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## MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Adults Select Committee held  
at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Tuesday, 21st June,  
2016 at 10.00 am**

**PRESENT:** County Councillor P. Farley (Chairman)  
County Councillor R. Harris (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: R. Chapman, R. Edwards, M. Hickman, P. Jones,  
P. Jordan

Co-opted Member: Mr. D Hill

### **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Claire Marchant  
Tyrone Stokes  
Paula Harris

Chief Officer Social Care, Health & Housing  
Finance Manager  
Democratic Services Officer

#### **1. Apologies for absence**

There were no apologies.

#### **2. Declarations of interest**

County Councillor P. Farley made a personal, non-prejudicial interest as one of the two elected members who attend the Monmouthshire CAB board meetings on behalf of the council.

#### **3. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the Special Meeting of the Adults Select Committee held on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2016 were agreed and signed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **4. Citizens Advice Bureau ~ presentation of the 'Better Advice Better Lives' report on Council Tax and Housing Benefit and the Monmouthshire context.**

We welcomed Shirley Lightfoot and Darren Williams from Citizens Advice Bureau who presented their report to the Committee.

#### **Citizens Advice Service**

- Nationally the service comprises of 316 local organisations delivering services across 2,600 locations, by telephone, web chat and face to face.
- There is a consumer service, Pensionwise and Witness Service functions.
- 7000 staff (6500 in the network) and 21,600 volunteers.
- Over 2.5 million clients are dealt with, directly helping with 6.2 million advice issues.
- Four out of five clients state that the advice given improved their lives, including reducing stress and improving finances.

# MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## Minutes of the meeting of Adults Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Tuesday, 21st June, 2016 at 10.00 am

### Merged Service

- The three offices in Abergavenny, Caldicot and Chepstow merged in September 2013 and commenced provision in Monmouth in July 2015.
- There are a total of 9 paid staff and approximately 82 volunteers with a Trustee Board with 8 members who are also volunteers.
- Along with Shirley Lightfoot, there is an office manager and 2 advice services manager, one north and one south, to manage the service with the other staff delivering the projects for specialist advice.
- The specialist service includes in depth advice and support with applications for benefits, appeals against refusal and overpayments.

### Funding

- The annual budget set for 2016/17 allows for income of approximately £180,000 with expenditure at around £195,000.
- CAB are contracted to Monmouthshire County Council to provide advice services across the county for which we receive £57,000.
- Each of the Town Councils give a grant and income is also gained from the community councils.
- Payments are also made by Citizens Advice Cymru for the provision of the BABL project the funding for which comes from Welsh government.
- Any remaining income comes from donations and fundraising.

### Service Delivery

- Services are provided at 4 sites across the county in Abergavenny, Caldicot, Chepstow and Monmouth.
- Offices are open 4 days a week and the service is delivered 5 days a week in the north and the south of the county.
- There is also a telephone advice service with access to appointments on tel. no. 03444 77 20 20 from 9am to 4pm Monday to Friday through Adviceline the Wales wide service.
- Specialist advice through the Better Advice Better Lives project and the Frontline Advice project is available at main sites and at some outreach locations by appointment.

### Statistical Information

- In the financial year 2015/2016 the service saw a total of 2,747 unique clients.

Total no of issues	6,391
Benefits	2,173
Debt	1,389
Housing	400
Employment	462
Relationships & family	453

### Outreach Locations

- The BABL project operates outreach at the Adult Community Education centre in Abergavenny on Tuesday afternoons.
- The BABH project operates outreach at Trellech doctor's surgery and Chepstow Hospital.

## MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of Adults Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Tuesday, 21st June, 2016 at 10.00 am

- They currently operate generalist advice from Usk and Wyesham (by appointment) for one half day a week each.

#### **Training and Skills**

- All staff and volunteers are trained to generalist advice standard and receive regular updates on issues like benefits and changes in legislation.
- Specialists are trained to a higher level and volunteers are encouraged to explore as many training opportunities as they can.
- Training is provided both in house and by outside agencies e.g. National Citizens Advice, GAVO and CPAG.

#### **Member Scrutiny:**

The Chair called for clarity and referred to the lack of synergy across agencies as the report highlighted considerable areas of overlap and suggested inviting Monmouthshire Housing to speak to the Committee in future to discuss.

Members spoke about how it was essential that people who volunteer for the Citizen's Advice Service were impartial and highly qualified. They were pleased to hear about the continuous in-house training and ongoing self-assessment carried out by the service.

It was commented that the access to people with issues gave the service a unique point of view and that as a Council we need a better understanding of how we can help maximise the use of these visits to ensure we gain valuable insights to the needs of the population.

#### **Committee Conclusion:**

The Chair concluded that the report would be useful to all members and suggested that the service presented to a full council meeting.

The need for further collaboration across agencies was seen as paramount to ensure information was not duplicated and that useful information was easier to disseminate.

The Chair thanked both guests for the enlightening report and stressed that the Committee would revisit the issues discussed via regular updates and briefings.

