

# MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of County Council held  
at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Thursday, 19th  
November, 2015 at 2.00 pm**

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

County Councillors: D. Batrouni, J. Prosser, M. Powell, V. Smith, G. Burrows, P. Clarke, J. Crook, D. Dovey, G. Down, A. Easson, R. Edwards, D. Evans, P. Farley, P.A. Fox, J. George, R.J.W. Greenland, L. Guppy, E. Hackett Pain, R. Harris, B. Hayward, M. Hickman, G. Howard, D. Jones, P. Jones, S. Jones, S.B. Jones, P. Jordan, P. Murphy, F. Taylor, P. Watts, A. Webb, S. White and A. Wintle

## **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Kellie Beirne	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Tracey Harry	Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Sarah McGuinness	Chief Officer, Children & Young People
Will McLean	Head of Policy & Engagement
Robert Tranter	Head of Legal Services & Temporary Monitoring Officer
Claire Marchant	Chief Officer Social Care, Health & Housing
Sarah King	Senior Democratic Services Officer
Ian Saunders	Head of Tourism, Leisure and Culture

## **APOLOGIES:**

Councillors D. Blakebrough, R. Chapman, D. Edwards, P.A.D. Hobson, S. Howarth, J. Marshall, A. Watts and K. Williams

### **2. Public Open Forum**

There were no public forum items.

### **3. Chairman's report and receipt of petitions**

In opening the meeting the Chairman held a minute silence to remember those who had lost lives in recent tragedies. Council agreed that a letter would be sent to the Mayor of Paris and a copy sent to the consulate in Cardiff.

We received the Chairman's report.

There were no petitions presented.

### **4. Declarations of interest**

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County Councillor S. Jones declared a personal and prejudicial interest in relation to the motion, item 6b, due to the nature of employment. Councillor Jones left the meeting during discussion of the item.

County Councillor P. Clarke and B. Strong declared personal and prejudicial interests in relation to the motion, item 6c, regarding the Velothon. Councillors Clarke and Strong left the meeting during discussion of the item.

#### **5. To confirm and sign the minutes of the Council meeting held on 24th September 2015**

The Chairman confirmed and signed the minutes of the Council meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2015, subject to the following amendments:

- **Page 4 - Motion b) Submitted by County Councillor D. Batrouni**  
*Delete Carried and Insert **Upon being put to the vote the motion was lost.***
- **Page 4 and 5 - Motion c) Submitted by County Councillor P. Jones**  
*Addition:*
  - **Significant debate was held in relation to whether the Velothon could start or finish in Monmouthshire, Council recognised the benefit that this would have for the area. It was suggested that this could be negotiated during discussions.**
  - **Members recognised the high profile event and it was imperative that past mistakes were not repeated.**
- **Page 6 and 7 – Corporate Parenting Annual Report**  
*Addition:*
  - **Information was requested from the Cabinet Member regarding the difficulty in securing placements.**

Council discussed draft minutes and whether it was appropriate for amendments to be made at the subsequent meeting. Officers confirmed that amendments to any minutes were approved at the meeting where minutes were agreed, however, the process for amending minutes would be considered.

#### **10. Briefing Note - Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme**

The Leader presented an update in relation to Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme:

*'Following our resolution at the Council meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> September to participate in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme officers and members have been active in planning to participate in the scheme. This has been a very positive period with internal and external partners working to ensure that we are as prepared as we can be as an organisation and a wider public service to ensure a successful transition for those individuals relocated. A part of that has been assessing the range of issues facing the authority in fully participating – in particular the ongoing lack of clarity regarding future funding of the scheme. With regards to this I am working with senior officers to determine the most appropriate response, we have two options:*

- 1) *Is start planning to take in families from Jan 2016 onwards and not wait for Home Office to confirm funding figures for yr 2-5*

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- 2) *Is to wait for funding confirmation for year 2 – 5 before we take next steps. Waiting for confirmation does not stop us from discussing / planning the logistics in preparation for arrivals*

*Across Gwent there are a range of positions; Blaenau Gwent have yet to consider participation; Caerphilly are expecting their first arrivals prior to Christmas pending allocation of families, Torfaen are expecting their first families in December and Newport is awaiting confirmation of the future funding arrangements. A particular challenge for us is the availability of appropriate housing; we are currently working with the private rental sector and continue to have discussions with the Home Officer in terms of the profile of arrivals. To progress our arrangements. We will be having an internal meeting to identify school places, housing availability etc. to determine the number of households we can commit to on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2015.*

