

Whitecastle Community Council

Cyngor Cymuned Castellgwyn

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Minutes of the Council Meeting 11 December 2025 7.00pm

at Rockfield Barns, Pwll Y Cwm, Rockfield, NP25 5SZ

Present : Cllr. D. Astill-Parsons (Chair), Cllr. C. Duncan, Cllr. J. Biggs, Cllr. C. Lewis, Cllr. N. Graham,
In attendance : L. Taylor (Clerk), Cllr. I. Chandler (Monmouthshire County Council)

Public Speaking

No members of the public attended the meeting.

1. To accept apologies for absence.

Cllr. R. Metters and County Councillor I. Chandler sent her apologies. Cllr. D. Edwards was not in attendance. No apologies were received.

Resolution: To accept Cllr. R. Metters apology. Passed unanimously.

2. To disclose personal and pecuniary interests in items listed below.

It was agreed to allow members to disclose interests as they arise.

3. To approve as a correct record the minutes of the previous meetings held on 13 November.

Resolution: to accept the minutes as a true record of proceedings. Proposed by Cllr. Lewis and seconded by Cllr. Graham. The minutes were signed by the Chair of the Council.

4. Matters arising from the previous meetings.

- Members discussed the absence of Cllr Edwards from meetings. The Chair was asked to contact Cllr. Edwards to establish the reason for his absence. A decision about him continuing to a member of the council will be made at the February meeting.

5. To consider correspondence

Several items of correspondence were circulated to members since the last meeting. The Chair asked members if they wished to comment on any matters not covered by the agenda. Comments made are covered in later agenda items. The Clerk outlined the following additional items:

One Voice Wales

- Social Impact Assessment Survey. This was completed by the Clerk
- E Bulletin issue 14 was received.

Monmouthshire County Council

- Public Services Ombudsman For Wales Annual Letter 2024-25 was received. No complaints were received about the Community Council.
- The Community Council had responded to the County Council's Cultural Strategy Plan. The Council welcomes the ambitions of the Monmouthshire Cultural Strategy 2025–2035 but believes it should more clearly acknowledge the vital contributions of local community and voluntary groups. These grassroots organisations sustain traditions, foster participation, and enrich rural life, and their work should be better reflected in the strategy's vision and action plan.

Other organisations

- Urdd Gobaith Cymru Fund for All appeal 2026

- Monmouthshire Citizens Advice has contacted the council asking for support for its work. Members agreed to consider this matter as part of its budget discussions.
- Alzheimer's Society Cymru has requested the council to inform residents of the Monmouthshire Hub, which is in Monmouth Library. A news item has been added to the council's website.

6. Councillor ward matters

- Cllr. Duncan raised a resident's concern about the poor state of a short section of road in Llanvihangel Ystern Llewern. The road had been repaired by previous floods but the bank below road level had been washed away in the recent floods. The Clerk has informed Highways and the incidence is due to be checked
- Cllr. Graham was pleased to report that new road signs have been installed in Newcastle following his request to the County Council. The signs appear to be alerting motorists to the built-up area, resulting in reduced vehicle speeds. Road markings have not yet been completed but are presumed to be scheduled. The village gates will be installed on the new posts in due course. Cllr. Graham also brought up the problems residents are having with parcel deliveries which is believed to be due to couriers being unfamiliar with the area.

7. County Councillor's report

In an email message, Cllr. Chandler reported that flooding from Storm Claudia had affected some homes and businesses in Rockfield Village, and residents were being supported by council officers in the aftermath. Residents and business owners are encouraged to apply for the grants available through the County Council website.

8. Community Groups.

- Cllr. Biggs reported that **Community Green Energy Advisory Group** held its Annual General Meeting on 2 December. The fund had been oversubscribed and as a result some donations were scaled back. The group were able to distribute all funds.
- Cllr. Graham and the Clerk reported on a meeting held on 14 November with the **Village Life Community Project**. The group is seeking to use funding from the Community Green Energy Advisory Group to support the rollout of bleed kits within the community. A limited number of kits have already been installed at existing defibrillator sites; however, advice received from the Welsh Ambulance Service has prompted the group to review its approach. It was agreed that no further bleed kits should be purchased until the situation has been clarified. Further clarification is expected following a meeting scheduled for 16 December.
- The Clerk reported that **Llanvapeley and District Gardening Club** had been contacted to explore the possibility of running a competition to encourage residents to improve the appearance of the villages. While the Gardening Club supported the idea, it is currently unable to assist directly due to its involvement in a new initiative to organise a produce show. Members agreed to explore whether a competition could still be arranged with the support of individual Gardening Club members.