#### **5. Budget Monitoring ~ Scrutiny of the Revenue and Capital Outturn report.**

##### **Context:**

We received a report from the CYP Finance Manager in order to consider the guidance for Scrutiny. The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information on the forecast revenue outturn position of the Authority at the end of reporting period 4 which represents the financial outturn position for the 2015/16 financial year.

##### **Key Issues:**

This report is also to be considered by all Select Committees as part of their responsibility to,

## MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of Adults Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Tuesday, 21st June, 2016 at 10.00 am

- assess whether effective budget monitoring is taking place,
- monitor the extent to which budgets are spent in accordance with agreed budget and policy framework.
- Challenge the reasonableness of projected over or underspends, and
- monitor the achievement of predicted efficiency gains or progress in relation to savings proposals.

The Commissioner recognises that challenging financial times will present difficult decisions for Councils as to how to provide quality locally accessible services to communities and has produced guidance for local government scrutineers to assist them in their consideration of key decisions and policy affecting older people. The guidance advocates the need for careful consideration of the implications of decisions in order to protect society's most vulnerable people.

The guidance provides a useful outline for scrutineers in terms of how to apply the principles of the 'Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessments' to decisions and policy affecting older people, given the increasing ageing population.

Scrutiny Members may wish to consider how they can embed such principles into their scrutiny approach; possibly through developing a questioning strategy to be applied to scrutiny of relevant subjects, or through considering the robustness of 'Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessments' together with the validity of evidence provided in such assessments to support decision-making.

#### **Member Scrutiny:**

A Member asked what is the commitment against the redundancy reserve for this year and are we paying statutory or enhanced redundancy payments. The finance Manager did not have the information to hand but assured the Committee that he would return with answers.

It was also asked regarding children's legal costs and exploring fixed rates with Counsel, the Chair acknowledged this had been asked previously and stressed the importance of following this up. The Finance Manager confirmed that he would also look into to this suggestion and return to Committee with an update.

#### **Recommendations proposed to Cabinet:**

That Members consider a net revenue outturn underspend of £676,000, an improvement of £878,000 on quarter 3 outturn predictions.

Members consider a capital outturn spend of £18.3m against a revised budget of £18.8million, after proposed slippage of £43.7 million, resulting in a net underspend of £508k, of which circa £433k is available for recycling onto other projects/priorities which it is recommended will be held pending review of the additional pressures.

Consider and approve the £43.7m capital slippage recommended, paying attention to those schemes included in paragraph 3.5.4 where slippage has been requested by the service manager but is not being recommended to slip (£170k), and notes the significant level of slippage required at outturn not manifest earlier in the year highlighting a concern in managers capital forecasting going forward.

## MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of Adults Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Tuesday, 21st June, 2016 at 10.00 am

Considers the use of reserves proposed and notes the significant decline on earmarked reserve levels at end of 2015-16 and the likely indication at end of 2016-17.

Approves the reallocation of reserve balances, following the actuarial review of the insurance reserve and review of other small reserve balances, in order to address reserve pressures and the apportionment of general underspend in supplementing reserve levels as follows:

- £1,037 million to Redundancy and Pensions reserve
- £419k to IT reserves
- £350k to Invest to Redesign reserve

Approves the use of the Invest to Redesign reserve during 2016-17 totalling £30,835 as MCC's additional contribution to enable the work on the City Deal initiative to continue.

#### **Committee Conclusion:**

The Chair thanked the Finance Manager for another pleasing report and stressed that the Committee appreciated the hard work of the staff.

It was recognised by the very nature of the portfolio, there were often things that could not be predicted or controlled.

The report was recommended to Cabinet and the Chair looked forward to future updates.

#### **6. Feedback on Member's Seminars - Chief Officers to provide a progress update**

The Head of Officer for Social Care discussed recent Member Seminars, giving special praise to the Dementia Training, commenting on the powerful presentation.

The Chief Officer thanked Members as she felt their comments gave officers focus for action plans and helped drive issues forward.

Members expressed disappointment at the number of members who did not attend, as they felt the seminars were a valuable tool.

A Member suggested a day of mini presentations, giving edited highlights of the subject matter, leaving Members to revisit in more detail if they wished.

#### **7. Areas of future Scrutiny - Committee to identify future areas for scrutiny and agree lines of inquiry**

The Head of Officer for Social Care updated the Committee on the new duty of care, since April 2016 for our prison population. And it was felt that a visit to Usk Prison would be useful to provide relevant scrutiny.

It was suggested that, working with our partners in the prison service, that the committee visit the Prison late 2016/early 2017 and return to the Chamber for scrutiny.

## **MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of the meeting of Adults Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Tuesday, 21st June, 2016 at 10.00 am**

A member of the committee was asked by a non-committee member to look at services for stroke sufferers. The Chair welcomed this and felt it was important to invite the Stroke Association and Leisure Services to a future meeting for a briefing. It was suggested that the briefing was titled 'Life after stroke' and focused on post stroke care and support.

#### **8. Adults Forward Work Programme**

We received the future work programme for Adults Select Committee.

#### **9. Date and time of next meeting**

12<sup>th</sup> July 2016 at 10am.

**The meeting ended at 12.00 pm**