MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee held
at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Monday, 11th April, 2016 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor S. Jones (Chairman)
County Councillor S. White (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Dovey, D. Evans, B. Hayward, J. Prosser and
A. Wintle.

County Councillors V. Smith and R.J.W. Greenland attended the
meeting by invitation of the Chair.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Kellie Beirne	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Sian Hayward	Digital and Technology Manager
Matt Lewis	Deputy Director Shared Resource Services
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Richard Williams	Democratic Services Officer

APOLOGIES:

Councillors D. Edwards

1. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest raised by Members.

2. **Scrutiny of the i County Strategy and Business Plan 2016/19**

Context:

To receive the iCounty Strategy Business Plan for 2016/19 for Member scrutiny, along with a report on Monmouthshire County Council's Digital and Technology service and how it aligns with Monmouthshire County Council's iCounty, People and Place strategies.

Key Issues:

Technology is moving at pace, and digital services need to keep up with the changes in order for the Council to support sustainable communities and economies. In order to ensure that Monmouthshire County Council captures the benefits of digitization, the iCounty Strategy was developed in April 2014 and was agreed through the Council's committee approval processes in July 2014.

This is the second year of implementation, and the business plan has evolved and has been refined through learning and experience, as well as through collaborating with partners and organisations across the UK to ensure the strategy is robust and sustainable.

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**Minutes of the meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee held
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Monmouthshire County Council has achieved some significant developments since iCounty was first approved, and the foundations have been laid for a sustainable ICT infrastructure, Council ICT platforms, digital transformation and digital service provision.

<u>Members' Scrutiny:</u>

- Coding events for young people were being run in Monmouthshire's schools and in Monmouthshire's libraries. Young People needed to be digitally enabled to ensure more coders were available in the future.

- The Alacrity Foundation has put 12 to 16 graduates through its scheme providing training for them to start up their own businesses. The County Council is working in partnership with Alacrity, which is also working with Monmouthshire's schools.

- The Education Achievement Services (EAS) is visiting schools with a view to developing IT and digital strategies. The Authority is also working closely with the EAS regarding this matter.

- The Chief Officer, Enterprise stated that computer coding is a national issue and the Enterprise Directorate is working with schools.

- The Authority is investigating ways to provide Wi-Fi provision for all community halls and youth clubs throughout Monmouthshire via the Rural Development Programme (RDP) Fund.

- An Item should be added to the Select Committee's Forward Work programme to receive a report in due course regarding ways to directly work with schools regarding computer coding for students, as currently the Directorate is having to work around the curriculum with regard to this matter.

- There is scope for further talks with the Children and Young People Directorate and schools regarding the need to create a closer link with the way Maths, IT, and Engineering are taught. These are currently taught under the subject entitled STEM. This could be included in the report that will be presented to the Select Committee in due course regarding computer coding and potential gaps this the provision of this subject.

- The Council's infrastructure is very well controlled by the SRS.

- The Authority is a Member of the Severn Valley Cyber Launch Pad.

- There are several pillars to the iCounty Strategy. It enables the community to access the service and work more easily with the Authority. The more we digitally enable County Council staff, this will improve the service that the Authority provides to the public.

- The Community Hub is available for the public to access the Authority digitally. iCounty can help both businesses and the community.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee held
at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Monday, 11th April, 2016 at 2.00 pm**

- In response to a Select Committee Member's question in which it was suggested that the iCounty strategy might not be focussed enough and was potentially too expensive, it was noted that the Authority's services were being amalgamated with other authorities which is saving the Authority a considerable amount of money. Currently the Authority has 80 systems. Using the new technologies available, this could be reduced down to three or four separate IT platforms. The Authority has invested in the My Council Services application at a small cost. The new systems are intuitive which means that training is not required which saves the Authority money. If there are products available on the market that are fit for purpose, then the Authority will use them. However, if there isn't a product available, then we will build it. The benefits of this are that these products can be sold to other authorities.

- The efficiency savings being generated could be reported back to a future meeting of the Select Committee.

- The Authority is working with the SRS and Welsh Government creating efficiency savings.

