

1. Community Information

Update on proposal and consultation to change Powys voting system to the Single Transferable Vote system (STV).

The consultation with residents closed on 30th September. A report detailing the consultation responses is attached. 60.5% of respondents to the consultation were in favour of the change to STV, 27.6% were in favour of retaining FPTP and the remainder expressed no preference.

A two thirds majority of county councillors voting in favour of the change was required for it to happen. As required by the Elections Act (the legislation that empowered local authorities in Wales to change their systems to STV), a dedicated full council meeting was held for the vote, on 17th October. Those of us who favoured the change to STV numbered 21, far short of the two thirds majority required. 33 councillors voted to retain FPTP, 5 abstained and a small number refrained from voting.

The debate was informed by a report from the council's Head of Legal Services and by the input of the councillors themselves. Not all of the input was fully informed, in my view, but I hope that the range of input was sufficient to even out the balance and enable listeners to distinguish between fact, evidence and opinion. I have attached my own contribution to the debate, in case the community council is interested in your ward councillor's input. I would have liked to say much more, but councillors are limited to 3 minutes when we speak in full council. In this light, I amended my intended input several times as others were speaking, to avoid duplicating what had already been said by others and to correct inaccuracies in the input of some of them. Hence, the content of the attached might not precisely mirror the content of my input on the day.

The report, the consultation papers and the webcast recording of the debate can be viewed on the page for 17th October in the county council's online calendar, available on the public website, here: <https://powys.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=149&MId=8792>

The pathway to the calendar is:

Powys CC homepage > My Council (top menu bar) > Committee Meeting Information > Calendar.

The legislation permits local authorities to consult on changing their voting system only once in each electoral term. Therefore this proposal cannot be brought to full council again until the electoral term that will begin in 2027.

On 18th September, I held a community meeting about STV in Bwlch village hall, supported by Mat and Nia from ERS Cymru. Seven people attended and the small number enabled a rich and collegiate conversation. I recorded the event and am happy to share the recording with anyone who would like to listen to it. I would also be delighted to hold more events like it, should any residents wish to come together to learn more about STV (and other voting systems), share their own knowledge and experience about STV and/or other systems, and explore together what different systems might mean for democracy in Powys.

Changes to Health Services

Powys Teaching Health Board has approved proposals for what are being termed temporary changes to some minor injury and ward-based services in the county. The opening hours for the Minor Injury Units in Brecon and Llandrindod Wells will change from 24-hour opening to 8am-8pm opening. The clinical model for inpatient care in Brecon, Bronllys, Llanidloes and Newtown will change to refocus on supporting the flow of patients out of hospital and their reablement and resettlement in the community (detail below).

Both proposals will be introduced on a temporary basis for a 6 month period beginning by December.

The changes aim to respond to challenges facing the NHS and local patients and to stabilise the delivery of key services so that discussion and debate can take place with the public, staff and wider stakeholders to agree the future permanent shape of safe and sustainable health services in the county.

The temporary changes are as follows:

- The Minor Injuries Units in Brecon and Llandrindod Wells will open from 8am to 8pm (currently 24 hours, but the service is subject to frequent overnight closures at short notice).
- Graham Davies Ward in Llanidloes will focus on patients who are assessed as 'Ready To Go Home', to enable timely discharge from hospital and to prevent patient deconditioning caused by hospital stays extending beyond fitness to be discharged.
- Llewelyn Ward in Bronllys, Epynt Ward in Brecon and Brynheulog Ward in Newtown Hospital will focus on patients who are assessed as requiring more specialised rehabilitation in a community hospital setting.

Other urgent care services such as 111 and ShropDoc are unchanged.

The agenda and papers for the meeting of the Health Board on 10th October 2024 at which the changes were discussed and agreed, and the webcast recording of the meeting, are available from the Health Board website at <https://pthb.nhs.wales/about-us/the-board/board-meetings/2024/13/>

Regular updates on the temporary changes will be presented to future meetings of the Health Board.

Shared Prosperity Fund grants and awards

Just over £26 million has been allocated to Powys under the Shared Prosperity Fund for 2022-2025. The Powys SPF Local Partnership Board is responsible for deciding the projects to be funded.

The partnership includes Powys County Council, Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority, Powys Teaching Health Board, NPTC Group of Colleges, Business Wales, Mid Wales Regional Skills Partnership, Mid Wales Tourism, Mid Wales Manufacturing Group, Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations, Wales YFC, NFU Cymru, Farmers' Union of Wales, Chambers Wales, and One Voice Wales.

