

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held
at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Thursday, 17th
December, 2015 at 2.00 pm

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

County Councillors: D. Batrouni, J. Prosser, M. Powell, V. Smith, G. Burrows, P. Clarke, J. Crook, D. Dovey, A. Easson, D. Evans, P. Farley, P.A. Fox, R.J.W. Greenland, L. Guppy, E. Hackett Pain, R. Harris, B. Hayward, M. Hickman, P.A.D. Hobson, G. Howard, S. Howarth, D. Jones, P. Jones, S. Jones, S.B. Jones, P. Jordan, J. Marshall, F. Taylor, P. Watts, A. Webb, K. Williams 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 |
| Will McLean | Head of Policy & Engagement |
| Joy Robson | Head of Finance/Section 151 Officer |
| Robert Tranter | Head of Legal Services & Temporary Monitoring Officer |
| Deb Hill-Howells | Head of Community Led Delivery |
| Claire Marchant | Chief Officer Social Care, Health & Housing |
| Mark Howcroft | Head of Operations |

APOLOGIES:

Councillors D. Blakebrough, R. Chapman, G. Down, D. Edwards, R. Edwards, J. George, P. Murphy, A. Watts and S. White

2. Public Open Forum

There were no members of the public.

3. Chairman's report and receipt of petitions

Council received the Chairman's report.

There were no petitions presented.

4. Declarations of Interest

County Councillor L. Guppy, declared a personal non prejudicial interest, pursuant to the Members' Code of Conduct in relation to the Adjustments to the Capital Budget report, as a member of Rogiet Community Council.

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5. To confirm and sign the minutes of the Council meeting held on 19th November 2015

Members highlighted the need for an action sheet to be included with the agenda and the importance of actions being updated.

An update was requested in relation to amended minutes. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that it was correct procedure for minutes to be amended at the subsequent meeting. A system had recently been introduced to ensure that publicised minutes were appropriately marked to show that they had been amended at the subsequent meeting.

Councillor Burrows updated members regarding clarity on placements. Council were reassured that there would be opportunities through the Corporate Parenting Panel and contributions of care leavers and apprentices.

12. Update on Syrian Refugees

Council were updated regarding Syrian Refugees, this followed the briefing received by Council at the meeting in November 2015.

Information had been received from the home office regarding future funding, which would be tapered and available for 2-5 years. The funding was based on those wishing to relocate and having a suitable support package.

Officers would continue to meet and discuss challenging issues, one specifically identified was housing. Housing policies had been reviewed and there was confidence that suitable housing would be found. 20 households would be accepted over the life of the scheme and UK Government had reassured that refugees would be subject to the usual immigration checks.

It was suggested that short term Task and Finish Group was established, with a representative number of elected members, so that the extent of the situation could be considered further.

We thanked officers for the update and clarification was requested regarding timescales. In response, it was anticipated that progress was made as quickly as possible and a scrutiny session was not envisaged.

The Task and Finish Group would look at what was required so that humanitarian support could be provided and to put detailed arrangements in place. Council recognised the need for ward members and community groups to be fully briefed.

Clarification was requested regarding whether groups would be politically balanced. What support would be provided in terms of the process of welcoming refugees and what has been gained from other Councils which have been used as dispersal areas.

In response, it was suggested that there was one representative from each political group. The partnership group had been established and along with other organisations, support could be provided and options would be considered.

6. Notices of Motions:

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6.1. Submitted by County Councillor S. Jones:

'This council supports the GOYA Cooperative in its application for support from Disability Wales and the Wales Cooperative Centre to establish a Citizen-led Direct Payments Cooperative based in Monmouthshire.'

In presenting the motion, Councillor Jones highlighted that in supporting the motion there would be support for the wider principles of direct payment cooperatives. Opportunities and benefits would be received by many people through the process.

In discussing the motion, we noted:

- Members expressed support for the motion and thanked Councillor Jones for presenting.
- Council welcomed the assistance and support that would be provided through the scheme.
- Information had been sent to members and further details could be provided.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was carried.

