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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of County Council held
on Thursday, 20th April, 2023 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor Laura Wright (Chair)
County Councillor Ann Webb (Vice Chair)

County Councillors: Rachel Buckler, Tony Kear, Catrin Maby, Jan Butler, Ian Chandler, Sara Burch, Alistair Neill, Su McConnel, Mary Ann Brocklesby, Fay Bromfield, Jane Lucas, Emma Bryn, Peter Strong, Meirion Howells, Paul Griffiths, Jackie Strong, Rachel Garrick, Maria Stevens, Steven Garratt, Angela Sandles, Ben Callard, John Crook, Tomos Davies, Dale Rooke, Catherine Fookes, Sue Riley, Jayne McKenna, Jill Bond, Louise Brown, Lisa Dymock, Tony Easson, Christopher Edwards, Martyn Groucutt, Simon Howarth, Richard John, David Jones, Penny Jones, Malcolm Lane, Phil Murphy, Paul Pavia, Maureen Powell, Frances Taylor, Tudor Thomas and Armand Watts

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Matt Phillips	Chief Officer People and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Paul Matthews	Chief Executive
Peter Davies	Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer, Resources
Jane Rodgers	Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Frances O'Brien	Chief Officer, Communities and Place
Matthew Gatehouse	Head of Policy, Performance and Scrutiny
Ian Saunders	Chief Operating Officer, MonLife

1. Declarations of interest

County Councillor Richard John declared a non-prejudicial interest in respect of item 7a in respect of his work as a public affairs consultant, and a client being the Railway Industry Association.

2. Public Questions

None.

3. Chair's Announcement

Noted.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 9th March 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th March 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record.

5. Community and Corporate Plan 2022-28

The Leader of Council presented the report to seek approval of a new Community and Corporate Plan that sets the direction for the council and county of Monmouthshire, articulating

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the authority's purpose and priorities alongside the steps we will take to deliver these, the accountable Cabinet member and the measures that will be used to track progress.

Opposition Leaders highlighted concerns but recognised that the plan needed to be passed by Council and declared that they would abstain during the vote.

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

- **That Council approve the Community and Corporate Plan.**
- **That Council adopt the six goals in the plan as the Council's Well-being Objectives in accordance with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.**
- **That Council note the targets set within the measurement framework, attached as appendix 2, and task Cabinet with ensuring that these are reviewed and updated over the lifetime of the plan**

6. Motions to Council

7. Submitted by County Councillor Richard John

This Council:

Recognises that Monmouthshire's bus services reduce private car journeys, help tackle rural isolation and are key to aspirations of an integrated transport network alongside the South Wales Metro.

Is gravely concerned that the Welsh Government's withdrawal of the Bus Emergency Scheme funding on 24th July 2023 will see buses in Wales reduced to a 'skeletal' service. Resolves to intensively lobby the Welsh Government to protect Monmouthshire's bus services, especially in rural areas where they are a lifeline for our residents.

Seconded by County Councillor Rachel Buckler.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment explained that she had been lobbying intensively about the need for further support, particularly for rural bus services, since she came into her role. She supported future plans and the movement to bus franchising but had concerns around the transitional period. The Cabinet Member was keen to explore all opportunities to safeguard bus provision and improve service provision.

Council heard that officers were working closely with Transport for Wales, the Burns Delivery Unit, and operators to explore different opportunities to protect and improve service provision.

The Leader of the Independent Group was pleased to see cross-party support.

Suggestion was made that MCC lead the way for Wales by introducing a pilot scheme.

Assurance was sought that there would be no reduction of the Gilwern No9 service, to ensure minimum impact around the closure of the GP practice.

It was stated that by recognising that the HS2 development is not benefitting Wales, that investment could therefore allow a proper transport system across Wales.

Upon being put to a vote Council resolved to accept the recommendation.

8. Submitted by County Councillor Steven Garrett

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This Council is appalled by the UK government's illegal immigration bill which proposes to detain and later remove anyone who arrives in the UK on a small boat, meaning the Home Office will not consider any of their Asylum claims regardless if they have fled war or persecution.

