Welsh Medium Education Forum it became apparent that the north east of the county was an area that could benefit from investment.

Councillor John announced proposals to create 'seedling' Welsh medium primary school provision in Monmouth with Welsh medium Early Years provision and bilingual childcare. We will also seek to further develop our provision on the Ysgol Y Ffin site in Caldicot. This is 100% grant funded from the Welsh Government to the tune of £2.1million although clearly, in time, there will be a revenue budget consequence as we meet the new school's annual running costs.

He added that he is grateful for the confidence that the Welsh Government has shown in Monmouthshire to deliver this scheme. Officers will now begin the extensive process of progressing this grant approval through to delivery. This will involve the statutory consultation regarding the creation of a new school, thorough scrutiny by our Children and Young People select committee and will be subject to the full planning approval and the procurement process.

Members were asked to be aware that this development does not impinge on the ambitious proposals that we set out in the 21st Century Schools Band B proposals. A report will go to Cabinet this autumn to establish the Programme Office that will guide this work through its crucial development stage.

This is again another example of the work we are doing to ensure that learners in Monmouthshire have the very best provision to learn; fit for the new curriculum and fit for the future.

5. MONMOUTHSHIRE - 10 YEARS A FAIRTRADE COUNTY

Council welcomed representatives of Fairtrade who were in attendance to make Members aware of our commitments as a Fairtrade County.

Following a presentation detailing options of purchasing fairtrade items at supermarkets Members reflected on what was considered an excellent cause.

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In terms of managing budgets, it was suggested that maybe some people could do something sometimes, and others on a more regular basis.

A suggestion to connect to the plastic free campaign was highlighted.

Members voted to agree the recommendations in the report:

That members note the report and gain an understanding of our commitments as a Fairtrade County.

That members hear from some local Fairtrade town volunteers about how thinking carefully about what we buy can make a difference to the lives of farmers both locally and across the world.

6. CAPITAL FUNDING APPROVAL FOR THE A40 WYEBRIDGE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

Council were presented with a report to seek Members' approval for capital funding of £300k as a contribution towards the proposed traffic and pedestrian improvements on the Wyebridge/A40 which is a joint scheme with Welsh Government. The majority of the costs of this scheme will be met by Welsh Government via their pinch point funding programme however a condition of the grant is that MCC make a £300k contribution and also take on the risk of any overspend for the scheme. In addition members are asked to approve and allow for the continuity and employment of WSP consultant engineers to assist with the procurement and supervision of this project.

The Cabinet Member for Finance referred to concerns around the overrunning of the contract, and suggested an amendment to recommendation 5:

That the Cabinet Member, in discussion with the Head of Operations, *Cabinet Member for Finance and Chief Officer for Resources*, negotiate favourable terms of the final agreement with the Welsh Government.

The Leader seconded the amendment, and thanked the Cabinet Member and Officers for Operations for their work.

Upon being put to the vote, Council resolved to agree the recommendations, with the amendment to recommendation 5:

That Members approve a capital expenditure budget of £4.17m for the A40 Wyebridge Scheme.

That members approve funding of the above project by the following council resources:

- £50,000 S106 funding from the former Wyesham Infants School Development.
- £50,000 from MCC ATA allocated funding.
- £200,000 loan to be repaid from the Highways Revenue budget over 20 years.

This together with the £3.87million funding provided by WG will fund the £4.17m total cost of the project.

That Members agree to meet the conditions for funding, that MCC takes on the risk associated with any overspend of the works.

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That MCC continue to employ WSP consultant engineers to complete the design, oversee the procurement process and construction of the works in accordance with the ICE conditions of contract and MCC financial regulations.

That the Cabinet Member, in discussion with the Head of Operations, Cabinet Member for Finance and Chief Officer for Resources, negotiate favourable terms of the final agreement with the Welsh Government.

7. STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2017/18

Council received the report in order to consider and sign off the Council's Statement of Accounts before publication deadline of 30th September. The report has been considered by the Council's Audit Committee and is provided to Council with their collective endorsement.

The Cabinet Member commended officers on the completion of the accounts, three weeks ahead of the deadline.

