

Public Document Pack

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of County Council held
at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Thursday, 23rd January, 2025 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor Su McConnel (Chairman)
County Councillor Peter Strong (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: Rachel Buckler, Laura Wright, Tony Kear, Catrin Maby, Jan Butler, Ian Chandler, Sara Burch, Alistair Neill, Mary Ann Brocklesby, Fay Bromfield, Jane Lucas, Emma Bryn, Meirion Howells, Paul Griffiths, Jackie Strong, Rachel Garrick, Steven Garratt, Angela Sandles, Ben Callard, John Crook, Tomos Davies, Dale Rooke, 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, M. Newell, Paul Pavia, Maureen Powell, Frances Taylor, Tudor Thomas, Armand Watts and Ann Webb

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Peter Davies	Acting Chief Executive
Jonathan Davies	Head of Finance
Jane Rodgers	Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health
Will McLean	Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Ian Saunders	Chief Officer Customer, Culture and Wellbeing.
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
James Williams	Chief Officer Law & Governance
Deb Hill-Howells	Head of Decarbonisation, Transport and Support Services
Craig O'Connor	Chief Officer, Place

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors Maria Stevens and Sue Riley

1. Declarations of Interest

Item 6b Gwent Regional Partnership Board Area Plan: County Councillor Penny Jones declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest as an Independent Member of the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board.

2. Chair's Announcement

The Chair's Announcement was noted.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=O4h55z61vQyCCVFW&t=103>

3. Public Questions

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=dWktAaOO8T6O5kBn&t=105>

4. Submitted by Justine Johnson to Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

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<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=KGTa4dr9WdOsU8-O&t=597>

Justine Johnson, representing residents of Goldwire Lane, Monmouth, was welcomed to the meeting by the Chair. She provided a handout to councillors regarding residents' concerns about the about flooding, the validity of the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) and lack of consultation with the wider affected community.

She asked: "Under what criteria is the ETRO on Goldwire Lane being assessed and will the results be made available to residents and the public for full consultation and consideration before a decision is made on Goldwire Lanes' future".

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment responded:

- An explanation is on the County Council website. The Council will monitor the effect of the order on the nearby highway network and the section of Goldwire Lane that is subject to the order from 25th October 2024 for up to 18 months. There will be an assessment of the effect on Highway users, including but not limited to, those who drive, walk, cycle, and scoot. After 6 months, the Council will review the effect on the adjacent Highway network. If the effect is not disproportionate, a permanent order will be made.
- Regarding consultation, residents of the section of the lane subject to the order were consulted in advance with letters delivered by hand. No objections were made. Consultation is currently open throughout the six-month period and residents can submit comments in writing.
- With the order in place, anyone who drives down the section of Goldwire Lane in question, without a legitimate reason for access to the properties, will be in contravention of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.
- The order was prompted by a request from residents for something to be done about the dangers from cars using this road as a shortcut and confirmed in the letter signed by 11 residents> Further discussion with residents and the Police identified that there are three ways in which vehicles use Goldwire Lane as a shortcut. There is an adequate and clearly marked alternative route for cars via Somerset Rd. which is a road of normal width with pavements.
- This section of Goldwire Lane is the only direct route for pedestrians into town, used by children going to school, people with prams, mobility scooters, elderly people with walking frames or sticks. There is sheltered housing and residential streets from where people use the route across the bridge to walk into town, to schools, etc. There have been several near misses and minor accidents involving cars and other users.
- The priority is road safety for everyone.

5. Submitted by Jonty Pearce to County Councillor Paul Griffiths, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning and Economy

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=3eMUQpQfYQXe2nkd&t=129>

The Chair welcomed Mr. Jonty Pearce to the meeting. Mr. Pearce provided a pack for councillors and asked how the Council would respond to objections from organisations about the inclusion of the development of Dixon Rd, Monmouth in the Replacement Local Development Plan (RDLP).

1. CADW said it will bring modern dense development much closer and will be clearly visible, adding that it will have an unacceptably damaging effect upon the settings of the Scheduled Ancient Monument and the Dixon Conservation Area.