9. Clerk's report

- The Clerk presented a learning review of a conference on 12 November run by the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC). He identified three priorities for council improvement which included community engagement, audit readiness and training for clerks and councillors.
- Approval to recycle the old computer was requested. The computer is a council asset but is no longer used or needed. The computer is to be recycled through a charity known as Computers 4 Charity. The Clerk alerted members to the need for a new printer. The printer currently being used is not a council asset.

Resolution: To recycle the old computer and allow the Clerk to purchase a new printer (budget ~£150) when necessary. Proposed by Cllr. Lewis and seconded by Cllr. Graham.

- Following the meeting on 13 November, the Clerk contacted the clerks of neighbouring councils (Grosmont and Skenfrith) to explore ways of working together on matters of shared interest. This aligns with Recommendation 7 of the March 2025 Welsh Parliament report, which encourages greater clustering and the sharing of good practice among community and town councils. A positive response was received from the Clerk of Skenfrith Community Council, but Grosmont has not yet replied. Members discussed the clustering idea, with support from the Chair, though others noted

that Whitecastle must first address its own democratic challenges, including several vacancies and difficulty encouraging residents to stand for council. Highlighting the council's successes was seen as an important way to promote greater community engagement.

- The Clerk informed members of the training opportunities currently available and confirmed that any new opportunities will be circulated promptly to allow members to book onto relevant courses.

10. To consider planning matters.

DM/2025/01513 28 November 2025 Fast Track Full Planning Permission New silage clamp (15.2m wide, 36.5m long, 3.65m high) with concrete cast walls open at one end and associated works. Whitehall Farm Whitehill Lane Rockfield NP25 5NH

The Community Council raised no objection provided the proposed biodiversity measures are implemented, water and effluent systems are properly maintained, and any future external lighting is low-level, downward-directed, and wildlife-sensitive. The council recommends approval of the application.

DM/2025/01510 28 November 2025 Householder Extension and conversion of garage and single storey extension to dwelling to integrate converted garage into the dwelling. Tandderwen Penrhos Road Penrhos NP15 2LE

Members scrutinised the application and have no concerns, concluding that the modest, policy-compliant garage conversion and extension is sympathetic in design, contained within the curtilage, and poses no impacts on neighbours or amenity. The council recommends approval of the application.

- **Other planning issues:** Following concerns raised at the last meeting the MCC planning department has been notified of a development in Penrhos which may require planning consent.

11. To consider highways matters.

- Following concerns raised by a resident, a public footbridge in Llangattock Vibon Avel ward has been closed.
- A road closure has been scheduled in St Maughans on 17 December. Residents have been notified on the website.
- The member for Penrhos highlighted ongoing concerns over the lack of progress in resurfacing a badly deteriorated stretch of road in the ward's southern area, noting that some residents now avoid it when travelling to Raglan. The Clerk was asked to pursue the issue.
- Cllr Lewis also raised concerns about funding for road repairs and asked the Clerk to contact Cllr Chandler to clarify how much money Monmouthshire has received from central government.

12. To discuss churchyard matters.

- An application for a burial has been received in Llanvihangel-ystern-llewern churchyard. The burial is on 18 December and the Clerk as Burial Office has liaised with the undertakers and the church committee.
- Contractors in each of the churchyards have been asked if they can confirm their availability for 2026.
- The Clerk reported that the churchyard safety checks have not as yet been scheduled.

13. To consider policing matters.

- The latest police report had been circulated and no comments were made.
- The Clerk informed members of a new email system used by Gwent Police to provide information for residents. Residents will be given the details on the council website.

14. To consider the use of the council's website and community council notice boards.

- The new notice board in Penrhos is up and running and Cllr. Biggs was provided keys to the box.
- Plans are being formulated to provide one in Llantilio Crossenny village in 2026/27.