Questions were raised around school deficits to which the Assistant Head of Finance referred to a Monitoring report to Cabinet in July 2018 and changes proposed around the financial discipline around the fair funded document which should mitigate the anticipated forecast pressures within schools.

In response to concerns around borrowing it was explained that alongside traditional borrowing from banks we also borrow from other councils and public institutions that have a surplus cash balance and there are many occasions where we can derive a preferential rate over and above what we would borrow from the bank. Audit Committee receive a report twice a year on the treasury performance and the average rates of both borrowing and lending.

A Member highlighted the significant skill mix across governing bodies of Monmouthshire, and how we rely on those volunteers to help set strategic direction and run our schools. However, questions were raised regarding the support those bodies receive.

Members were assured that Audit Committee had thoroughly scrutinised and approved the accounts.

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

That the final draft Monmouthshire County Council Statement of Accounts for 2017/18 (Appendix 1), be accepted as a True and Fair view of the Council's Statement of Accounts.

8. WELLBEING OBJECTIVES AND STATEMENT - ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

Council were presented with a report to seek council approval of the Well-being Objectives and Statement – Annual Report 2017/18.

It was noted that the report did not reflect targets for building new properties, and the implications for the wellbeing of Monmouthshire. The Member referred to objective 1 of the plan: to provide children with the best possible start in life to help them achieve better outcomes. The average child poverty in Monmouthshire is 26.1%, being over

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3700 children living in poverty. A factor contributing to this is housing, not just building houses, but building communities.

The Leader of the Opposition raised concerns with delivery of the plan, particularly regarding child wellbeing. He highlighted the areas of poverty in the County and recognised we have the right goals and objective, but as a Council did not deliver. He stated cuts in education of £3.4 million by this administration. To be effective the wellbeing report should reflect the good and the bad.

The Leader responded that we had flat-lined schools funding in this Council and last year increased a portion of the budget spending on education. It was not as much as Council would like but that was a reflection of Welsh Government.

In terms of the plan, a Member referred to childhood obesity, and the relationship with sports development in schools, and how we need to be clear on impact and outcomes.

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

That the Well-being Objectives and Statement – Annual Report 2017/18 be approved, subject to any final amendments agreed by Council.

9. ABERGAVENNY TOWN HALL REFURBISHMENT

Council were presented with a report to seek agreement to proceed with the Abergavenny Town Hall refurbishment proposals to enable the facilitation of a community hub and undertake improvements to the Borough Theatre.

The Cabinet Member clarified that we will be getting a building with an extension on the first floor creating a larger space for a library. This will extend over the market hall but will not affect the running of the market hall once it is there. There will also be a flexible hub space which will be used by the Town Council, and a new Mayor's Parlour. There will be a new passenger lift at the front of the building.

With regards to the Borough Theatre Council have been in consultation with the Arts Council for Wales, and have received some possibilities for funding.

Councillor Thomas welcomed the refurbishment but expressed concerns of market traders around disruption to trading and proposed an amendment *'That this Council ensures that the market traders in Abergavenny Market Hall have an alternative space to continue trading during the refurbishment processes.'*

The Head of Commercial and Integrated Landlord Services explained that they had been clear in terms of the specification given to the design team that we want the market to continue to operate throughout the duration of the works. The works would be phased so there will be moves for the One Stop Shop and Hubs. There will be inevitable disruption.

Upon being put to vote the amendment was defeated.

Debate ensued.

The Chair of Stronger Communities Select sought reassurance of engagement with the disabled community so the building can be enjoyed by all. The officer confirmed that they had

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consulted with CARE, who had provided useful feedback, and as designs proceed they will ensure inclusive engagement.

Officers were working with Gwent Police, who were looking to create a presence in Abergavenny, and in terms of our facility they would be looking to relocate the community into the building and works have already begun in the One Stop Shops to accommodate growth of the team.

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

That Council agrees to proceed with the Abergavenny Town Hall refurbishment scheme utilising the capital funding already allocated within the Capital Programme.

That decisions relating to the management of the scheme and award of any contracts are delegated to the Cabinet Member for Resources and Chief Officer, Resources.

