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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of County Council held
at Remote Meeting on Thursday, 16th July, 2020 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor S. Woodhouse (Chairman)
County Councillor S.B. Jones (Vice Chairman)

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

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Matt Phillips	Head of Law/ Monitoring Officer
Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Peter Davies	Chief Officer, Resources
Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
John Pearson	Local Democracy Manager
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Frances O'Brien	Chief Officer, Enterprise

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors D. Blakebrough and M.Lane

1. Declarations of Interest

On opening the meeting the Chair conducted a minutes silence in respect of those affected by the pandemic.

The Chair thanked everyone for their continued hard work and commitment in supporting Monmouthshire residents, and everyone across Monmouthshire for supporting each other.

County Councillor Tudor Thomas declared a non-prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 8c.

County Councillor Sara Jones declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 8c and removed herself from the meeting during discussion.

2. Public Questions

None.

3. Receipt of petitions

County Councillor Richard John presented a petition on behalf of residents of Dingestow in support of a 20mph speed limit through the village.

4. Report of the Chief Executive

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held at Remote Meeting on Thursday, 16th July, 2020 at 2.00 pm

4.1. **Call In and Urgency Report**

The Chief Executive presented the report following the decision by Cabinet to deal with an urgent matter on 27th May 2020, thus waiving the option of call in, and triggering the constitutional requirement to submit a report to Council explaining the reason for the urgency thereafter.

He explained that every decision taken has been open to call-in and this is the only one that is not for reasons set out in the report.

Current arrangements for meetings will be reflected on over the summer period.

Council resolved to note the report.

5. Report of the Chief Officer for Resources

5.1. **Section 151 Officer Covid 19 Update**

Council received the report to provide an update on the financial impact of COVID-19 on the Council and to outline the timetable for a budget recovery plan to be developed.

The Leader stated this is a grave financial situation, recognised by all Leaders, and hopes all Members recognise the gravity of the position we are in.

The Leader of the Opposition referred to the limited reserves held by the Authority, leaving us in a more precarious state than other authorities. In response Members referred to lack of funding by Welsh Government.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Murphy and seconded by Councillor Fox.

Upon being put to a vote Council resolved to accept the recommendations:

To receive an update and recognise the significant uncertainty surrounding the Council's financial position.

To recognise the need to limit spending wherever possible until such time that financial uncertainties become clear and a budget recovery plan is agreed.

6. Reports of the Head of Policy and Governance

6.1. **Climate Emergency Strategy Update**

Council received the report to provide an update on progress towards the Council's commitment to reduce its carbon emissions to net zero by 2030.

Councillor Groucutt commended the work of the Climate Strategy Committee, in particular, the work of Hazel Clatworthy, Sustainability Officer. He asked that County Council respond positively to the important decisions made in this Committee.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Feakins and seconded by Councillor Fox.

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

That Council notes progress made towards reducing council carbon emissions, including those areas where progress has been slower than anticipated.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held at Remote Meeting on Thursday, 16th July, 2020 at 2.00 pm

6.2. Electoral Review - Council Proposed Scheme

Council received the report to seek approval for the Council's preferred option for submission as part of the consultation being undertaken by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales ("the Commission").

The efforts and work undertaken by the Electoral Team were commended.

It was pleasing to see that proposals were put forward by a cross-party panel.

Concerns were raised regarding dual representation; in that it may not be democratic. There was disappointment that we had to fit in with Assembly requirements.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Fox and seconded by Councillor Feakins.

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

That members approve the proposed scheme attached at appendix 1 to be submitted to the Commission as a formal proposal for their consideration into the future electoral arrangements for Monmouthshire.

7. Notices of Motion:

7.1. Submitted by County Councillor M. Groucutt

This council notes and welcomes the very well organised and wholly peaceful rallies recently organised by young people in Abergavenny, Monmouth and Chepstow. It reflects a positive engagement in seeking to improve our society. We congratulate the organisers for their efforts in enabling these events to take place. As a consequence, many hundreds of people were able to show that, whatever the era and whatever the place, Black Lives Matter.

