

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA with remote attendance on Thursday, 14th December, 2023 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor Lisa Dymock (Chairman)

County Councillors: Louise Brown, Emma Bryn, Jane Lucas, Maria Stevens, Jackie Strong, Tudor Thomas, Laura Wright, Paul Griffiths and Catrin Maby

Officers in Attendance

Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Frances O'Brien, Chief Officer, Communities and Place
Mark Hand, Head of Place-making, Housing, Highways and Flood
Hannah Jones, Youth and Community Officer
Nigel Leaworthy, Commercial & Operations Manager
James Woodcock, Business Insights Manager

APOLOGIES: Councillor Tomos Davies

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

None.

3. Pre-decision Scrutiny - To scrutinise the Monmouthshire Economy, Employment and Skills Strategy and action plan in setting the economic ambition for the county

Cabinet Member Paul Griffiths introduced the report. Hannah Jones and James Woodcock delivered a presentation and answered the members' questions with Councillor Griffiths and Mark Hand.

Key questions from members:

- How is the figure of 6,240 jobs arrived at? Does this really address Monmouthshire's needs i.e. internal jobs to cut out-commuting?
- How does this strategy link in with our needs? E.g., with an ageing demographic, there will be more need for the care sector – are we going to have housing for key workers? How does this relate to a previous CYP report that said work was being geared to the care sector?
- Regarding Enterprise, would it be helpful to add something about apprenticeships with local schools?
- Regarding Tourism, what is the evidence of the need for hotels?
- Concerning Public Procurement, one problem with EU regulations was local people not necessarily being hired for council contracts. Has that improved after Brexit and can we boost the work that Monmouthshire does?

- Other authorities have looked at whether key worker housing, if it can't be filled by people from those particular occupations, could be used for other eligible people – has that been considered?
- To note a correction: the report mentions Wales's last remaining lare net fishermen practising the tradition in Caldicot but, in fact, because of NRW rules they aren't allowed to fish at present
- What is the commuting data in and out of Severnside? Does it constitute a lot of the overall movement in/out of the county?
- There is a need for a link road off the M48 to alleviate congestion on the B4245 – what effect does congestion and traffic have on the local economy?
- Why is the Local Transport Policy not sitting in the section entitled 'Strategic Context'? Is the lack of transport stifling economic opportunities e.g. are the poor public transport connections in Monmouth a challenge to businesses that want to expand into the county?
- P43 and learning opportunities: why is no mention given to one of the biggest access barriers for youngsters looking to attain higher education qualifications, which is the frustration of physically accessing colleges due to the lack of transport links?
- Why is there no mention of requesting a better deal under Cardiff Capital Region, or that we are no longer part of the scheme to join up rail and bus services across the region?
- The Kingsgate Active Travel route on P70 should not be hailed as best practice for prioritising active travel as there is still no safe walkable route into town from Kingswood Gate, with the final phase not planned to be built till 2024, and is still subject to funding – **ACTION: Provide the committee with an update on the Active Travel plans for a walkable route into Monmouth town from King's Wood Gate houses**
- How will the Action Plan have a positive influence on the Welsh Language Standards as stated in the impact assessment?
- 6000 jobs and 38 hectares of employment land – which comes first, jobs or houses?
- Is 'rapidly ageing' an appropriate term?
- It is vital that Care industry workers are given the right support as it is a highly skilled job
- Regarding viability support to town centres, it is a shame we haven't supported them this Christmas by giving free parking on the weekends –it has been handled poorly and businesses aren't happy
- Regarding Tourism, is the work of town councils recognised enough in running events etc.?
- What about a Skill Centre in Monmouth?
- As well as infrastructure problems, the schools in Monmouth are full; are the 270 homes proposed for the top of Monmouth not at the wrong end?
- Key workers and affordable housing, based on wages – what is that figure? = **ACTION: Provide the committee with the figure for the wages in relation to affordable housing**
- What are the skills gaps? If we identify those then we can go some way to improving the skills base that we have
- For people to work and stay in the county, we need to develop some of the industrial sites e.g. there is no food processing for the livestock market in Raglan. Can we increase industrial processing for food?

- We will need to use some of our land for housing and industrial development, in order to provide huge employment
- King Henry VIII school serves as an example of the problem: the majority of younger staff don't live in the county as they can't afford to – same for social workers, care workers, etc. to encourage a better base of skills we need to develop housing for key workers
- 90% employment level – is that workers residing in-county and commuting elsewhere or living and working in the county?
- Caldicot and Chepstow are now seen as commuter towns – how will this be addressed in the long term?
- How will we as an authority support and attract more investments and businesses, and where will we begin?
- Residents struggle to connect with Severn Tunnel Junction and the bus network, and the times now no longer align with 20mph speed limit – **ACTION: Provide the committee with information about the proposals to improve bus connections at Severn Tunnel Junction**
- How will the workplace parking levy affect attracting businesses, and how will it work?
- Regarding transport problems constraining economic growth, as well as the problems for local employment, Avonmouth companies are concerned about Chepstow delays, and the 20mph limit is now also causing delays e.g. fewer pharmacy prescription deliveries per hour
- Workplace charging: if internal employers are charged and those outside the county aren't then will it be a disincentive for employers to come into the area?