'This council supports the GOYA Cooperative in its application for support from Disability Wales and the Wales Cooperative Centre to establish a Citizen-led Direct Payments Cooperative based in Monmouthshire.'

6.2. Submitted by County Councillor D. Blakebrough:

'This Council recognises the importance of preserving Welsh culture, traditions and the language. However, at a time when Monmouthshire County Council, in common with other local authorities across Wales, is faced with having to cut spending on important services, the Council believes that adherence to the Compliance Notice issued by the Welsh Language Commissioner is ill-timed and not a priority of the overwhelming majority of residents of the County.'

The Council therefore calls upon the Commissioner to withdraw the dates for compliance shown in the Compliance Notice, and to accept that the requirements of the Notice should be treated as aspirations to be fulfilled only as and when funding permits.'

The motion was withdrawn.

7. Referrals from Cabinet (October 2015):

7.1. Caerwent Section 106 Funding

Council were presented with Caerwent Section 106 Funding, which had been agreed by Cabinet on 7th October, the purpose was to recommend to Council the setting up of a Capital Budget in 2015/16 for the Caerwent (Merton Green) Off Site Recreation Funding; and to decide on the allocation of grants to specific projects from the funding available.

During debate we noted:

- A member highlighted that when S106 was discussed, further emphasis was required on wider aspects of the leisure centre.

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- Council recognised that S106 was needed within the community for significant future development and there had to be a negotiated expectation of where money would be used.
- The specific budget would be used in areas noted within the report.
- A member recognised that more opportunities, for community funding, could be provided when CIL agreed.

We resolved to agree recommendations within the report:

- 1.1 That a capital budget of £316,988 be created in 2015/16 to carry out the projects set out in 2.2 below and that this is funded from a corresponding contribution from the Section 106 balances held by the County Council in respect of the Merton Green development site in Caerwent (Finance Code N539); and
- 1.2 that the projects set out below be approved:

| Project | Project Cost £ | Recommended Grant £ |
|--|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Crick Wildlife and Environmental Group | 17,420 | 13,260 |
| • Old Gym Community Centre Committee | 146,600 | 121,864 |
| • Caerwent Playing fields Association | <u>215,897</u> | <u>181,864</u> |
| Totals | 379,917 | 316,988 |

7.2. Abergavenny Town Team

Council were presented with Proposed Funding for Team Abergavenny, which was agreed by Cabinet on 7th October 2015, the purpose was to recommend to members that £30,000 is allocated to Abergavenny Town Team to undertake capital projects to enhance Abergavenny town centre in preparation for the National Eisteddfod in 2016.

During debate, the following points were noted:

- Clarification was requested regarding benefits that would be gained by outlying areas of Abergavenny.
- Members were reminded that the report specifically referred to Town Teams. The funding would provide the opportunity to support the town and ensure viability. The fund would be available to deal with very specific projects.
- It was proposed and seconded that an additional recommendation was included, which allowed for single member decision to be made on specific projects.
- We welcomed the report which enabled decision making to enhance and added value to communities.

We resolved to agree recommendations within report, plus additional recommendation:

1. That the sum of £30,000 is allocated to the Capital Programme to support the work of Abergavenny Town Team in improving and enhancing the town centre environment and offer in preparation for the National Eisteddfod in 2016.
2. The £30,000 is allocated to the development of activities within the following themes:

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- To promote local food & drink produce.
 - To encourage repeat visitors by enhancing the visitor experience.
 - Promote Abergavenny as an events town.
3. The allocation of the £30,000 funding to support specific projects and activities be delegated to Bryn y Cwm Programme Board, who will be required to ensure that the projects are viable, meet deliverable outcomes and have been market tested. The Programme Board will be responsible for monitoring agreed projects both in terms of outcomes and financial prudence.
 4. In order to streamline and speed up decision making, project proposals which meet issues outlined in 2 will be presented to individual member for consideration and approval.

