

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Joint Advisory Group held
at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Monday, 26th October,
2015 at 10.00 am**

PRESENT: County Councillor P. Murphy (Chairman)
County Councillor A. Easson (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Dovey, E. Hacket Pain and J. Higginson

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Kellie Beirne	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Jan Davies	Trade Union Representative
Richard Garner	Trade Union Representative
Peter Short (Trade Union)	Trade Union Representative
Rowena Hayward (Trade Union)	Trade Union Representative
David Gunter (Trade Union)	Trade Union Representative
John Pearson	Local Democracy Manager

APOLOGIES:

Councillors J. Crook

1. Declaration of Interest

None received.

2. To confirm and sign the minutes of the Joint Advisory Group of 15th June 2015

The committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

3. Draft Budget Proposals 2016/17 for Consultation

The chair summarised the current budget position being as tough as its ever been with next year likely to be even harder but focus is needed just to get through this year. The mandates being presented are ideas and not firm proposals which contain a number of assumptions rather than definitive details. However, mandates may become proposals given the need to save money. The chair informed the committee that there is a reliance on external money through raising charges for fees and services and bringing money in from external sources. There is a current deficit of £1.7 million out of the £6.4 million savings required, further details on the deficit savings will be brought to a future meeting of the committee.

The Chair worked through the budget summary list and gave an overview of the proposals contained in each mandate.

Mandate 2a and 2B– Increase in residential/nursing & domiciliary care fees due to introduction of the Living Wage

Members of the trade union queried why this area was receiving greater levels of market protection to other areas of the Council. The Chief Officer for Enterprise informed the committee that the authority must conform to certain standards and expectations of the service area which

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the authority has little control. There is still no firm date to implement the living wage in the service area but its expected to be from 1st April 2016.

Whilst the Trade Union agree with the points raised by the Chief Officer, they queried the process of the Government reducing funding to local authorities whilst implementing the living wage at the same time, which must be met by the local authority who forward that funding to the private sector to deliver the service. If the service was delivered in house the minimum wage would already apply across the board to those who are providing the service.

A discussion then took place around the legal requirements of the authority with examples of case law from other local authorities provided to support the need to move to the living wage.

Mandate 2C – Waste and street services

A brief overview of the mandate was provided by the Head of Operations which include a need to update the fleet of vehicles operated by the authority, an increase of the number of properties that use the service as well as an overall increase in waste from households. The mandate assumes 0% uplift in contract fees unless the contract is aligned to a specific inflation index. The Head of Operations also informed the committee of the potential for a 25%-30% reduction in the grant funding in coming years which will affect the service across Wales and local authorities are trying to include the costs associated with the service in the RSG to minimise the impact.

Members queried whether initiatives could be introduced to reduce the level of waste being generated but were informed the issue isn't the amount of waste generated by households but the additional packaging with goods that is increasing the overall load.

Mandate 2d – Passenger transport unit school transport

The Head of Operations briefed the committee on the budget pressures in the passenger transport unit and the increase in costs associated with additional learning needs transport. Initiatives were put in place to alleviate the pressure in this area which had not been successful and has therefore continued to overspend. Other budget issues relate to Welsh School Transport and the failing to realise potential income.

Members queried the additional pressure placed on the passenger transport unit budget due to the closure of Deri View School and whether it should be the education department who should be funding the transport for school related journeys. The Cabinet Member for Education advised the committee that the closure of the school has minimal impact as children at the school were already scheduled to attend other schools and the overall cost of the service is a council issue and is not directorate specific.

The Head of Operations informed the committee that the passenger transport unit provide both school transport as well as public transport and public transport may need to be reviewed in future years but the current mandates only relate to school transport.

Full Mandates / Budget Summary

B1 – Assess the feasibility to establish a not for profit service delivery model (tourism, leisure and culture)

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Members of the trade unions informed the committee that they have a lot of experience in these types of business models being run in other local authorities but wanted clarity on the scope of the mandate and how many staff are effected as the plan appears large compared to a trust associated with purely leisure centres.