These people seeking sanctuary will then be deported back to the country they have fled from or a 'safe' third country. This third country could be Rwanda, or another country deemed safe by UK Govt, potentially with a questionable record on human rights.

This ill-thought out and inhumane legislation will punish the most vulnerable people from across the world. Questions have been raised surrounding the legality of the Bill and whether it is compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and consistent with the 1951 Refugees Convention. The Prime Minister has also stated in writing that if you come to the UK illegally "You cannot benefit from our modern slavery protections".

This Council also notes and condemns the dangerous and dehumanising language which has been used to support this Bill. This rhetoric cultivates and provides a platform for a culture of abuse, racism and even violence against refugees, asylum seekers and people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

As an aspiring County of Sanctuary, this Council and the people of Monmouthshire have opened their hearts and homes and welcomed and accepted refugees and asylum seekers for decades, particularly in recent times following the Ukraine war. This has made our county a more interesting, diverse, and tolerant place.

This Council condemns the action of the UK Government in bringing forward this legislation and calls upon the prime minister and his ministers to withdraw these egregious proposals.

We call upon the Leader of Council to write to the Prime Minister in the strongest possible terms to outline our concerns.

Seconded by County Councillor Sue McConnel.

There was some concern about the wording used in the Motion.

Many Members expressed disappointment of those criticising the motion, considering the measures in the Bill cruel and inhumane. It was thought that the Bill would create division in the UK.

Members expressed their deep disappointment regarding the treatment of refugees.

A Member was keen that local residents were aware that MCC are disassociated from the language used by UK Government.

Upon being put to a vote Council resolved to accept the motion.

9. Members Questions

10. From County Councillor Ian Chandler to County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

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Can the cabinet member provide residents in Skenfrith and Cross Ash with a firm date by which the B4521 near Trebella Farm will be repaired and the 'temporary' traffic lights removed?

The Cabinet Member explained that the proposed works were scheduled for completion by the end of August 2023. The extended timescale was in order to secure ordinary water course consent for drainage repairs, and for ecology surveys to be completed.

As a supplementary Councillor Chandler asked how much more money would be spent on the temporary lights and sought assurance that the repairs would take place in the timeline advised. Councillor Chandler also asked that the Cabinet Member publish to residents across the whole County the criteria by which road repairs and resurfacing decisions are made, alongside a schedule of all pending repairs.

The Cabinet Member had been briefed by officers that there were a number of challenging projects relating to highways assets and various bridges and structures needed significant investment to secure longevity and continued use. It was recognised that the budget available was inadequate and was a cause of concern. The Trebella works have been rated as amber as there is no danger to the public, but the Cabinet Member agreed that the use of temporary traffic lights must be addressed.

11. From County Councillor Ian Chandler to County Councillors Angela Sandles/Catherine Fookes, Cabinet Members for Equalities and Engagement

In response to the UK Government's policy to require a photo ID for English and UK elections, which many experts predict will reduce voter turnout among young people and those from disadvantaged communities, can the cabinet member give an update on plans to ensure that every eligible voter in Monmouthshire is able to cast their vote at the next UK parliamentary election?

Cabinet Member, County Councillor Angela Sandles explained that the Elections Act 2022 changed the law to require voters to photographic ID at polling stations to be able to vote in elections in England and the UK. The measure appears draconian and would, likely, reduce turnout and impact democracy.

Not all elections in Wales will be affected and it will apply to the General Election, Police and Crime Commissioner Election but not to Senedd or Local Government.

A wealth of information can be found on the Electoral Commission website. Any voter will be able to apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate from their Council if they don't have the appropriate ID. Councillor Sandles recommended that all Members signpost this to their residents.

Councillor Sandles explained that one way we are preparing at MCC is by being able to watch carefully what happens in England at the upcoming local elections, and that we are grateful to bodies like the Electoral Commission who have put in a lot of time and effort into the matter.

MCC is required to canvass every property in the County every year to ensure records on voter registration are up to date. When this takes place later this year, we will use it as the starting point on our communication plan for voter ID. That plan will take us right through to polling day with targeted campaigns for different demographics of voters.