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2. The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) objected that allocation HA4 made no reference to the Wye Valley National Landscape and its location within the landscape setting, adding that the development of the site would impact the picturesque, extensive and dramatic views from Offa's Dyke Path and the Kymin. The Wye Valley AONB added that there is insufficient evidence that the National Landscape has been considered and evidenced in adding land at Leasbrook as a strategic allocated site in the AONB in the RLDP.
3. National Resources Wales reminded the Council that its own landscape sensitivity report of 2020 said that building on the Dixton Rd. site would be highly undesirable.
4. Council was reminded that it had removed key protections for the endangered greater horseshoe bats from the RLDP. Consequently, Monmouth Town Council voted unanimously to raise 7 objections to the Dixton Rd. Development, including concerns about the development within the sight line and core sustenance zone for the bats. Gwent Wildlife Trust said that it could potentially impact the integrity of the special area of conservation and that the proposals may not be suitable. Natural Resources Wales refuted the claims in the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA), which said there would be no adverse effect on the bats.

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development, responded that he is aware that the deposit plan for the RLDP includes the site at Dixton Rd. Monmouth and noted that a full public consultation on the RLDP took place at the end of last year. All responses will be reported to Council with his review of those responses in due course. Several of the comments made are responses made to the consultation that are under review. Council will receive a response to those points at that time.

Where sites have been included in the RDLP, potential developers are preparing for the situation where they may be included in a future approved plan and as part of that preparation, they are asking if an application on a particular site would require an environmental impact assessment; such a question takes the form of a formal request to the local planning authority which would consult relevant statutory consultees on the requirement for an environmental impact assessment.

Upon enquiry regarding the need for an environmental impact assessment, CADW and Wye Valley National Landscape listed reasons, not necessarily opposing the inclusion of a site.

The Council's Development Management Team has made public the decision that, based on the evidence, the submissions of such bodies and the statutory criteria, an environmental impact assessment will be required. That is not particular to this site as the same process has been applied to strategic sites in Chepstow, and the same conclusion has been published. These decisions provide evidence of the Council's commitment to uphold environmental protections and maintain full regard for the environmental impact of development proposals within the RLDP.

6. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on the 12th December 2024

[Thttps://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=zmP3JPqvPZIFbJvR&t=965](https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=zmP3JPqvPZIFbJvR&t=965)

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7. Reports to Council

Council resolved to accept the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting held on 12th December 2024.

8. Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/26

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented the report entitled Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/26 for Members to consider.

The scheme, fully funded by Welsh Government, seeks to help thousands on low income pay, their council tax, the Council Tax Reduction scheme is a means tested benefit which can cover up to 100% of a household's Council tax.

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

1. To note the making of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Prescribed Requirements (Wales) Regulations ("the Prescribed Requirements Regulations") 2013 by the Welsh Government on 26 November 2013; and
2. To adopt the provisions within the Regulations above ("the Prescribed Requirements Regulations") and any 'annual uprating regulations' in respect of its Scheme for the financial year 2025/26 including the discretionary elements previously approved as the Council's local scheme from 1st April 2024.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=h4NKnwVqzzH7qwOb&t=985>

9. Gwent Regional Partnership Board (RPB) Area Plan and RPB Annual Report 23/24

The Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Health presented the report to update Members on the work of the Gwent Regional Partnership Board (RPB) in fulfilling local authority statutory duties required under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, presenting the:

- Regional Area Plan 2023-2027, and
- RPB Annual report 2023/2024

(County Councillor Armand Watts left at 14.38)

The Head of the Gwent Regional Partnership Team provided additional information about the Population Needs Assessment confirming that there is regular public engagement. The question of access to equality and justice will be referred to the Public Services Board. It was confirmed that efforts are being made to promote the Disables Facilities Grant.

Council resolved to note and approve the recommendations:

1. To consider the joint commitments within the Area Plan, and;
2. To ensure that Members have the opportunity to review the RPB Annual Report and progress made against the objectives; and provide any feedback/comments.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=4AjGy5Zmo3YjrbBY&t=1323>

10. Council Diary 2025/26

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The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement presented the report in order for Council to approve the diary of meetings for 2025/26.

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

That the diary of meetings for 2025/26, as attached, be approved

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=ltFJm05RlqU3pbv6&t=2570>

11. Motions

12. Submitted by County Councillor Richard John

County Councillor Richard John presented the motion:

This Council:

Regrets that Monmouthshire, the lowest funded council in Wales, has again received from Welsh Government the lowest increase in funding of any council in Wales.