The motion was seconded by County Councillor Tudor Thomas who added that racial equality must be faced head on. He referred to human rights and equality figures and examples of discrimination, including unemployment figures. He commended those who had protested peacefully and brought the issue to the forefront in Abergavenny.

Councillor Easson wished to see recognition of footballer, Eddie Paris, by Monmouthshire County Council within the county.

The Cabinet Member for Social Justice highlighted areas of work being undertaken and took the opportunity to make members aware if an upcoming meeting of the Social Justice Strategy Group.

Members were keen to support the motion and applauded the peaceful protests and thanked those involved in arranging the events.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was carried.

7.2. Submitted by County Councillor V. Smith

That Monmouthshire County Council should support the construction of a Severn Barrage to ensure security of energy and economic benefit through construction. A transport route across a barrage would benefit area connectivity.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held at Remote Meeting on Thursday, 16th July, 2020 at 2.00 pm

The motion was seconded by County Councillor Howarth, who added his support based on the aspirations of the Council.

The Cabinet Member for Infrastructure stated that whilst she is fully supportive of the concept that central government research all opportunities to harness tidal energy, the motion lacks detail and there are currently no projects in place to develop this idea. Great consideration needs to be given to the natural environment and wildlife in the estuary. Consideration also need to be given to a third crossing and how our infrastructure could cope with the increased traffic. For these reasons she did not support the motion.

Councillor Smith amended the wording of her motion to: *That Monmouthshire County Council should support the **concept** of a Severn Barrage to ensure security of energy and economic benefit through construction. A transport route across a barrage would benefit area connectivity.*

The amended motion was seconded by Councillor Feakins and upon being put to the vote was carried.

Councillor Murphy left the meeting at 16:30pm

7.3. Submitted by County Councillor D. Batrouni

That this Council supports free car parking in all our town centres, in particular Chepstow, Abergavenny and Monmouth, until December 2020. We believe this will give a much-needed boost to our local businesses through this Covid19 pandemic by encouraging residents to shop locally.

County Councillors Sara Jones, A. Watts and T. Thomas declared an interest. Councillor Jones left the meeting.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Thomas. He added that Abergavenny is a successful town but trade has been decimated and parking is still a major issue. Footfall is light and shoppers want to visit briefly, and the highest complaint is parking charges. As a short term measure a concession should be given to attract people back to the town.

Councillor Becker proposed an amendment to the motion *that this Council makes car parking free for 1 hour until the end of September to help retail with their cash flow troubles.*

Councillor Watkins seconded the amendment, recognising that businesses are struggling. However, it was understood that the Council is in financial difficulty. Debate ensued.

The Cabinet Member highlighted that whilst the administration wants to do everything in their ability to support our town centres and high streets, they are limited by what they can afford to do. Much effort has gone into making town centres safe and welcoming. The idea of free parking has been considered but rejected as it would cost the Council £557,000.

Upon being put to the vote the amended motion was defeated and debate returned to the original motion.

Upon being put to the vote the original motion was defeated.

Councillor Watkins left the meeting at 17:54pm

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held at Remote Meeting on Thursday, 16th July, 2020 at 2.00 pm

7.4. Submitted by County Councillor D. Batrouni

That this Council opposes the scheme proposed by Cabinet to offer loans to our schools to cover their deficit positions. The Council believes that instead of saddling our schools and future generations with more debt, the Cabinet should properly fund our schools by making a commitment to increase (at the very least) school budgets in line with inflation

The motion was seconded by County Councillor Thomas who urged the administration to reconsider the scheme.

The Cabinet Member for Resources explained that the loan facility is optional, and some schools will stick to their own recovery plans.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was defeated.

*County Councillors Treharne, Davies and Batrouni left the meeting at 18:22pm,
County Councillor Becker left the meeting at 18:30pm
County Councillor Dymock left the meeting at 18:39pm*

8. Members' Questions

8.1. From County Councillor P. Pavia to County Councillor J. Pratt, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Neighbourhood Services

Will the Cabinet Member make a statement on the closure of the Old Wye Bridge in Chepstow?