15. Section 6 Biodiversity Duty Reporting

The Clerk was asked to send off the report now that it has been completed.

16. To consider financial matters.

- **Audit Notice.** The council has been given a Completion of audit notice for 2024-25. The notice has been placed on the website. The audit raised a concern in regard to the accuracy of figures relating to funds transferred from previous community councils and a minor issue to do with the accuracy of variance figures. The audit opinion was therefore qualified.
- Members discussed a request from the Clerk to increase his hours to 35 a month. The Clerk's statutory duties, combined with additional specialist roles in burial administration, website management, and payroll, now exceed the capacity of the current 30 contracted hours per month. Increasing the allocation to 35 hours is necessary to meet legal, financial, and governance obligations to a high standard and to manage upcoming audit demands responsibly.

Resolution: To employ the Clerk for 35 hours a month from April 2026 – all other conditions to stay the same. Proposed by Cllr. Lewis and seconded by Cllr. Graham.

- **Budget.** The Clerk provided updated budget information for 2026/27 and asked members to discuss each of the budget categories with special attention given to the items below.

Community services and maintenance. It was agreed to continue support for MCC Rights of Way and to provide a replacement notice board for Llantilio Crossenny.

Grants and donations. Members agreed to a reduced budget for Cross Ash School Parents, Teachers and Friends Association which will enable the council to respond to requests for support. Monmouthshire Citizens Advice have not been supported in previous years but the latest information has provided a strong case for the council to renew its support. St Cadoc's Community provided a strong case for support and are custodians of the council's historic hand bells. Likewise, The Village Life Community Project provided a compelling case for continued support and members decided to match the level of support requested.

Support for the maintenance of local churchyards is included in the Grants and donations budget. The council is aware that the church committee in Llantilio Crossenny is aiming to improve biodiversity in the churchyard as part of the Eco Church initiative and have asked for financial support for this project. The council is pleased to support this initiative and asks the church committee to provide a request for funding when all costs are known.

Spending on grants and donations is covered by expenditure allowed under s137 LGA 1972 and power of well-being.

Upkeep of WCC churchyards: Members agreed to continue its maintenance schedule for each churchyard and to improve the path in Llangattock Vibon Avel. Significant work has been completed in Llanvihangel-ystern-llewern this year and no further work has been scheduled.

Reserves: The council has been advised by One Voice Wales on an appropriate level of reserves for a small council. Members agreed it was appropriate to add a £1000 to the budget to maintain reserve levels.

Resolution: To approve a budget of for 2026/27 of £27,141 which is an increase of 3.3% on 2025/26. Proposed by Cllr. Lewis and seconded by Cllr. Graham.

Expenditure type	Amount
Community services and maintenance	£2,500
Contingency	£500
Council insurance	£950
Employee costs	£7,207
Grants and donations	£8,150
Member costs	£1,484
Office services	£500
Premises cost	£300
Services and subscriptions	£2,000
Training	£500
Upkeep of WCC churchyards	£1,700
Website and IT	£350
Addition to reserves	£1,000
Total	£27,141

- Members were asked to approve a direct debit payment. The payment to the Information Commissioner's Office in 2024/25 was £40 which increases to £52 in 2025/26.
Resolution: To approve an annual direct debit payment to the Information Commissioner's Office to cover the fee for a Data Protection Registration Certificate. Proposed by Cllr. Lewis and seconded by Cllr. Graham.
- Financial Reports** The Clerk presented a balance sheet and a bank reconciliation up to the end of November 2025.
Resolution: To approve the financial reports. Proposed by Cllr. Lewis and seconded by Cllr. Graham. The documents were signed by the Chair of the Council.
- Payments for approval.** The Clerk presented the following payments for approval and supporting documentation for review.

Vision ICT Website hosting and support for February 2026 to January 2026	£273.86
L Taylor Secretarial duties November 2025 plus expenses	£433.75

Resolution: To approve the payments. Proposed by Cllr. Lewis and seconded by Cllr. Graham. The documents were signed by the Chair of the Council.

17. To confirm the date and time of the next meeting.

Full council Meeting at The Hogs Head, Great Treadam, NP7 8TA 5 February 2026