10. ADDRESSING OUR LACK OF A FIVE YEAR HOUSING LAND SUPPLY - MONMOUTHSHIRE'S APPROACH TO UNALLOCATED HOUSING SITES

Council received a report in order to seek Council's decision on its approach to tackling its housing land supply shortfall, specifically how we deal with planning applications for unallocated sites in advance of the new Local Development Plan being adopted in December 2021. This decision relates to the Monmouthshire Local Planning Authority area only: it does not affect that part of the county falling within the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Ahead of the presentation the Chair welcomed Ms. Helen Ronchetti, a member of the public who requested to speak on the recommendation of the report, which she believed to be contrary to WG decision to suspend paragraph 6.2 however government have stated that it is up to the decision maker to decide the weight it gives to the lack of housing supply. As a resident of Monmouthshire, Ms. Ronchetti believed that continuing to apply paragraph 6.2 undermines the democratic process of allocating land according to the LDP. She urged MCC to seriously consider the impact of continuing to apply paragraph 6.2 despite WG recommendation to dis-apply it.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged the concerns of residents, but recognised the overriding concern that the LDP is not bringing forward the number of houses anticipated. He suggested the wording of the recommendation be amended to use the term '*appropriate weight*' rather than 'considerable weight'.

The Cabinet Member also proposed the following amended recommendation:

Council will give appropriate weight to our housing land shortfall in considering planning applications. This means that our current housing land supply shortfall will be a material planning consideration when considering planning applications. However, it does not have considerable or over-riding weight, and the 'ground-rules' set out in paragraph 5.17 must be adhered to.

This decision ceases to have effect should we regain a five year land supply and/or meet the LDP housing shortfall identified in this report.

The size and mix of the proposed dwellings is both suitable for the location and seeks to address our demographic challenges

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Any planning permissions will have a reduced lifespan; full planning permissions shall be commenced within 2 years, and outline planning permissions shall be followed by reserved matters within 1 year, with commencement within 1 year of approval of the reserved matters.

Applications recommended for approval shall be accompanied by a Unilateral Undertaking by the time they are presented to Planning Committee.

The Chair called a 10 minutes recess to assess the amendment.

Concerns were raised around the affordable housing gap. The Head of Planning, Housing and Place Shaping explained that we can specify the mix to meet our identified needs, so via this proposal we would have the guaranteed 35% affordable housing, which may be social rented or low-cost home ownership on a flexible basis.

Councillor Howard registered concerns that this could trigger a rush of development proposals of the kind we have always resisted, for good reasons. He added that as far as the democratic process is concerned, and the lack of public participation, this may not send a good message to those who took part in the development of the existing LDP.

The Cabinet Member summed up that our current housing land supply shortfall will be a material planning consideration when considering planning applications.

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

That, when considering planning applications for residential development on unallocated sites, the Council gives 'appropriate weight' to its lack of a five year housing land supply, insofar as those development proposals are otherwise acceptable in planning terms and that the following 'ground rules' are met:

- Residential development is unacceptable in principle within undefended flood plain (zone C2) or on greenfield sites within defended flood plain (zone C1), as per national planning policy and TAN15;
- Residential development is unacceptable in principle within allocated Green Wedges: the appropriate time to review Green Wedge designations is via the new LDP;
- Residential development is unacceptable in principle on allocated employment sites. Such sites will not be released for housing development unless full compliance with LDP Policy E1 can be demonstrated and there is no realistically likely future demand for the site for employment purposes;
- Unallocated sites are required to deliver 35% affordable housing and no negotiation will be entertained (60% where the development relates to a Main Village);
- The development must be acceptable in other planning terms. If infrastructure is inadequate to support new development, and it cannot be satisfactorily improved via a S106 planning agreement, permission would normally be refused. This includes matters such as highway capacity, school capacity, primary health care and air quality;
- The scale of additional residential development will be considered in the context of the LDP spatial strategy, both in its own right and cumulatively with other approved residential development.
- Development should be restricted to the Main Towns, Severnside, and Rural Secondary Settlements (with the exception of Llanfoist where there shall be no additional development on unallocated sites outside of the new LDP); and small

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60% affordable housing sites in those Main Villages without an allocated site (namely St Arvans and Llandogo).