8. Report of the Head of Finance/S151:

8.1. Proposal to revise the Policy on Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) for 2016/17

Council were presented with the Proposal to revise the Policy on Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) for 2016/17, the purpose was to provide Full Council with a proposal to revise the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement for 2016/17 and to outline the budget consequences of the proposed changes.

In debating the report we noted:

- A member recognised that proposed action would result in working differently over the next few years. A question was raised how staff were supported in relation to continuing day job and working more innovatively. In response, the aspiration would be to continually improve the organisation, there was a need to create time and space which would result in some changes.
- Some concerns were expressed regarding implications for the future.

We resolved to agree recommendations within the report:

It is recommended that Full Council approve:

1. The revised MRP Policy Statement attached as Appendix 2, which changes the approach concerning the Minimum Revenue Provision on Unsupported Borrowing moving it from an equal instalment basis to an annuity basis.
2. That work on reviewing the approach adopted concerning the Minimum Revenue Provision for supported borrowing is undertaken, and further proposals on the options available are brought back to Council.

9. Report of the Head of Operations:

10.1. Adjustments to the Capital budget during 2015/16

Council were presented with Adjustments to the Capital budget during 2015/16, the purpose was for Council to receive recommendations from Cabinet and if thought fit to approve adjustments to the capital budget in 2015/16.

In debating the report we noted the following:

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- A member requested clarification regarding the process for approval of public realm improvements. Council were informed that detailed design had been undertaken with team Abergavenny, which would be exhibited to the public in January, Bryn y Cwm members would be consulted and final decision would be made by Individual Cabinet Member.
- We recognised that Capital programme was not ring-fenced, commitment had been made to 21st Century Schools, community schemes and Hubs. There were additional projects that had to be considered.
- Members expressed support for the report.
- It was proposed and duly seconded, that an additional recommendation was included, which recommended to explore DFG funding. A member explained that funding had not been increased and there was a need to allow disabled people to live independently.
- The Leader highlighted that Cabinet were minded to look at other capital elements closer to setting the budget and effects on social services.
- A number of members welcomed developments regarding transport, specifically rail and car parks.
- Aspects of the report had been subject of significant scrutiny and we recognised that recommendations from select committees had been incorporated.

We resolved to agree recommendations within the report, with an additional recommendation:

That Council approve the following recommendations arising from Cabinet decisions taken on the 2nd December 2015:

1. That Council approve the creation of a capital budget of £1,050,000 in 2015/16 for improvements to the public realm in Abergavenny Town Centre, the budget to be taken from the £3,433,000 capital released when the decision was taken not to build a new library in Abergavenny (Council, 26th February 2015). The funding of which is proposed to be capital receipts.

2. That Council approve the creation of a capital budget of £275,000 in 2015/16 for the development of a car park off Rockfield Road, Monmouth. The budget to be created by prudential borrowing funded from car park income over a period of 10 or 20 years – to be agreed with finance colleagues.

3. That Council approve the creation of a capital budget of £45,000 in 2015/16 for the development of a car park at Rogiet Playing field (adjacent to Severn Tunnel Junction). The budget to be created by prudential borrowing funded from car park income over a period of 10 or 20 years – to be agreed with finance colleagues.

4. To explore DFG funding.

11. Report of the Chief Officer, Enterprise:

11.1. Community Governance - Review Findings and Recommendations

Council were presented with the Community Governance – Review Findings & Recommendations, which updated Members on the findings of the Community Governance

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Review and the proposed recommendations to develop a more coherent and partnership approach with communities.

In presenting the report, the Cabinet member recommended that recommendation 2.1 was removed:

'That Council agrees to adopt the actions and recommendations proposed within the Community Governance review, in particular that Area Committees are disbanded forthwith.'