The Cabinet Member explained that routine inspections by officers identified structural cracks to the main longitudinal girders of the 200-year-old cast iron Chepstow Bridge. This prompted the commissioning of a detailed assessment and the draft report suggests that the damage may be due to overloading of the structure. The report makes several recommendations which includes restricting overloading on the bridge until repairs have been carried out. It also highlights the need to create a longer term plan to protect the integrity of the structure. Officers are due to meet with consultants to discuss the recommendations.

Councillor Pratt added that it is unlikely that the bridge will be closed as schools are due to return in September but restrictions may need to be implemented. Updates will be provided.

As a supplementary Councillor Pavia asked what assessment work has been done, particularly with the continuation of pedestrianisation of the high street, on the adverse effect of the A48.

The Cabinet Member will ensure that the question is answered by officers.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held at Remote Meeting on Thursday, 16th July, 2020 at 2.00 pm

8.2. From County Councillor P. Pavia to County Councillor R. John, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and MonLife

Will the Cabinet Member make a statement about plans to educate Monmouthshire's children from the start of the new academic year 2020-21?

The Cabinet Member thanked all school-based staff and head teachers for all they have done over recent challenging time. The way the return to school for these three weeks has been planned has provided confidence that the return to school in September will be well managed. Councillor John was pleased to see the announcement from the Education Minister that all pupils of all ages will return to school, with limited social distancing, from 14th September 2020. The period since that announcement has been intensive particularly since the education guidance has been published. Through discussions with schools it has been agreed that 1st and 2nd September will be planning and preparation days, to allow for practical changes. Discussions continue over some areas of school return. We have been clear that we want as many pupils back in school as soon as possible but safety is paramount.

As a supplement Councillor Pavia referred to the offer by Welsh Government to propose 900 additional teaching posts and asked what assessment is being made to identify the need to access and bid for that resource, particularly in relation to our secondary schools.

Councillor John explained we are still at an early stage and are awaiting further details.

8.3. From County Councillor P. Pavia to County Councillor R. Greenland, Cabinet Member for Enterprise

Will the Cabinet Member make a statement regarding the review of COVID public-safety proposals implemented by the Council in our towns and village centres the week commencing 22 June 2020?

The Cabinet Member responded that it was recognised that one of the essentials would be to try and unlock our towns and make them safe for shoppers to return as soon as possible. We did not have the time to plan as we would have liked so we began with meeting initially with town Mayors outlining generic proposals. We then met with representatives of each town and plans were consulted at that point. Due to limited time we had to listen to points raised and reach a decision, getting plans underway. We recently undertook an online survey of all our residents, with nearly 1500 responses. 73% told us they would return to our shops and town centres when they are able to. The remaining 27% who felt unhappy could be the difference between profit and loss so the efforts needed are huge.

Councillor Greenland thanked officers, led by Mark Hand, for their efforts.

The unlocking process is going well, recognising there have been some issues.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held at Remote Meeting on Thursday, 16th July, 2020 at 2.00 pm

It was reiterated that these changes are temporary and will be removed when allowed. Where changes bring benefits to the towns and are supported by the stakeholders then some may remain.

As a supplementary Councillor Pavia sought confirmation that there will be regular review gateways with town and community councils and other key stakeholders over the coming months. Also, how will channels of communication be opened with the public to ensure we are agile enough to adapt and change our plans.

Councillor Greenland confirmed that meetings will be ongoing through every stage. He is aware that due to the timeframe not all businesses were aware as much as we would like. We are getting a full set of email addresses and will directly email any changes to as many businesses as we can. He took the opportunity to thank the Communications team for their efforts.

9. To confirm the minutes of the meeting of County Council held on 4th June 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 4th June were confirmed and signed by the chair.

In doing so it was noted that Councillor Fox had attended the meeting.

10. EXEMPT Report of the Chief Executive

- 10.1. To exclude the press and public from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business in accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A to the Act.**

10.2. Chief Officer Appointment

Council resolved to accept the recommendation as set out in the report.

The meeting ended at 6.45 pm

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