Notes with concern that, under this administration, council tax is rising at more than double the rate of inflation and the council still forecasts an overspend of over £5million in 2024-25 and its five year forecast shows a shortfall of £35million.

Expresses concern about the administration's capacity to fund essential services in 2025-26.

Supports the administration's regularly repeated statement that "radical change to the council's operating model" is required and instructs the administration to urgently bring this forward.

A request to alter the motion was declined.

The motion was seconded by County Councillor Alistair Neill.

Upon being put to the vote, the following votes were recorded:

In favour of the motion - 23

Against the motion - 20

Abstentions - 0

The motion was carried.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=Qh-O2KBygU7EWTMK&t=2848>

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NAME	For	Against	Abstain
Councillor J BOND		X	
Councillor M A BROCKLESBY		X	
Councillor F BROMFIELD	X		
Councillor L BROWN	X		

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Councillor E BRYN	X		
Councillor R BUCKLER	X		
Councillor S BURCH		X	
Councillor J BUTLER	X		
Councillor B CALLARD		X	
Councillor I CHANDLER		X	
Councillor J CROOK		X	
Councillor T DAVIES	X		
Councillor L DYMOCK	X		
Councillor A EASSON		X	
Councillor C EDWARDS	X		
Councillor S GARRATT		X	
Councillor R GARRICK		X	
Councillor P GRIFFITHS		X	
Councillor M GROUCUTT		X	
Councillor S.G.M. Howarth	X		
Councillor M HOWELLS		X	
Councillor R JOHN	X		
Councillor D. W. H. Jones	X		
Councillor P. Jones	X		
Councillor T KEAR	X		
Councillor M LANE	X		
Councillor J LUCAS	X		
Councillor C MABY		X	
Councillor S MCCONNELL		X	
Councillor J MCKENNA	X		
Councillor P MURPHY	X		
Councillor A NEILL	X		
Councillor M NEWELL	X		
Councillor P PAVIA	X		
Councillor M POWELL	X		
Councillor S RILEY Apologies			
Councillor D ROOKE		X	
Councillor A SANDLES		X	
Councillor M STEVENS Apologies			
Councillor J STRONG		X	
Councillor P STRONG		X	
Councillor F TAYLOR	X		
Councillor T THOMAS		X	
Councillor A WATTS Apologies			
Councillor A WEBB	X		
Councillor L WRIGHT		X	

13. Members Questions:

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14. County Councillor Laura Wright to County Councillor Ian Chandler, Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health Services

"Brew Monday" is this month, encouraging us all to catch up and connect with others to support our mental health. Will the cabinet member please tell us what MCC is doing to support mental health and wellbeing for our residents, council staff and elected members.

The Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health Services highlighted the importance of nurturing mental health and wellbeing remarking that the building blocks are likely to include meaningful connections with others, doing things you enjoy, giving back, staying as active as possible, keeping on learning and staying connected with nature.

The Council aims to ensure people have access to good advice early on how to maintain good mental and physical health, how to reduce loneliness and isolation. The Community Development Teams work closely with the third sector to ensure a vibrant community-based wellbeing offer across the county. Community-based link workers are in community hubs and GP services to help the more vulnerable to access community support services and to support mental health and wellbeing.

(County Councillor Rachel Buckler left at 16.17)

The Be Community Service ensure there are a range of volunteering opportunities. Volunteering has been shown to help maintain positive wellbeing whilst helping others. Work is taking place to bring together community-based groups and services to have community conversations to ensure that those who may need more formal care and support are proactively linked to the support they need to promote wellbeing and independence.

Supporting wellbeing is a cross-directorate activity with Leisure, Youth, Culture and Heritage amongst others playing a role.

Providing wellbeing support in the workforce is also a priority. The Hub contains financial and wellbeing support information signposting staff to Connect 5 and Melo (also available to residents). There is a GoTo Group and a Menopause Café to provide peer support. Staff and elected members can access wellbeing support through the occupational health service, the Phillips wellbeing service and through links to Benenden Health. January is recognised as a particularly hard time of year for a lot of people and specific communications have been released directing people to support on Brew Monday, highlighting available support.