*We have had numerous offers of help and support and we would look to organise this in a more structured and cohesive manner. I have identified areas where we can save on costs*

- 1) *Caldicot Food bank has offered to provide a 'Welcome' food pack for every household upon their arrival*
- 2) *iNeed community group in Monmouth has said that they would be happy to start collecting furniture etc in anticipation of the new arrivals, if MCC is able to provide storage space (a warehouse) perhaps, they are happy to organise this.*

*I anticipate that they may be some frustration around why this is taking so long but it's important for elected members to note that this is by far a more complex scheme that Home Office wants us to deliver with a much more detailed statement of requirements.*

*One key aspect is that around the provision of the potentially acute healthcare needs that some of the family members can be expected to experience. We have met with the lead Public Health Consultant and have confidence in the arrangements that are in place.*

*I will report back to the next Council the progress that has been made.*

#### **Afghan Translators**

*Our involvement in the Afghan Translators scheme has progressed positively and currently we have 12 singles and 1 family relocated to Monmouthshire - a total of 15 individuals.*

*We are still committed to relocating a further 9 singles, 5 couples and 9 families which will take us beyond the initial expected end date of the project (March 2016). We anticipate that in may take up till March 2017 to meet those commitments, and if there is capacity, we may be asked by Home Office to consider relocating more individuals e.g. shared accommodation becoming available as translators integrate into life in the UK and decide to move out of the area.*

*MCC has continued to remain in close contact with Home Office to ensure that the profile of the participants that we relocate matches our availability around housing, school spaces etc.*

*This scheme has been relatively straight forward to deliver as DPIA has been able to provide us with a comprehensive integration support package. They manage the GP registration, obtaining NI numbers, exploring leisure activities, induction to local area etc.*

*The first 6 arrivals are currently studying part time in Coleg Gwent (Advanced level English).*

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*The new arrivals (6 singles plus family) are still going through their induction period as they have only arrived end Oct/early Nov.*

*We are currently in contact with Capt D Bell, Militia Captain, The Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers (Militia) to see if we can develop some initiatives for the translators to continue to engage with the military in an informal manner.'*

Councillor J. Prosser highlighted that the issue had been discussed at the military engagement session and had expressed enthusiasm to engage.

#### **6. Notices of motion**

##### **6.1. Submitted by County Councillor V.E. Smith**

*'This Council notes the human and financial cost of road traffic accidents and the risk of speed related accidents on rural roads.*

*Council resolves to write to Welsh Government to request that the policy of blanket 60mph speed limits on rural roads be reviewed in the interest of public safety and public finances.'*

Councillor R. Greenland proposed an amendment which was duly seconded:

*'Whilst it is accepted that 60mph is safe on some rural roads, there are probably others where a lower limit is appropriate. In the interests of road safety we look to the Welsh Government to review speeds on our rural roads*

*Following the debate at the last Council meeting, it is acknowledged that officers have worked extensively with WG to address the concerns of members around the organisation of the 2015 Velothon. We welcome the appointment of Run4Wales To deliver the Velothon for 2016 and have received from them assurances that the route through Monmouthshire will be amended and that extensive consultation and communication with those affected will be at the centre of their work leading up to the event. Having received these assurances Council supports the inclusion of Monmouthshire in the Wales Velothon in 2016.'*

Council recognised the importance of the issue and that there was a need to ensure roads were safe.

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

Upon being put to the vote the substantive motion was carried:

*'Whilst it is accepted that 60mph is safe on some rural roads, there are probably others where a lower limit is appropriate. In the interests of road safety we look to the Welsh Government to review speeds on our rural roads*

*Following the debate at the last Council meeting, it is acknowledged that officers have worked extensively with WG to address the concerns of members around the organisation of the 2015 Velothon. We welcome the appointment of Run4Wales To deliver the Velothon for 2016 and have received from them assurances that the route through Monmouthshire will be amended and that extensive consultation and communication with those affected will be at the centre of their work leading up to the event. Having received these assurances Council supports the inclusion of Monmouthshire in the Wales Velothon in 2016.'*

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#### 6.2. Submitted by County Councillor V.E. Smith

*'This Council notes the effect of the 5p charge on plastic carrier bags has had on littering by these bags. Council notes there is a widespread problem with litter, especially drink bottles and cans. Council resolves to write to Welsh Government to request Welsh Government consider the application of a deposit on all drinks containers, to discourage littering and to incentivise those people who regularly pick up litter.'*

#### **County Councillor S. Jones left the meeting at 2.25pm**

In debating the motion we noted:

- Factors such as product packaging could be considered and there was a need for a review in legislation.
- It was recognised that there was a need for enforcement within the authority, prior to any correspondence with Welsh Government.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was defeated.