Chair's Summary:

Members wanted clarity regarding the 6,240 job target and where the figure came from, and requested more detailed data about area commuting. There is a strong desire to look at key workers' housing being considered, and there were a number of comments about problems being caused for workers by a lack of public transport and road links. Members welcomed the idea of a Skills Centre, especially in the Severnside area, but one is also required in the north of the county. Comments were made about a link road off the A48 on to the M48, which would help to encourage people to access the county. Concerns were raised about the lack of public transport and the impact on pupils wanting to attend higher education, missing out on those opportunities. Comments were made about supporting town centres – it is imperative that town councils are involved and that we support independent retailers. We would like to see development of the food supply chain, particularly in food processing. We are pleased that there will be further analysis of the skills gap. Thank you to members for their contributions and to officers and the Cabinet Member for their responses.

4. Community Improvement Team - To scrutinise the team's operations and organisation

Cabinet Member Catrin Maby and Nigel Leaworthy introduced the report. Nigel Leaworthy answered the members' questions.

Key questions from members:

- P228, 3.13: 'newly formed Caldicot and Magor town teams' – the Caldicot town team isn't newly formed. So does this refer to the same team or a different one?
- Can you clarify about the funding from precept?
- The 'New Town Team' will cause a lot of confusion – can that be renamed?
- How heavily does the team rely on volunteers, and what expectations are there between groups?
- Are man-hours of volunteers recorded, and therefore a record of what costs would be without them?
- How much of the work is reactive vs proactive?
- Is the group responsible for cutting back residential hedges, or is that a different team?
- Presumably, street sweeping has a certain schedule, rather than being reactive?
- Do you coordinate any of the reactive work in sweeping leaves at the same time as dealing with blocked drains?
- Hedges can affect highways, if not cut by private landowners – have we ever charged someone if they haven't followed an enforcement notice?
- How many sweepers were there before and how many are there now?
- There is a good liaison between the community and town teams in Abergavenny which has improved the situation. The issue of dog mess and littering remains disappointing but it is difficult to keep on top of that with a limited team.
- Would the Monmouth Town Council service level agreement override the standard level agreement?
- There are many emails from residents who aren't happy with Nature Isn't Neat and would like public areas to be tidier. What are we looking at to control weeds?
- Are you not allowed to borrow back for a few days per month the road sweeper that was transferred to Highways?
- The discontinuation of glyphosates is welcome but residents at top of Sandy Lane have raised concerns about the state of pavements and gullies – it would be useful to have feedback about the state of play with alternative methods of weed removal
- The report mentions town teams getting to grips with potholes – can we have more information?
- Something more joined up is needed regarding litter in Caldicot, especially when there are big events.

Chair's Summary:

Thank you to the officers and teams for their hard work ensuring cleanliness in our communities, which is vital and has a hugely positive impact on communities. Thank you to the Cabinet Member for attending and we look forward to the discussion in the new year about litter.

5. Place Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Councillor Strong noted that in light of the prostate motion at full council, changing places and MDML needs to be looked at on 14th March with the Toilet strategy.

Councillor Strong also asked if new ways to progress refurbishment of Caldicot Leisure Centre could be considered – **ACTION**

EV charging and Climate & Nature Emergency Strategy need to be deferred from 11th January. The items need to be scrutinised before final Cabinet sign-off on 10th April. Members do not wish to hold a meeting on the same day as full council. Officers to arrange a date that meets all the requirements and notify members subsequently = **ACTION**

Councillor Brown requested clarity about the Cabinet date for the Strategic Equality Plan: the SEP will go to People scrutiny on 6th February but was on the planner for cabinet on 18th January – it has been since updated to 29th February.

6. Cabinet and Council Work Planner.

7. To confirm the following Place Scrutiny Committee Minutes:

Ordinary Meeting dated 28th September 2023

Special Meeting dated 23rd October 2023

23rd October: Councillor Brown requested an amendment be made to clarify the comment about the Welsh Parliament document, which was mixed up with a comment about the children's commissioner – **ACTION**

8. Next Meeting: Thursday 11th January 2024 at 10.00am

See FWP discussion above – officers to confirm cancellation once a new date for the items is set.

The meeting ended at **12.25 pm.**

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