

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Public Services Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Monday, 11th December, 2023 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor Armand Watts (Chairman)
County Councillor Penny Jones, (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: Jill Bond, Jan Butler, Steven Garratt, Malcolm Lane, Dale Rooke, Frances Taylor

Also in attendance County Councillors: Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Mark Hand, Head of Place-making, Housing, Highways and Flood
Nicholas Tulp, Active Travel Officer

APOLOGIES: None

1. Declarations of Interest

Frances Taylor declared a non-prejudicial interest as founder member of the Magor Walkway group.

2. Public Open Forum

None.

3. Pre-decision scrutiny of the Strategic Transport Plan

Cabinet Member Catrin Maby introduced the report. Debra Hill-Howells delivered the presentation and answered the members' questions with Christian Schmidt, Mark Hand and Nicholas Tulp.

Key points raised by the Committee Members:

- The current provision in some areas is insufficient. We can't change people's practice if we don't have alternatives for them e.g. Severn Tunnel car park isn't very accessible.
- The Active Travel network in Caldicot hasn't come back to Members to discuss outstanding issues, so isn't felt to be 'complete' as an action.
- Can the positive impact of the B4245 project on High Beech roundabout be emphasised to Welsh Government?
- How can the digitally excluded be assisted to access the consultation?

- How is the Wellbeing Assessment being assessed?
 - Some of the consultation questions and response options could be better for engaging the public and the Christmas period may not be the most appropriate time for a consultation.
 - Members would like greater clarity on the timescales for actions associated with the Magor with Undy walkway station.
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- Members are hesitant about some of the active travel measures relating to the station, for example, dropped kerbs. **(ACTION): - Officers to provide more information about interventions.**
 - Concern that the improvements for buses to High Beech roundabout cannot happen without a dedicated bus lane. Concerns around variable lanes on link roads in general.
 - Concern that if Chepstow bus station is moved, the National Express may no longer stop at Chepstow.
 - Concerns that electric vehicle charging on-street is going to be more difficult in older towns and concern as to whether we have the electricity infrastructure to make it happen.
 - Concern that commuters from Chepstow to Bristol via Severn Tunnel Junction, 20mph limits will slow commuting traffic between Chepstow and Bristol.
 - A member advised that the lobby group Transition Chepstow didn't invite local councillors to their discussions, so there may be some disjoint.
 - General concerns around the accessibility of bus platforms and drop kerbs: Example being Goytre, and Llanover, which only has one drop kerb.
 - Members requested more information on the proposed route through Penperllenni, noting future employment near the site and more information on the Goytre to Llanellen project **(Action): Officers to provide.**
 - Questions around the core bus services, including the No.60.
 - Queries around the Integration of public buses and Home to School transport.
 - Members would appreciate information on the New Inn/Pontypool station and whether there will there be a bus link to Usk **(Action): Officers to provide. (Action): Officers to provide.**
 - Concern that Usk isn't considered a key town in the plan.
 - Delivery vehicles on roads: a Member commented that residents need to shift to using local shops and pickup points.
 - Monmouth: concern that there are no trains, and that National Express doesn't stop there and whether any progress could be made on this.
 - A feeling that there isn't encouragement for people to use buses, as it takes too long.
 - The provisional objectives in the plan: a feeling that culture shouldn't come above economic ambitions.

- Concern that there are frequent technical issues with trains coming back from Cardiff or Newport, including trains not stopping at Chepstow, which does disincentivise people from using the service.
- A feeling that there needs to be recognition that we are part of the Severnside economy and a question as to whether we fully understand the enormity of the movement of workers each day into England.
- A query around funding for the A466, as we don't have any jurisdiction.

Cabinet Member Concluding Remarks:

There is a need to move away from system built over decades at a time of huge economic difficulty and it is complex. There are limits to powers within Monmouthshire, and the extent to which we can influence decisions rather than take them ourselves. The challenge is not easy for the public to understand and transport across the country does appear very fragmented. A big frustration is seeing expertise and ability in our team and being aware of what we could achieve if there was access to funding. We need to continue working with Burns, Transport for Wales and local authorities over the bridge.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for attending and taking Members questions. The Chair concluded the following feedback for the Cabinet on behalf of the Committee:

The Strategic Transport Plan has been brought to the Public Services Scrutiny Committee on 11th December 2023 for Pre-decision Scrutiny. The committee has scrutinised the report in detail with key points highlighted in the minutes of the meeting, however our concluding feedback follows:

- There are concerns around the consultation process and the involvement of Chepstow Councillors in relevant matters relating to Chepstow area. Members raised a limited reference to the train network within the plan and suggested it would benefit from greater prominence.
- Concerns have been expressed about the level of funding required to deliver the aspirations of the plan and a concern that smaller projects may not happen as a result.
- Members highlighted the need for accessibility at train stations but also at bus stops, because the lack of dropped kerbs are preventing people accessing bus services, although we acknowledge the trunk roads are the responsibility of Welsh Government.
- There were also concerns around the Electric Vehicle charging infrastructure.

4. Minutes of the previous meetings held on:

The minutes were agreed with a correction for the appointment of Vice Chair on 19th June 2023, advised by Councillor Penny Jones (**ACTION**).

5. Public Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Action List

An update on Dentistry Services has been sent to members and Members are able to contact the officer directly with any future queries. Members cited some ongoing concerns around the recruitment of dentists and services to care leavers.

The Scrutiny Manager highlighted that the Committee had tabled all the items suggested by Members, but that there are some topics remaining on the work programme list that the Committee may want to table to future meetings. This was agreed.

Members raised accessing neighbourhood policing as a key concern and asked whether the new inspector could be invited to the next meeting.

6. Council and Cabinet Work Planner

The plan was noted.

7. To note the date and time of the next meeting: 19th February 2024

The meeting ended at **12.19 pm**