#### **County Councillor S. Jones returned to the meeting at 2.35pm**

#### 6.3. Velothon 2016

County Councillor R.J. Higginson took the chair.

County Councillor R.J. Greenland proposed a motion, which was duly seconded:

*'Following the debate at the last Council meeting, it is acknowledged that officers have worked extensively with WG to address the concerns of members around the organisation of the 2015 Velothon. We welcome the appointment of Run4Wales To deliver the Velothon for 2016 and have received from them assurances that the route through Monmouthshire will be amended and that extensive consultation and communication with those affected will be at the centre of their work leading up to the event. Having received these assurances Council supports the inclusion of Monmouthshire in the Wales Velothon in 2016.'*

In debating the motion we noted:

- Significant issues had occurred after the last Velothon event and an all member seminar had been held to discuss proposals for 2016.
- Members requested reassurance regarding whether costs would be incurred. Council were informed that this was early stages of discussions and that the position would be scrutinised by select committees.
- Costs would be contained within existing budgets, there would not be additional budgets to run the velothon.
- Some concerns were expressed that existing budgets would be used and loss to businesses in the county was recognised.
- Council generally supported the event. However, members were apprehensive regarding the effect on local businesses and residents.
- Members welcomed officer views in terms of the consequential financial gain which would offset investment. Council sought reassurances and concrete information. Further clarification was requested regarding whether there had been progress in a start/finish point being confirmed within Monmouthshire.
- Council requested a map for the whole of the event route.

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- In supporting the motion, members were encouraged by information received by Welsh Government at the members seminar and that residents and community councils had been engaged.
- In opposing the event, there were significant concerns due to the effect on residents in ward and restricted access. It was felt that the event would be detrimental.
- We highlighted the importance of sufficient and appropriate consultation. Council welcomed an improved and organised event.

Officers advised that members who had attended seminar would have been comforted by Run4Wales. Lessons had been learnt and if the event was to go ahead then full consultation would be undertaken.

Road closures had been an issue which would be addressed and options would be considered on how issues could be mitigated and impact on local communities minimised.

Sufficient time was available to ensure an appropriate plan was in place, so that events (i.e. Weddings) could be accommodated.

Cyclists would be using cycling routes prior to the event, as well as during. Information would be publicly available on the website and people would be fully informed and engaged, to deliver an event which will minimise disruption and maximise benefit.

The Cabinet member reiterated that the event was a huge opportunity. There were issues to be considered for businesses and individuals, however, there was a need to maximise the available opportunities at a minimised cost to the authority.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was carried:

*'Following the debate at the last Council meeting, it is acknowledged that officers have worked extensively with WG to address the concerns of members around the organisation of the 2015 Velothon. We welcome the appointment of Run4Wales To deliver the Velothon for 2016 and have received from them assurances that the route through Monmouthshire will be amended and that extensive consultation and communication with those affected will be at the centre of their work leading up to the event. Having received these assurances Council supports the inclusion of Monmouthshire in the Wales Velothon in 2016.'*

#### **7. Report of the Chief Officer, Social Care, Health and Housing:**

##### **7.1. Providing Members with an evaluation of the effectiveness of safeguarding within Monmouthshire**

The Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health presented the report and thanked officers for work that had been undertaken. The purpose was to provide members with information and analysis regarding the safeguarding of children and young people.

Comprehensive strategic and operational information is provided via a suite of three cross referenced reports:

- Strategic Report for Safeguarding September 2015;** this provides an evaluative overview for Members on progress, areas for further work and includes case studies. **Pages 1-5 of this report will enable Members to obtain a good summary of the current safeguarding agenda.**
- Safeguarding Report Card September 2015;** this provides detailed evidence and analysis for Members wishing to review safeguarding performance in more depth.