A number of new projects have been awarded SPF funding in recent months, across a range of themes and categories.

Category: Resilient, healthy and safe neighbourhoods

Six projects have been awarded a total of £4.59m in this category, to improve communities and buildings.

The successful projects are:

- Community Hall Decarbonisation: £1,717,559, to Powys County Council's Property Department, to work with 18 community halls to reduce their energy use and carbon footprints.
- Rebuilding Community Foundations: £1,717,257, to Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations (PAVO), for the second phase of a scheme supporting the managers of community buildings to make them more self-sustaining (including installing electric vehicle charging points).
- Transition and Resilience Scheme to support the Arts and Culture Service: £687,999, to Powys County Council's Cultural Services, for grants to support organisations which failed to secure multi-year Arts Council Wales backing in 2023.
- Welsh Language in Powys: £250,000, to Powys County Council's Education and Welsh Language Services, to promote the council's plans for the Welsh language and Welsh-medium education, recruitment opportunities for Welsh speakers and Welsh language support for businesses at the Maldwyn 2024 Urdd Eisteddfod.
- Property Flood Resilience: a further £200,000, to Powys County Council's Highways, Transport and Recycling Service, for a grant scheme to help households that have been damaged by floodwater to become more resilient in the future.
- Energy Efficiency and Decarbonisation: a further £12,999, to Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority, for a project delivering reduced energy bills and CO2 emissions for community buildings.

Category: helping businesses expand

Seven projects have been awarded a total of £1.85 million in this category, to boost business investment and create jobs.

The successful projects are:

- Powys Business Growth Grants: £716,724 to Powys County Council's Economy and Climate Service, to run a scheme to help business in Powys fund work that will either create or safeguard jobs.
- Hay Festival: £250,000, to Hay Festival Foundation, to help support the Winter Weekend in the short-term and for a feasibility study to look at the best way of securing its long-term future.
- BEACON Mid-Wales: £249,999, to Aberystwyth University, for a project providing support and open-access to AgriTech/biorefining scale-up facilities, training and expertise.

- NutriReValorise: £248,868, to University of South Wales, to help key rural industrial sectors, including agriculture, switch to more productive ways of dealing with nutrient rich waste.
- Preparing to Grow: £195,595, to University of Wales Trinity Saint David, to provide bespoke support to the leaders and senior staff at 70 Powys businesses looking to increase in size from small to medium-sized companies.
- Growing Mid Wales Careers: £144,310, to NPTC Group of Colleges, for a work experience app that can be used by schools, colleges and employers in Powys, to help them connect and arrange placements for students.
- Mid Wales Business Energy Efficiency Boost: a further £43,014, to Severn Wye Energy Agency, to help small and medium-sized businesses reduce their energy bills and CO2 emissions.

Category: boosting skills and job prospects

Five projects have received a total of £750,000 in this category, to support people to find work or secure better jobs.

The successful projects are:

- Accelerating Decarbonisation and Productivity through Training and Skills: £250,000, to University of Sheffield AMRC Cymru, to provide 80 employees at 16 companies with training in advanced manufacturing techniques.
- Green Digital Transformation: £248,287, to Aberystwyth University, to provide training for Powys businesses which are seeking investment for, or commissioning, new digital systems.
- Transition into Meaningful Employment: £124,183, to Powys County Council's Economy and Climate Service, for employment guidance, support and mentoring for young people aged 16-19.
- Digital Confidence Powys: £99,068, to Cwmpas, for a project offering digital inclusion advice and training in community and council run settings, and for some equipment for those without internet access.
- Preparing for Sustainable Futures: £29,462, to NPTC Group of Colleges, to offer a short course on Sustainable Futures free of charge to students returning to education or looking to make a career change.

Category: boosting adult numeracy

Four projects have received a total of £476,000 to help people manage their money and improve their wellbeing.

The successful projects are:

- Making a Difference in Powys – Numeracy: £206,672, to Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations (PAVO), to run a grant scheme for charities and community groups who want to run maths related schemes.
- Family Numeracy: £153,480, to Cambrian Training, to run courses on managing household finances and helping children with maths homework, for low-skilled and low-paid Powys employees in their workplaces.
- Money MOT for over 50s: £61,397, to Age Cymru Powys, for numeracy training for older Powys adults, to help them manage their money, find or stay in employment and feel more confident solving maths problems.
- Greener Maths at CAT: £54,297, to the Centre for Alternative Technology, to run courses for adults which will boost their confidence in using maths while learning about energy, biodiversity or sustainable construction.