Responding to a supplementary question from County Councillor Wright, the Cabinet Member committed to explore if the Centre for Mental Health's Local Government Mental Health Challenge, or a suitable Welsh alternative, would be appropriate for Monmouthshire. The Cabinet Member also committed to discussing with colleagues the suggestion of a Mental Health Champion.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=bmlqG7S1szcYJv8h&t=8035>

15. County Councillor Laura Wright to County Councillor Ian Chandler, Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health Services

Can the cabinet member please provide an update on the future of the Tudor Street building in Abergavenny?

The Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health Services responded with the good news that The Gathering Community Group was recently awarded charity status

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and has signed a 12 month lease on the Tudor St. building; with the keys handed over last week.

The Council assisted in establishing the formal organisation, developing a business case and granting permission to use the Wellbeing Information Centre for two days a week over the past year.

The Gathering welcomes more volunteers, fund raisers, trustees and is specifically seeking a Treasurer. The Cabinet Member invited those expressing interest to view The Gathering's Facebook page. It was noted that the Cabinet Member, several other councillors and town councillors attended the AGM earlier this week where lots of offers of help were made.

County Councillor Laura Wright asked a supplementary question about continued support that could be offered to The Gathering by the Council.

The Cabinet Member provided assurance of continued support from the Community Development Team. There will be a rental reduction in acknowledgement of the renovation work being undertaken. It is planned that activities will be start in 6 weeks. The Gathering welcomes offers from people to run activities on a regular or one-off basis.

The Cabinet Member was pleased that there will be a new community-based provision for vulnerable adults in the Abergavenny area and congratulated The Gathering wishing them well for the coming year.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=9pDnC8JWBk3VSUpK&t=8488>

(County Councillor Jackie Strong left at 16.30)

16. County Councillor Paul Pavia to County Councillor Paul Griffiths, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning and Economy

Will the Cabinet Member provide an update on what the Council is doing to enforce parking restrictions on High Street in Chepstow?

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development responded

Responsibility for parking enforcement was transferred from the Police to local authorities by the last government. Local authorities were not given capacity to fulfil the role.

It was reported that there is enforcement on Chepstow High St. In 2024, 7 parking enforcement notices were issued. It is recognised that signage is not good and Chepstow Town Council has agreed that the signage should be complemented by double yellow lines. Current restrictions allow loading and unloading. Enforcement officers must judge the activity being undertaken by a parked vehicle and will generally allow 5 minutes grace between identification and issuing a notice to allow the motorist time to leave.

Maintaining adequate staffing levels in the Enforcement Team has been challenging since the transfer of the responsibility. Enforcement will be considered during the Parking Review currently in progress. Council will consider the conclusions of the review when completed.

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County Councillor Pavia asked a supplementary question requesting that the Cabinet Member examines the enforcement capacity as part of the wider review and look to deploy operatives across all the towns, but particularly Chepstow to clamp down on such antisocial behaviour.

The Cabinet Member agreed to work through the review to ensure that enforcement is as effective as possible. It was noted that the conditions in Chepstow are not unique and occur throughout the county

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=fe9P4pEy6fdPmjc4&t=8770>

(County Councillor Mary Ann Brocklesby left the meeting at 16.34)

17. County Councillor Lisa Dymock to County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

Please can the cabinet member provide a detailed explanation of the one-way system proposals for Crick Road specifically, can you outline the direction of traffic flow, whether the road will be resurfaced as part of the project, and if there are plans to include a dedicated cycle route or other improvements to pedestrian and cyclist safety and how long this work will take?

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment responded:

The Crick Rd Safer Routes in Communities Scheme will provide a 2.5m shared footway and cycleway from the junction of the new residential development to the entry point into Archbishop Rowan Williams Church in Wales Voluntary Aided School. As a consequence of the widened footway, a new one-way traffic system will be introduced with the direction of travel being from Portskewett towards the B4245. The one-way system will start at the north western side of the Treetops junction and will finish approximately 38m southeast of the junction with the new development. The works should be completed by the end of the financial year.

The developer has been contacted to carry out carriageway resurfacing works as part of improvement works. Officers will keep County Councillor Dymock updated on progress. A site visit with the relevant Highways Team may be beneficial.

Councillor Dymock asked if updates could be provided via the MyMonmouthshire App.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=qkNyNAiuO6dJGa6V&t=9098>

18. County Councillor Lisa Dymock to County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

Have the changes in garden waste collections effected the number of collections some areas have received?