- The SRS is trying to build an infrastructure in which the Authority can build on to it in a most cost effective way.

- iCounty is a Monmouthshire County Council Strategy but requires technology partners to develop it.

- The Authority is trying to build relationships with industry with a view to companies going into schools to talk to students. Over the coming years, developing this link will be crucial.

- In response to a Select Committee Member's question regarding staff resources, it was noted that whilst the Authority's team was small, areas have been identified that require bolstering on a project basis. Currently, the team is performing well.

- Staff have worked with coders to develop appropriate systems.

- There are several opportunities available around the region to work with technology industries. Working with such industries would be massive for the local economy.

- There was a need to map out and prioritise potential changes over the next three to five years.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee held at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Monday, 11th April, 2016 at 2.00 pm

> **Committee Conclusion:**
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> The Committee welcomed the report and the views expressed.
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> The Committee resolved to receive a further report regarding ways to directly work with schools in respect of computer coding for students, as currently the Directorate is having to work around the curriculum with regard to this matter. Also, it was noted that there was scope for further talks with the Children and Young People Directorate and schools regarding the need to create a closer link with the way Maths, IT, and Engineering are taught. These are currently taught under the subject entitled STEM.

3. Scrutiny of the Shared Resource Service (SRS)

Context:

To receive a Shared Resource Service (SRS) progress update for scrutiny purposes.

Key Issues:

Since the last SRS update, the SRS has made significant progress in admitting new partners into the organisation. The SRS ambition has always been to expand the provision of services to other Public Sector partners. Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has completed and agreed a business case through its own authorisation and committee processes, and all the existing partners have agreed to invite Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council to join the SRS.

The SRS Strategy (2016 – 2020) is focused on consolidating the demand of multiple partners and brokering the supply of single ICT solutions. The SRS strategy is scalable to support Welsh Government public sector objectives.

The SRS operates with 5 strategic aims to:

1) Deliver effective ICT services from a single combined unit.
2) Provide a solid foundation upon which partner organisations can operate in order to improve service delivery.
3) Ensure the investment in ICT is focused on delivery of the corporate priorities of the partner organisations.
4) Develop a capable, professional workforce that can meet the challenges within ICT over the coming years.
5) Provide a collaborative platform for public sector organisations to share digital capacity and capability through shared platforms.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has a business need to develop and implement a sustainable service improvement model for its ICT provision that:

- Supports the Welsh Government's objectives for collaboration.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee held
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- Addresses some of the financial issues that affect the Authority.
- Responds to the Authority's growing delivery needs and previously identified issues.
- Future proofs the service.

The SRS Public Board has agreed that accepting a new partner is in line with its strategic aims to grow the business. With the addition of new partners the SRS is able to further achieve economies of scale and realise savings through the equal share of strategic and service management costs.

The challenges experienced by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council offer an opportunity to the SRS to showcase ability, supported by its strategic vision, to realise its potential for public sector collaboration in line with Welsh Government aspirations.

The acceptance of this proposal will generate additional revenue of £163,665 into the SRS to invest in service improvement that will generate efficiency savings for the existing partners.

The SRS is now in negotiations with other Greater Gwent local authorities to further expand the company in line with its objectives and in line with the SRS Strategy 2016/20.

Members' Scrutiny:

- SRS Public Board meeting minutes will be made available to Select Committee for future meetings.

- Public Sector Broadband Aggregation (PSBA) is a Wales-wide network which connects public sector organisations in Wales to a private secure Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Wide Area Network (WAN). This is a very good service which prevents local authorities' data from being stolen.

- The Authority works with the SRS to ensure that the appropriate tools are available to allow County Council officers to carry out their duties efficiently. For example, the Authority has officers who have become digital champions and are available across the authority to support colleagues and Members with their IT issues.

- In response to a Select Committee Member's question regarding the SRS becoming under the auspices of Welsh Government, it was noted that legal advice regarding this matter was being sought. An update on progress would be welcomed in due course.

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Committee Conclusion:

The Committee welcomed the report and considered that a watching brief be held via the SRS Public Board Meeting minutes with regard to progress being made in respect of the SRS.

The Committee resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

The meeting ended at 4.20pm.