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- iii. **Service Improvement Plan for Safeguarding 2015 – 2016, Quarter 2 Review**; this is the mid-point review of the annual plan for the safeguarding unit detailing progress against identified the priorities and actions.

Council were informed that Safeguarding reports had been considered by Cabinet and Select Committees, significant contribution and progress had been made since November 2012.

We recognised the importance of Safeguarding, as a cornerstone for what the authority represented. Directorates were in receipt of training and the issue would be continually embedded in a cultural capacity across the authority.

- A member highlighted that recommendations within the report were unclear, as they referred to select.
- Council commended the report.
- Concern was expressed that there was only one reference to housing contained within the report, when it was perceived that safeguarding issues sometimes stemmed from housing related matters.
- The Cabinet member thanked Council for well made comments. We were reminded that this was an ongoing journey, however, issues related to housing would be discussed further.
- There was a need for elected members to be clear on expectations, in terms of safeguarding and the role that they have. We agreed that arrangements would be made for level one training to be provided to all elected members.

We resolved to agree the recommendation within the report.

### **8. Reports of the Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services:**

#### **8.1. Proposals for Casinos - Gambling Act 2005**

Council were presented a report which considered the Council's existing resolution to not permit casinos within the County of Monmouthshire.

We resolved to agree recommendation within the report:

To refuse casino applications made under the Gambling Act 2005 within their Gambling Policy.

*Councillor A. Easson left 3.20pm*

#### **8.2. Adoption of Gambling Policy - Gambling Act 2005**

Council were presented with the Adoption of Gambling Policy – Gambling Act 2005, the purpose of which was to agree the Council's 'Statement of Gambling Policy 2016'.

During debate, we noted:

- Further clarification was requested regarding community resilience and impact on policy in Monmouthshire.
- Council discussed equality, officers clarified that in terms of equalities within the policy it related to the high street gambling premise and complying with central guidance.
- It was suggested that a section could be included which engaged on wider education of gambling.

We resolved to agree recommendation within the report:

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To adopt the Gambling Act Policy for Monmouthshire County Council, provided in Appendix A.

### **8.3. The Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 and Health Protection Regulations**

Council received a report which considered appointment of Proper Officers and the delegation of powers to the Head of Community Protection under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act and Regulations made there-under.

A member requested that it was clarified whether the designated consultants were members of properly regulated bodies.

We resolved to agree recommendations within the report:

1. To appoint the designated Consultants in Communicable Disease Control and Health Protection as set out in Appendix One, as Proper Officers under section 113 (1A) of Local Government Act 1972.
2. To delegate powers to the Head of Community Protection, as outlined in Appendix One, and to replace previous reference to 'Chief Officer R & C' with 'Head of Democratic and Regulatory Services'.

### **9. Members' Questions**

#### **9.1. From County Councillor D. Batrouni to Councillor P. A. Fox:**

'What is Monmouthshire's gross schools expenditure per pupil?'

In response:

- The set of latest data provided comprehensive statistics across the whole of Wales and there had been a decline compared to last year.
- The commitment to pupil investment was unquestionable, but was not always indicative of figure outcomes.

#### **9.2. From County Councillor D. Batrouni to County Councillor P.A. Fox:**

'How many households were threatened with homelessness in Monmouthshire in 2014/15?'

In response:

- General enquiries would be directed to the housing options team, however, not all related to homelessness.
- 249 direct applications were determined in 2014/15, which was decreased from 2013/14.
- People would be signposted to the appropriate place and the authority would try not to place families and children in B&B.

As a supplementary Councillor Batrouni asked why statistics from Welsh Government identified Monmouthshire County Council as 3<sup>rd</sup> worst authority in preventing homelessness.

In response, Councillor Fox advised that the KPI was flawed and would be discontinued. The ongoing priority would be for private accommodation to be assessed.

#### **9.3. From County Councillor D. Batrouni to County Councillor P. Murphy:**



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'How many residents in Monmouthshire benefited from the Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme in (a) 2014/15 and (b) 2013/14?'

In response:

- a) 6309 in 2014/15 and b) 6503 in 2013/14
- Further information would be provided regarding benefits for the authority for additional funding on CTRS.

#### **9.4. From County Councillor D. Batrouni to County Councillor S.B. Jones:**

'How many residents have been refused blue badges in Monmouthshire in (a) 2015/16 to date and (b) 2014/15?'