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment responded that there were changes to collection days as a consequence of the change to polypropylene bags requiring changes from week 1 to week 2 and vice versa. As a result, some customers (maximum 1421) missed one week of garden waste collection. Efforts have been made to mitigate any negative impact by taking extra waste at the next collection. Additionally, an additional collection was arranged for Christmas trees and leaf fall. The changes were implemented as late as possible in the gardening season to limit the numbers impacted.

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Asking a supplementary question, County Councillor Dymock noted that residents are paying a significant fee and expect to receive the full number of collections. Whilst understanding the extra Christmas tree collections, the perception is that missed collections represent a loss of value for money. Unavoidable disruptions must be clearly communicated with practical solutions in advance. Councillor Dymock asked if consideration could be given to provision of an additional collection for the residents affected.

The Cabinet Member responded that this has been done by providing the Christmas tree and leaf fall collection. At £55 per annum, each collection costs £2.62. One week less would be £2.75 per collection. The nuisance of an accumulation of garden waste is recognised but it would be expensive and difficult to provide an additional single collection because it is organised in combination with other refuse collection.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=LshPQGc6qtflcJS2&t=9314>

19. County Councillor Lisa Dymock to County Councillor Angela Sandles, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement

It's been nearly 6 months since the council conducted the raid and seized 71 dogs at Lost Souls Sanctuary. This matter is still of significant concern to members of the public and many are seeking welfare on the dogs and clarity on the resource allocated, please could the cabinet member confirm the total costs incurred to date for the investigation, operation (raid), ongoing shelter of seized dogs and legal representation associated to this case?

The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement acknowledged the public interest in this question noting that it is over 17 months since the operation was carried out. It was confirmed that this matter remains the subject of criminal proceedings and is scheduled for trial in August 2025. It is therefore inappropriate to comment further until the legal proceedings have concluded.

As a supplementary question, County Councillor Dymock requested an update on the current welfare status of the dogs seized and how many have been domestically rehomed and plans for those not rehomed. The Cabinet Member was unable to provide any information due to the current legal proceedings.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=2LOiUWLM7u2CL52k&t=9519>

(County Councillor Frances Taylor left at 16.45)

20. County Councillor Louise Brown to County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

Please can you provide an update on improvements to High Beech roundabout including nearby land at Mounton Road?

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development answered the question:

A Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance (WeITAG) Study on the High Beech Roundabout has commenced, an interim report issued and further work commissioned by the study team. As conclusions emerge, these will be shared with Council and County Councillor Brown.

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County Councillor Brown was concerned that local County Councillors are not involved in these meetings. Transition Chepstow is involved but may not have the same local knowledge as elected members. In a supplementary question Councillor Brown asked if the Cabinet Member recognised the need for action on significant improvements at High Beech Roundabout stating that it is the Welsh Government's responsibility to resolve. The traffic queues affect commuters and local residents at different and unpredictable times.

The Cabinet Member explained that public engagement with the process is primarily regarded as a professional process. It is important that resident groups in Chepstow such as Transition Chepstow and local elected members are made aware of the analysis and conclusions when available.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=Gxq9Xp26Kxxbgaw2&t=9641>

21. County Councillor Penny Jones to County Councillor Angela Sandles, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement

In light of the recent proposals of the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru (DBCC) consultation relating to the 2026 Review of Senedd Constituencies, how can the residents of Monmouthshire be assured that this administration is working on their behalf to maintain the identity of Monmouthshire and all that that embodies?

The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement explained that the Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales has the responsibility for undertaking the review of Senedd Constituencies ahead of the 2026 election. The Commission is restricted by guidance from Welsh Government in how it can conduct the review and it is limited to combining the existing 32 UK Parliamentary Constituencies in Wales into 16 new Senedd constituencies. Given that restriction and the geography of Monmouthshire as a boundary County, there are limited viable options that could be put forward. The Commission has proposed that the Monmouthshire Constituency be combined with the Torfaen Constituency with the constituency being named Mynwy Torfaen. This proposal retains the whole of the County of Monmouthshire remaining together within a single constituency rather than being split between constituencies as was the case previously. The proposals being put forward are for the 2026 election only and the Commission will be tasked with a further review ahead of the 2030 election which may remove the restrictions on using UK Parliamentary boundaries and may have a more significant impact on the County as a whole.