- The size and mix of the proposed dwellings is both suitable for the location and seeks to address our demographic challenges;
- Any planning permissions will have a reduced lifespan: full planning permissions shall be commenced within 2 years, and outline planning permissions shall be followed by reserved matters within 1 year, with commencement within 1 year of approval of the reserved matters;
- Applications recommended for approval shall be accompanied by a Unilateral Undertaking by the time they are presented to Planning Committee;
- This decision ceases to have effect should we regain a five year land supply and/or meet the LDP housing shortfall identified in this report.

This means that our current housing land supply shortfall will be a material planning consideration when considering planning applications. However, it does not have 'considerable' or 'over-riding' weight, and the 'ground-rules' set out above must be adhered to.

11. MEMBERS QUESTIONS:

11.1. From County Councillor M. Feakins to County Councillor R. John

Would the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People give an update on how students and staff are settling in to the new Monmouth Comprehensive School?

Councillor R. John thanked Cllr Feakins for the question and responded that the transition to the new building had gone smoothly and had been hugely positive. It is an exemplary learning environment which will prepare students for new ways of learning in time for the new curriculum. The school enhances the opportunity for excellence with flexible learning spaces to facilitate small and large groups, as well as individual study. The First Minister was shown around last week by two impressive young people, Emily Shields and Luke Rogers, the school's head boy and girl. It was clear to see how proud they were and how well they knew the building, having been involved in the design process. The preparatory work done by staff has been second to none and teachers were ready to exploit the new asset to its fullest potential. On Monday 17th September the school opened its doors to nearly 1600 students who expressed positive reactions. Students were taken on guided tours first thing and by 11:30am the normal timetable had begun. It is fully operational with interactive white boards. There are many people to thank including Interserve, Welsh Government, teaching staff and others but particular tribute was paid to the Deputy Headteacher Tim Bird, and on behalf of the Authority Poppy Harris and Phil Kenney who have worked tirelessly to deliver this project in the final stages. The opening of Monmouth means we are half way to achieving this Council's pledge of regenerating our four Secondary Schools.

11.2. From County Councillor L. Jones to County Councillor R. John

Would the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People provide an update on recent changes to the provision of free school milk?

Councillor R. John thanked Councillor Jones for the question and responded that we provide every child in foundation phase with a portion of fresh milk each morning. Until July this was provided in a single use plastic bottle with a straw. Across the entire County this meant we were getting through 11500 bottles per week, equating to 500,000 every year in Monmouthshire alone. We have replaced these with glass bottles and no straws resulting in a significant reduction in the amount of single use plastic being used in our schools. It also a lot more cost effective. All milk is locally sourced.

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

Will the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People make a statement on the authority's infrastructure investment in Chepstow School?

Councillor responded that this year we have made significant investments in Chepstow Comprehensive School, including in the budget £200,000 in the renewal of IT facilities. We have invested £50,000 in the renewal of windows, and a further £58,000 which has been delegated to the school in their block grant to invest as they see fit. Last year, through effective budget management, the school concluded the financial year with a surplus of around £150,000. The Cabinet member has worked closely with senior officers to oversee the building works associated with band A of 21st Century Schools. Pending clarification from Welsh Government a paper will be brought to Cabinet this autumn to agree the establishment of the project team for band B, a part of their work will be to ensure that both the strategic case and the economic case for the redevelopment of Chepstow are prepared well ahead of the launch of band C.

As a supplementary Councillor Pavia asked if, in terms of commitment, has all the investment money been spent on IT, and infrastructure work?

Councillor John responded that the £200,000 agreed investment has been spent by purchasing 238 pieces of IT equipment for students; 85 new laptops for teachers and supporting equipment; £26,000 on network spending. The commitment to redeveloping Chepstow will be the focus of the team soon to be appointed, we have a four school redevelopment policy and we are half way through that. He recognised the number of challenges faced by Chepstow School and has confidence in the new Headteacher, along with EAS and LA, that he will be able to provide the strong leadership needed for future success.

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

Will the Leader of the Council make a statement about progressing proposals for a Chepstow Bypass?