For more information on the UK SPF in Powys visit: <https://en.powys.gov.uk/article/14045/UK-Shared-Prosperity-Fund-Open-For-Applications>

Or email: ukspf@powys.gov.uk

Text message scam

The older people's rights team at Welsh Government has alerted me about a scam text message, shown in the picture attached, which purports to provide information to support people with the cost of living crisis.

The Department for Work and Pensions Cyber Resilience Team have acted on the scam and residents are advised to report these or similar texts to the police Action Fraud team, at the following link: <https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/>

Ty Brycheiniog multi-agency centre completed

The conversion of the former call centre in the Brecon Enterprise Park into offices for Powys County Council and partner agencies has been completed.

£3.5 million in UK Government funding has funded the purchase of the building and its refurbishment by the company Beacons Business Interiors (BBI), which has included refurbishment of the second floor to create office space for council staff, with zero-carbon flooring and LED lighting with intelligent controls, and a reorganisation of the first floor to allow for multi-occupancy by different agencies from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Powys County Council staff are likely to move from Neuadd Brycheiniog to Ty Brycheiniog in early 2025. Other floors will be used by partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The project created one apprenticeship and was used for site visits by carpentry students from NPTC Group's Brecon Beacons College.

Carbon-reduction measures at five Powys schools

Solar panels, batteries, LED lighting and loft insulation have been fitted at five Powys schools which have community centres attached. The work is expected to deliver combined annual cost savings of around £42,000 and carbon savings estimated at 23 tonnes of CO₂e.

The sites are Berriew County Primary School and Community Centre, Newbridge-on-Wye Church in Wales School and Community Hall, Ysgol Cwm Banwy and Canolfan y Banw in Llangadfan, Ysgol Glantwymyn and Community Centre and Ysgol Dolafon and Bromsgrove Hall in Llanwrtyd Wells.

The work follows similar measures implemented at school and community centre sites in Arddleen, Tregynon and Llangattock last year, and has been supported by Assets Collaboration Programme Wales grant funding from Welsh Government's Ystadau Cymru programme, and by Powys County Council's Schools Major Improvements programme.

The five schools are anticipated to be able to reduce their electricity bills by up to a third as a result of the measures.

The projects were all delivered by Ian Jones Electrical Contractors, of Caersws.

Bird keepers required to register themselves with the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA)

A new legal requirement enacted on 1st October 2024 requires keepers of poultry and other captive birds to register with the APHA, regardless of the size of their flock. (Some types of captive birds kept as pets and living solely indoors without any outside access are exempt from registration.)

Powys County Council's Animal Health Team is urging bird keepers who haven't registered to do so immediately.

Bird keepers registered with the APHA receive updates and guidance about disease outbreaks such as bird flu in their areas.

Keepers will be required to review their entry on the register annually.

Further information is available at: www.gov.uk/poultry-registration

Contacting the county council

Powys county council aims to be an open, accessible and responsive council. Set out below are a range of ways to contact the council, report faults or issues with council services, and make a complaint.

Opening a My Powys Account

A My Powys account can be used for a range of activity, including:

- Keeping a record of requests and reports made by the resident, and information obtained by the resident (such as school bus routes, as discussed above)
- Enabling the resident to view and track requests and reports
- Pre-filling forms submitted by the resident with the resident's address and contact information
- Expediting phone calls made by the resident by enabling the call handler to view and track the resident's requests and reports
- Enabling the council to send residents updates about their requests and reports

Residents can open a My Powys account here: <https://en.powys.gov.uk/login>

The pathway is via the 'Log in/Register' function at the top right of the county council's homepage, here: <https://en.powys.gov.uk/>

All residents, with or without a My Powys account, can contact the council by any of the following means:

Contacting the council online

- Use the online live Chat function on the website's Contact Us page, here: <https://en.powys.gov.uk/contact>

The pathway is via the 'Contact Us' function at the top right of the council's homepage.

- Identify the email address for the service required and contact the service direct (on the same Contact Us page, scroll down to the grid of different services at the base of the page)

Contacting the council by phone

General Enquiries: 01597 827 460

Enquiries for a specific person whom the resident can name: 01597 826 000

Contacting the council in person

Several transactions with the council can be undertaken at local libraries, Monday to Friday.

Library staff can signpost residents to the council services required and put them in touch with the appropriate council staff member/s for their enquiry.