As a supplementary question, County Councillor Penny Jones asked if the Cabinet Member could give feedback to make clear that County Councillors were not made directly aware of the consultation and to ensure that the Monmouthshire name is retained bilingually in name changes.

The Cabinet Member responded that in relation to the current review a response has been submitted to the Commission as part of its consultation recommending a name change from Mynwy Torfaen to Sir Fynwy Torfaen. This proposal better reflects the County of Monmouthshire rather than locality of Monmouth but it will be for the Commission to consider whether to adopt this change when it publishes its final proposals. All members, political groups and political parties were able to respond to the consultation process with any alternative ideas that fall within the restrictions placed upon the Commission that could be put forward for future constituencies.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=iPjP85C-aYzqeQik&t=9921>

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22. County Councillor Christopher Edwards to County Councillor Martyn Groucutt, Cabinet Member for Education

Could the Cabinet Member for Education inform council of any proposed future investment the current administration intends to make in both Chepstow School and The Dell Primary School.

The Cabinet Member for Education recalled that the groundwork and business case development for the King Henry VIII 3-19 school once Monmouth Comprehensive School was completed and was delighted that on the 11th April the keys will be handed over to the Council.

Whilst there was every intention of commencing the early stages of the Chepstow project alongside the King Henry VIII project, this hasn't been possible due to the resources in the Sustainable Communities for Learning Team. Resources have been focussed on completing the King Henry VIII School. Work is in progress to remodel the nursery at Trellech Primary School and the former Mounton House staff house which will accommodate part of the Pupil Referral Service also the successful establishment of Ysgol Gymraeg Trefynwy in Monmouth.

Work has been undertaken to red line the Chepstow School site by external architects in order to determine what provision can be accommodated on the school and leisure centre site. It was confirmed that the Sustainable Communities for Learning rolling programme has been submitted to the Welsh Government in draft and the Chepstow School project is included as the priority project for the nine-year rolling programme.

The Cabinet Member mentioned that a few months ago, he was invited to Chepstow School to hear a presentation from pupils about their hopes and ideas for their school moving forward.

The high-level programme will be discussed by Cabinet in the coming months and further work will then be undertaken to look at the Chepstow cluster as a whole and develop more detailed proposals.

In a supplementary question, County Councillor Edwards, noted that work is required at Chepstow School to provide a modern environment to stimulate learning and inspire both staff and students. Councillor Edwards asked the Cabinet Member to reassure Council that the scale of investment in the fabric of buildings and classrooms as they currently are, is more than adequate and not simply biding time in the hope that Chepstow School will finally get the opportunity for major school investment.

The Cabinet Member added to his previous answer determining that Chepstow is the priority in the nine-year programme. Officer meetings have been held to look at existing education provision within the Chepstow area. A meeting has been held between the Cabinet Member, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development, the Chief Officer for Learning, Skills and Education, the Sustainable Communities for Learning Manager and the Chepstow Cluster Headteachers. The Sustainable Communities for Learning Manager and Project Officer have met with Stride Treglown Architects and Icon to consider the scope and outcome of feasibility work that has been undertaken on the Chepstow School site.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=zvCwFglyqgHZJoe3&t=10187>

23. From County Councillor Christopher Edwards to County Councillor Martyn Groucutt, Cabinet Member for Education

Could the Cabinet Member for Education inform council of what internal and external meetings have been held in this council term in relation to the council's Chepstow School submission as

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part of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, which replaced the 21st Century Schools initiative; and what progress has been made to date.

As the question had been partially answered in the previous question, County Councillor Edwards referred to the change from 21st Century Schools to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme and the need to resubmit the Council's programme by March 2024. He asked the supplementary question "As the new King Henry VIII School is about to open, what went wrong and is going wrong with Chepstow School's application. Referring to the decision to end the policy of any council assets that are sold being allocated to future school building projects - how will it be financed?"

The Cabinet Member for Education responded that the King Henry VIII project is on time and on budget. Regarding Chepstow School, the Cabinet Member undertook to provide a written response to County Councillor Edwards.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=1ZLIQ1Erk7arTphA&t=10674>

(County Councillor Ann Webb left at 16.53, County Councillor Jill Bond left at 16.58 and County Councillor Dale Rooke left at 17.03)

24. From County Councillor Jan Butler to County Councillor Martyn Groucutt, Cabinet Member for Education

Could the cabinet member for Education comment on the situation as regards school transport for students attending King Henry School from Penperlleni and Goytre Fawr.