In response:

*'In 2014 – 15 MCC received **2,483** blue badge applications. Of which **177** were 7.1% were refused. We issued **2,306** badges.  
Between 1<sup>st</sup> Apr – 30<sup>th</sup> Sep 2015 MCC has received **1,369** applications and has refused **157** – 11.4%. This does show that there has been a 4.3% increase in refusals to date.  
It needs to be noted that the MCC refusals are for the discretionary blue badge applications. Some people either because of certain conditions, or the benefits they receive automatically qualify.*

#### **Why are badges being refused?**

*In February 2015 MCC, following best practice and guidance from Welsh Government changed the way blue badge applications were processed.*

*Previously MCC received an application and would write to the GP who would determine whether a blue badge should be issued. In 2012 Welsh Government initiated the Blue Badge Improvement Scheme which had the following aims:*

*No. 1 reducing demands on GPs*

*No.2 reducing costs on Health Boards as they paid GPs for every blue badge assessment letter*

*No. 3 creating a system which would be fair and consistent across Wales No. 4 reducing demands on GPs*

*No.5 aligning blue badge with the process utilised by Department of Work and Pensions for the assessments on Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payment*

*The process now is:*

- *Application form is issued to resident to fill in. If a resident needs help then MCC Hub staff will sit down with them, or we can do it over the phone.*
- *Form will be checked for accuracy as certain documentation is required*
- *Form is then marked against elements provided by WG. Each element has a point allocation.*
- *To qualify for a badge an applicant must be awarded more than **15** points.*

*Of the 157 refusals to date:*

*93 are renewals*

*64 are for new applications*

*It needs to be appreciated that blue badges are not just renewed automatically now. Each application is a "new" application. It is no longer assumed that previous qualification means you are eligible as it is recognised that circumstances can change.*

*The main reason (142 out of 157) is that people have not met the 15 points needed.*

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*As this is a new system there is a process of Independent Assessment to review the Council's decision. As this is still a new process Welsh Government have recommended that we direct people to the Assessor if they believe they could qualify even though the initial assessment has not given them sufficient points. To date we have **proactively** referred 47 people and 38 of these have then been given a badge. Welsh Government are taking advice from the assessors to determine if and how the toolkit could be improved. A further version to the toolkit is due out before the end of the year.*

#### **Relationship with DWP – disability living allowance and personal independence allowance**

*To streamline the process and to reduce duplication MCC does not review applications if people are in receipt of DWP benefits. For example if they receive the higher rate of disability living allowance they automatically qualify for a badge. If they get the lower rate then they are not eligible for a badge and residents should not apply to MCC if they have been refused by DWP – hopefully the process should be consistent irrespective of evaluating organisation.*

*What we will not know though is how many are coming through to us if they have been refused completely by DWP. If they declare it we will, but we do not routinely check with DWP on the applications they have received.*

*If a resident was unhappy with the DWP decision then their first recourse of application should be to ask DWP for a review.*

#### **Moving Forward**

*MCC continues to work proactively with Welsh Government on the refinement of this guidance. For example we have recommended heart conditions should be included.*

*We do appreciate that refusals appeared to have increased this year and will continue to monitor why this appears to be happening. At the moment it appears it is the implementation of the new system and the points criteria. We do appreciate for people who have applied a refusal can be stressful and sometimes engaging with the system can add to that stress. We will work sympathetically with applicants and will help them when ever possible and explain clearly why a certain decision has been taken.'*

Councillor Jones would reply in writing regarding a question related to unsuitability through the DWP process and number of people affected.

#### **9.5. From County Councillor F. Taylor to County Councillor P. Fox:**

'Magor Post Office and the critical public services it provides to the residents of Magor with Undy is under threat as a direct result of Post Office Ltd.'s process of Network Transformation. Will the Leader of the Council and his administration actively support the campaign to Save Magor Post Office and ensure a sustainable and viable post Office service continues in Magor Square? Will the Leader agree to write to Post Office Limited and Baroness Neville-Rolf DBE CMG Parliamentary Undersecretary of State and Minister for Intellectual Property on behalf of local residents to facilitate open and transparent dialogue?'

In response:

- This was recognised as an important and urgent matter.
- Work would be undertaken with the local member and relevant people would be contacted appropriately to ensure that concerns were addressed.

**The meeting ended at 3.50 pm**

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