The Chief Officer for Enterprise advised the committee that the mandate is advancing and changing constantly. Whilst the terms trust is the recognised terms other business models are being considered such as mutual or co-operatives which are owned by the staff. There is between 200 and 300 staff effected by the proposals in the mandate. The Chief Officer confirmed that the Council is liaising with other authorities with experience in setting up these business models to learn for their experiences. The committee were also informed that staff effected by the mandate are keen to move to a new service model which should help to alleviate some of the constraints and issues the services are currently facing.

Members questioned the effect on school services using leisure facilities where they would not be operated by the local authority anymore and whether they would still be available for use and would there be additional costs associated with it? The committee were informed that there are service level agreements in place between leisure and education which would need to be reviewed and firmed up to ensure continuous arrangements are in place that suit everyone.

Members also queried the capacity of a trust to support staff through a subsidiary rather than directly through the local authority and who would the trust be responsible for reporting to given the level of council investment. The Chief Officer informed the committee that the trading element of the trust lies with them and would be its responsibility to make a profit and that reporting responsibilities would be included in the governance arrangements as the subsidiary is established.

B2 – Rationalise Business Support Teams

The trade union queried whether the review is county wide or specific to County Hall. The committee were informed that the review is looking across the board with chief officers and whether there is the option of reduced or flexible hours that can be implemented to reduce the potential for job losses.

Members also queried the effect of the increase in support functions amongst staff due to reductions already implemented and their capacity to cope and continue to support. The Chief Officer informed the committee that it is looking at general support rather than specific support services.

B12 – Second phase review of grants/subsidies to third sector discretionary bodies

The chair informed the committee that most third sector organisations are voluntary run with little staff resource and means they will need to look at other sources of income. Abergavenny Theatre will see an impact in a cut in its funding and will need to move to a more sustainable model for the theatre.

Members of the committee did not want to see a reduction in the funding levels to CAB's. The chair informed the committee that councillors are attending meetings and informing groups of the reductions and other potential sources of income to allow them to accept a reduction in funding rather than a total withdrawal of funding.

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The committee were informed of a provisional list of 140 sites for potential advertising and are currently reviewing those sites with planning. Following public consultation some sites have been amended or removed to ensure they are in keeping with its surroundings.

B14 – Grounds Maintenance – Funding Review

The committee were informed that there are possible staffing implications with this mandate due to the withdrawal of Chepstow sexton service which has been withdrawn so will continue for the time being. Currently any funding issues have been managed with vacancies not being filled and retirements. To ease the burden further there is potential for reviewing charges for services in the future.

B15 – Highways Maintenance Review

Mandate proposes a reduction in three staff, two will be funded by SEWTRA going forward and no compulsory redundancies are anticipated due to the retirement of other posts. It is still a priority to retain emergency response service for winter maintenance and training of other council staff to support the service.

The committee queried whether apprentices could be employed to support the service going forward. The Head of Operations informed the committee that they are hoping to take on two apprentices in the waste department this year but there are still cost implications for the council in employing apprentices.

B16 – Flexible Employment Options

The trade unions raised concerns around this mandate with regard to the same level of work needing to be complete but fewer staff available to do it as well as questioning the additional welfare support that will be available to support staff. The Chief Officer for Enterprise agreed with the concerns of the trade union and confirmed that take of flexible employment will be on a voluntary basis but will need constant reviewing to ensure capacity is available.

B19 – Property Services & Facilities Management Review

The committee were informed that there are no direct staffing implications associated with this mandate but are reviewing how the estate is managed. Trade union raised concerns around sudden decisions being made with regard to accommodation that are not being filtered down to staff. The chair agreed to put this as a standard item on the agenda for future meetings to keep members updated.

Any other business

The trade unions raised a general query regarding the implementation of the National Living Wage which will rise from £7.20 to £9 per hour by 2020 and whether this is being factored in to the Medium Term Financial Plan of the authority. The Chief Officer for Enterprise confirmed that the MTFP contains pressure relating to the increase in the national living wage up to 2020.

4. To note the date and time of the next meeting of the Joint Advisory Group as 25th January 2016 at 10:00am at County Hall, Usk

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The meeting ended at 12.05 pm