The Cabinet Member for Education responded that secondary learners travelling from Goytre and Penperlleni to King Henry VIII Comprehensive School are allocated to the 23 Stagecoach public service bus. A number of complaints were received in the Autumn Term about the punctuality of this service and following discussions with the operator the timetable has been amended to better meet the needs of the learners,

There were a number of issues which included poor communication of the timetable changes by the operator and delays associated with the use of alternative routes due to flooding. It is understood that the timetable issues have been resolved however the Council will continue to work with the operator and respond to issues as they arise. 27 learners are allocated to this route and is in line with the published home to school transport policy of maximising use of public bus services as it reduces the number of traffic movements, carbon emission and supports the viability of rural public bus services. Complaints about public bus services are managed by the Public- Transport Planning Manager and Team. All complaints are investigated and, where possible, changes to timetables will be implemented. Operators have been advised that the highest priority is to be given to trips taking learners to school.

A service starting in September was not performing as intended resulting in delays to learners travelling to and from school. The school had adjusted its timetable, affecting the bus service and the complaints that had been justified have been mitigated. The Public Transport Team had not been made aware of the changes to the school timetable and the school and bus timetables are now reconciled.

County Councillor Butler asked a supplementary question about measures to ensure continuation of the bus service due to increasing road closures north of Llanellen due to flooding and how viable the route is likely to be as there are more storms causing issues for residents.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged that the A4042 is subject to frequent flooding at Llanellen despite drainage works by Welsh Government.

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(County Councillor Tudor Thomas left at 17.07)

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=WY7-gL9kRjliP17p&t=10914>

25. From County Councillor Tony Kear to County Councillor Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment

Could the Cabinet Member please advise what dedicated resources are currently available to MCC for the clearing of highway drains and in light of recent flooding issues, will additional financial support be given to fund next year's programme of works?

The Cabinet Member for Climate Changes and the Environment responded that there are 24 frontline staff covering all highway duties across the whole County including emergency response and clearing drains. There are two Vactor drain machines and two sweepers to cover approximately 1600km of road and 20,000 drainage assets. Additional capitalisation grant funding in 2021 was used for dedicated drainage works and an additional Vactor drain machine that is still in operation. Main routes are prioritised with this additional resource so that other teams can focus on the remaining network.

The increased frequency of storms, a history of underfunding, and the flooding now being experienced affects our ability to be proactive. Grids, drains and culverts that are known to flood are proactively cleared, and resources, as far as possible, are focused on the areas identified in named storm announcements. The frequency of storms and intense rainfall highlight the need for additional capacity for highways operations in general. There is a need for capital investment across the UK. The Cabinet Member noted this is not exclusive to highways. Realistically, the intense rainfall is linked to climate change so fully clear drains at the start of a storm will struggle and slowly drain away.

Many of the ditches adjacent to the highways network are field ditches and should be maintained by the landowner. Soil run-off from fields is a major contributory factor in bringing debris. Changes in land management practices will be the only sustainable solution with long term associated benefits for river pollution and reduction in soil loss. Officers are supporting Welsh Government, National Resources Wales and Dwr Cymru initiatives to promote natural flood management in farmland. The importance of working with the Usk and Wye partnerships is highlighted.

In a supplementary question, County Councillor Kear asked if officers can drill down to discover the extent of the backlog of MyMonmouthshire requests to clear drains is so elected members can be realistic when advising residents. How many drains are being cleared in a reactionary manner or in a proactive approach. Elected Members are aware of hotspots that should be cleared on a regular basis that are not. Is there a system to look at these hotspots?

The Cabinet Member responded that there are so many ditches and spots around Monmouthshire, it is difficult to answer the question. The interaction of land and highways drainage is being discussed in detail in the Usk and Wye partnerships. A study by the Wye and Usk Foundation estimated that 80% of the water storage in the upper Usk catchment is in soils.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/Ru03XKYkCnE?si=J8NKPdCx44VG8be7&t=11344>

The meeting ended at 5.18 pm

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