- Council agreed to removal of recommendation 2.1 as it conflicted with recommendation 2.3.
- The leader welcomed recommendation for a review and that a working group was established, with feedback by March 2016.
- Clarification was requested regarding availability of £5000 previously available to each of the 4 area committees. Officers confirmed that this money was available for Area Committees to use.
- Further information was requested regarding determination of working groups and how full community engagement would be considered.
- Members recognised that a further work was required, in relation to the review, as there was an overlap between existing area committees and boards that had been established.
- Some members highlighted that public attendance at area committees had been low.
- Some members recognised the need for community involvement, engagement and generating interest. There was a need for increased accountability.
- The Cabinet Member reassured members that issues would be considered by the working group. The remit of the group would be deliberated and would be guided by the new LG Bill.
- It was envisaged that the working group would consist of a member from each political group. However, we noted that there were differences within the North and South of the County and areas should be represented.

We resolved to agree recommendations within the report, with the removal of recommendation 2.1:

1. A cross party Member working group is established which equally represents the four administrative areas. This group will
 - be responsible for developing a revised framework which preserves the leadership role of elected members, supports and encourages community participation and oversees the delivery of the local Whole Place plan.
 - Recommends a revised framework to County Council no later than 24th March 2016.
2. Whole Place Programme Boards will continue to meet until County Council has agreed a revised framework

12. **Members' Questions:**

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12.1. From County Councillor A. Easson to County Councillor G. Burrows:

Monmouthshire prides itself on being conscientious corporate parents. However I believe that we may be failing some of our most vulnerable children; by allowing them to live in what may be considered to be below acceptable housing living conditions. These are, in the main young women, with newly born, and not so young infants, that are settled in 60 year old high density flats/apartments which do not really appear to be appropriate for their circumstances.

Attempts to create environments fit for purpose by renovations of the properties have only succeeded in creating airtight boxes. The renovations carried out, and C/Heating installed is of a high standard, but by its nature is so efficient that condensation has now become a major problem for some tenants? Cost is a major factor for these parents by balancing and rationing their budgets to keep their heating running. Equally parents are fearful of having too many windows open for reasons of security. There is lack of natural ventilation, consequently walls soon drip with moisture, clothes in turn get fusty, the children get chest problems, and a vicious circle continues. I would appreciate your response at resolving these issues which may really only be of concern for Members who have similarly "ancient " social housing in their Wards. It would be interesting to assess how many of these properties are part of the housing stock across Monmouthshire, and are these problems only associated with them, or is there a wider malaise affecting young parents which is a general social issue? I do have the facility of Flying Start working with many of these parents, but they too are frustrated with the level of support needed to sustain a pleasant way of life. In posing these questions I am anxious for a positive direction from you as the

Cabinet Member responsible for Social Care Safeguarding and Health!

In response Councillor Burrows advised:

'I am concerned to hear about the issues you have in your ward but I am informed that since the question was submitted there have been some efforts to commence a meaningful dialogue with you and the Housing Association responsible to begin address the issues that are being raised.

I should just like to remind Members that your referral to collective responsibility as Corporate Parents is technically correct, yes we are Corporate Parents, but I should just like to remind all that this is not a general catch all with respect too all vulnerable youngsters in the County but a specific cohort of youngsters who are defined by us as looked after children.

It follows from this that all our looked after children whether in foster care, specialist placement or those on risk registers and having a relationship with a designated social worker, if there were any difficulties surrounding unsuitability of lodgings these would be known to us and a dialogue in place with the property owner as applicable.

It mandated of all of us who have responsibility to provide Social Services to those that need it in the County, that on a daily basis we have individuals young and old who present to us for the first time, and if they do they will be properly promptly and correctly assessed as to their needs and what we can subsequently do to assist. Their needs may be either simple or complex and in many cases there is no overall solution but purely the management of their existing circumstances. Matters relating to housing are very specific and improvements in living comforts can make a difference, but I would suggest that their solution are in the hands of others.

My sense of the issues you are alluding to are housing environmental matters that if addressed should immediately positively impact on and provide improvement to the affected individuals lives.'

As a supplementary, County Councillor Easson asked:

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Where does the Cabinet Member see local members responsibility for wards?

In response County Councillor Burrows:

Noted issues relating to housing, ward members have social housing in ward and encourage active dialogue with housing officers to address issues.

The meeting ended at 4.00 pm