County Councillor Armand Watts left the meeting at 16:41pm

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As a supplementary Councillor Chandler asked the Cabinet Member to commit to condemning the voter ID requirements and promote the take up of Voter Authority Certificate.

The Cabinet Member agreed that she condemned the requirements and recognised that this would disenfranchise many people.

12. From County Councillor Richard John to County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

What progress has the administration made towards delivering on its manifesto pledge to eliminate all potholes within five years?

The Cabinet Member explained that it was difficult to quantify progress with an ever-moving target and that the reduction in investment in highways maintenance over several decades across the UK, and the impact of climate change have created a perfect storm. The Cabinet Member was aware of opposition Members who had proactively encouraged residents to report potholes over the winter period which had made quantifying progress difficult.

Throughout the last year the Authority has:

- Continued with programmes to tackle drainage and gully issues.
- Increased the number of days spent on scheduled 'hot potholing' whilst maintaining the same levels of ad-hoc maintenance.
- Listened to concerns raised by Council in March and invested an additional £500,000 capital maintenance budget.

It was recognised that in pledging to tackle the issue it was necessary to understand the full scale of the problem and filling potholes is not a viable solution for long-term improvement of the network and more comprehensive solutions were needed. The Administration has continued to implement the evidence-based approach of road resurfacing implemented by the previous Administration.

The end of a fixed term grant for road improvements meant that the budget had decreased by £620,000 which meant significant challenges in maintaining the highway network.

An all Member workshop is to be arranged to discuss and explain further the different aspects of highway work.

As a supplementary Councillor John asked what greater flexibility does the Administration want to give highways engineers so they can make a more informed, evidence-based decision about how potholes should be fixed going forwards?

The Cabinet Member reiterated the points made and agreed that permanent repairs were necessary, and she would do what she could to secure the funds to do so.

13. From County Councillor Richard John to County Councillor Mary Ann Brocklesby, Leader of the Council

What has the administration achieved in the past year?

In response the Leader highlighted the following:

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- Distributed £379,800 in direct payments of £150 to 1772 households across the county to disabled people and those with children on free school meals.
- Provided period products to every single school.
- The poverty dashboard is now up and running allowing us to see in real time the statistics on poverty, homelessness, number of referrals for housing, numbers on universal credit etc.
- Held Cost of Living sessions in every town to ensure all community groups are joined up and are supported.
- Supported the setting up of warm hubs to provide a warm space and free drinks to support residents.
- Worked with WG to help hundreds of Ukrainians to flee the war.
- Welcomed the Monmouthshire Muslim Association to County Hall and hosted an Iftar event.
- Appointed our first LGBTQ Champion.
- Becoming a County of Sanctuary.
- Delivered summer play provision. Over 11599 children were supported including 620 children with diverse needs.
- Between June 2022 and March 2023 reduced the number of hours of unmet need in social care by a third.
- Overseen a successful recruitment campaign for foster carers.
- The waiting time for disabled adaptations has reduced by 24%.
- Produced and approved a rapid rehousing plan.
- Caldicot School site has been allocated for 100 affordable homes and received planning approval.
- Created a coherent inclusion service to support our most vulnerable learners.
- Seeking to promote our Welsh Language provision.
- Secured WG active travel funding of £3.4m for financial year 22/23.

As a supplementary Councillor John asked when the Administration would stop delaying on the big issues.

The Leader responded that there had been very few policy reviews under the previous administration, and that now that the Corporate and Community Plan has been approved by Council the administration are keen to progress. She added that the school transport and catchment reviews are still within the planned timetable and that the RLDP had been stalled but is now back on track with clear consultation underway.

14. From County Councillor Louise Brown to County Councillor Martyn Groucutt, Cabinet Member for Education

Can the Cabinet Member give a commitment that the new 3-19 school in Abergavenny will have single sex toilets for all years?