The Leader responded that a joint study of the problems and possible solution has been commissioned jointly by MCC and Gloucestershire CC but in full collaboration with Forest of Dean District Council, Highways England and Welsh Government. The study is being undertaken by Capita on behalf of the partners. The study covers the South East of the County generally rather than Chepstow in isolation and looks to plan ahead by better understanding potential development in the Forest and South of Monmouthshire. Any solutions will require cooperation amongst local authorities, and equally with Westminster and WG. The first stage report is nearing completion and it was hoped Members would receive the stage 1 report in November. If this receives a positive response, stage 2 involves a much more detailed research and option appraisal and associated costs. Funding will be considered in preparation of next year's budget.

As a supplementary Councillor Pavia asked what else the Leader thinks he can do to get senior political involvement to positively back the principle of the bypass?

The Leader responded that all partners are involved in the early works, but clear decisions have to be made at a very senior level. It would be quite appropriate for the Leader to ask for a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary

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

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Will the Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health provide an update on the work the authority is doing with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board to ensure the long-term viability of Chepstow Hospital?

Councillor P. Jones responded that the plans for Chepstow Community Hospital in the context of the clinical futures work closer to home under Healthier Wales which were working in partnership with ABUHB is an active programme taking place to increase the services offered from Chepstow Community Hospital with a range of new out-patient clinics coming on stream this year. CCH sits as part of an integrated hub network across Monmouthshire, the other hubs being Mardy and Monnow Vale. These hubs are crucial to the delivery of our integrated support to people of Monmouthshire. We are awaiting final confirmation from WG regarding a £99,000 capital investment to remodel parts of the hospital to facilitate delivery of integrated working and further out-patient clinics. In-patient community beds will continue to be provided from CCH. The partnership delivery of services via the hubs is coordinated through the Integrated Partnership Board, reporting to the Regional Partnership Board. Services already introduced to Chepstow so far include piloting frailty assessment bed; a new cardiology arrhythmia outpatient clinic; improved access health visitor clinics; significant redesign of accommodation due to growing integrated older adult community team; child safeguarding team for Caldicot; delivery of evidence-based cognitive stimulation therapy; specialist behavioural support teams. Detail of further far reaching services upcoming was provided. As well as congratulating Julie Boothroyd on her new position of Chief Officer, the Cabinet Member was pleased to announce Eve Parkinson as Head of Adult Services.

As a supplementary Councillor Pavia asked if Councillor Jones agreed that we don't just need to protect the current medical clinical services, we also need to enhance them and look for new opportunities. He asked if she would take these messages back to the working group.

Councillor Jones reminded Councillor Pavia this is an ongoing service and we will try to accumulate as many services as possible, and encourage the Health Board to do likewise. She added there is only so much room in Chepstow and certain areas are quite vast. We need to learn to prioritise and find out what the needs are.

11.6. From County Councillor P. Pavia to County Councillor R. Greenland

Will the Cabinet Member for Innovation, Enterprise and Leisure make a statement on the work the authority is doing to support businesses in Chepstow?

Councillor Greenland responded that our economic development unit, Monmouthshire Business and Enterprise works closely with all of the chambers of commerce and Chepstow is no exception. In July 2017 the chamber in Chepstow undertook a report on the town centre which identified various problems and we have been working, as a Council, to help them with issues like cleansing, waste and signage. One issue being business rates was believed to be outdated and the system should be changed. He added that we will continue to lobby Welsh Government to look at the whole problem of business rates, as in Chepstow there are a number of businesses are facing closure because of their high rates. He explained we continue to promote any empty spaces that are available to businesses, and work with all businesses to ensure we encourage as many people as possible to visit our towns. We are also engaged in work with Visit Monmouthshire, and look to work with coach operators. We work with Business Wales and Superfast Business Wales both to help existing businesses and in order to offer help and assistance to any other businesses that are looking to come into the town. The Cabinet Member recognised the huge problems being faced in town centres, and the effect of internet shopping. We should take the removal of bridge tolls as an opportunity to promote our town centres.

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As a supplementary Councillor Pavia asked if the Cabinet Member will give a commitment to examine some new opportunities to boost footfall leading up to Christmas, and piloting some more short-term parking in the town.

12. To receive the minutes of County Council meeting held on 26th July 2018

The minutes of the meeting of County Council held on 26th July 2018 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

The meeting ended at 5.50 pm

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