The Cabinet Member explained that a detailed consultation has been undertaken with the pupils of the current schools Deri View and King Henry VII Comprehensive. In the primary phase the plan is that there will be single sex toilets only. The Secondary school pupils had a more refined view and there would be single sex toilets on every floor but also toilets that will not discriminate between pupils. The walls will be floor to ceiling, and there will be no urinals in any toilet. The student voice has been listened to and they are getting what they have asked for.

As a supplementary Councillor Brown asked if the voice of the parents, governors and headteacher had also been listened to.

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The Cabinet Member added that the consultation had included adult feedback also. All the female and unisex toilets would have sanitary product facilities.

15. From County Councillor Christopher Edwards to County Councillor Sara Burch, Cabinet Member for Inclusive and Active Communities

A traveller community has recently encamped in Chepstow Leisure Centre car park on two occasions in a matter of 6-weeks. As you will be aware, this is a car park that also adjoins Chepstow School. This has caused disruption for residents, businesses, the school and leisure centre, not to mention the extra work for council staff and the police. Can the Cabinet Member explain what options the council will be taking in the future to prevent this crucial and busy Chepstow car park; used by residents, parents, children, leisure centre users and tourists from being used and abused in this way. There are authorised traveller sites in Monmouthshire, however, Chepstow is being seen as an easy target and council facilities mistreated, with residents also unable to take full advantage of the services they come to expect from a council.

The Cabinet Member recognised that the issue was of great concern and agreed that in this most recent case residents and visitors were unable to use most of the car park for several days over the Easter holidays. The facilities did remain open and she expressed due credit to the Mon Life staff who had continued to manage the site with professionalism. The Cabinet Member explained that there were no authorised traveller sites in Monmouthshire available to groups of Travellers passing through and very few places they could stop legally. Guidance from WG to MCC stated that when an unauthorised encampment takes place, while we want to move occupier off the site and be under pressure from residents to do so, our first duty is the welfare of the children and of any vulnerable adults to ensure they have access to water, refuse collection, toilets and washing facilities, and that we go through the legal process in requiring them to relocate if required.

When Travellers occupy land such as the car park, Environmental Health Officers undertake a site welfare assessment, ask intentions and liaise with the landlord, which is Mon Life in the Leisure Centres, Highways in car parks etc to seek their removal if needed, with MCC legal services.

With regards to height barriers, this would be problematic in these car parks as they must remain open for school deliveries. This could also deter tourists who travel through the county.

To summarise, the Cabinet Member stated that barriers would be looked at where appropriate, she would push for the development of a regional transit site in the M4 Corridor and bring forward sites for permanent pitches for local Traveller families, and review the protocol established in 2015 to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

16. From County Councillor Christopher Edwards to County Councillor Paul Griffiths, Cabinet Member for a Sustainable Economy and Deputy Leader

In January 2023, the Deputy Leader confirmed to this council that any future Highbeech roundabout improvements will be discussed again with the Welsh Government's "Transport Deputy Minister" and that he had been contacted to ask for a further study on Highbeech Roundabout, and that the Cabinet Member will be holding a meeting at the end of the month [January] with the minister.

As the original agreed funding for this further study was pulled by Welsh Government in 2022, can the Cabinet Member confirm if the meeting went ahead, what exactly was discussed, and

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the subsequent outcome of this meeting, and any further meetings that may have taken place since to look at improving the infrastructure in Chepstow which is greatly needed.

The Deputy Leader explained that he and the Leader had met with the Minister for Climate Change in January and had pressed for the next stage of funded design of the Highbeech Roundabout, and equally pressed the case with the Deputy Minister for Transport. He believed that both ministers understood the strength of the case and the need for improvement. He had not seen any records of a previous agreement to fund the study but had found an obstacle being that the junction has never appeared in the WG National Transport Delivery Plan. The Deputy Minister for Transport has offered to meet again in the next few weeks to discuss meeting objectives of funding the design for this roundabout.

The questions will be forwarded to contacts at WG and Council will be kept up to date.

As a supplementary Councillor Edwards asked if the correspondence between Council and Welsh Ministers will be included in the publicly available evidence for the RLDP.

17. Next meeting - 18th May 2023

Noted.

The meeting ended at 17:35pm