Information about all Powys local libraries is available here:

<https://www.storipowys.org.uk/find-a-library>

Reporting an issue

Residents can report a range of service-related issues directly via the council's website, here:

<https://en.powys.gov.uk/article/816/Report>

Pathway: From the county council's homepage, scroll to the first row of options below the search bar. 'Report' is second on the left. The function enables the uploading of photographs, also.

Complaining and commenting about a service

Residents can submit complaints and comments about any council service directly via the 'Contact Us' page of the county council's website, here: <https://en.powys.gov.uk/complaints>

Scroll down to the grid of options at the base of the page. The complaints and comments function is the first option in the second row in the grid. There is a separate function (second grid on the second row) specifically for complaints and comments about Social Services.

Complaining formally in this way ensures that the complaint is logged and can be tracked by the resident making the complaint.

All of the functions outlined above can be performed via a resident's My Powys account, and 'as a guest' for anyone without an account.

1. Council Information

Supporting unpaid carers in the workplace

Powys County Council is now an active member of the Employers for Carers (EfC) Wales scheme operated by Carers Wales.

The scheme supports employers to identify, recognise, respect and support members of its workforce who are also unpaid carers for family members or others who have care and support needs. Census 21 estimated there to be 13,465 unpaid carers in Powys, 8,550 them of working age. Carers Wales and the Carers Trust estimate the true total figure, which calculates numbers of unidentified unpaid carers, to be between 22,500 to 25,800.

Powys County Council's latest staff survey drew 971 respondents, of whom 117 identified themselves as unpaid carers. 74% of the 117 stated that their line managers were unaware of their caring responsibilities.

For information, advice and support:

The support organisation for unpaid carers in Powys is Credu: www.carers.cymru

01597 823800

Carers Wales provides information, advice and guidance for all interested parties across Wales:

www.carersuk.org/wales

029 2081 1370

For further information about the Employers for Carers (EfC) scheme, visit:

www.employersforcarers.org/about-us/wales-hub/

County council team shortlisted for national award

The Procurement and Commercial Services Team were shortlisted for an award from this year's GO Excellence in Public Procurement Awards Wales, in the Best Net Zero Initiative section. Go Awards Wales celebrates the procurement achievements of Wales's public sector organisations. The same team won the Sustainable Procurement category at the Awards last year. The Awards ceremony took place today (5th November).

Nearly three-quarters of the council's carbon emissions come from its supply chain and a third of that carbon expenditure arises from social care. Supported by a Welsh Government Health and Social Care Climate Emergency Grant, the county council's Digital, Adult Social Care and Procurement and Commercial Services developed a Supply Chain Sustainability Portal to support social care businesses to reduce their carbon emissions and to improve managerial carbon knowledge. The portal assesses an organisation's decarbonisation progress and uses generative AI to create a bespoke carbon reduction action plan for the organisation.

The sustainability portal is now being developed to enable it to be used by all businesses within the council's supply chain, and the highways, transport and recycling sectors are next on the portal's development roadmap.

The work is part of the council's Climate and Nature transformation programme, which aims to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030 and the protection and management of 30 per cent of the county's land and water for nature by 2030.

Further information about the GO Awards is available here: <https://wales.goawards.co.uk/>

Powys County Council Climate and Nature Conference 2024

This event repeats the Climate and Nature conference held last year in Llandrindod Wells aimed at encouraging climate and nature community action in Powys

Last year the conference was entirely funded and organised by PCC. This year's conference is organised by a steering group of volunteers from communities around Powys, under the umbrella of Powys Action on the Climate Emergency CIC: <https://www.pacepowys.cymru/>

It is being funded jointly by PCC, EGIN, the Powys Sustainable Food Partnership and the Wales Climate Conversation fund.

The conference will take place on 7th December from 10am – 4pm, at the Metropole Hotel in Llandrindod Wells.

The theme of the conference will be what communities can do locally to address the climate and nature emergencies. Town and Community Councillors, members of community groups active in promoting local solutions to the emergencies and county councillors are invited to take part.

Participation is free of charge and must be booked via Eventbrite:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/powys-climate-and-nature-conference-tickets-1043448090327>

Climate literacy training

Running parallel with the Climate and Nature conference, the county council has arranged for the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) to deliver an online course of three climate literacy training sessions focused on town and community councils. The training sessions are free to attend, and are described by CAT as follows:

This fully funded online course will cover the science of climate change, local and global impacts and explore how this could affect the work of Community Councils in Powys.

Drawing on our Zero Carbon Britain research, we'll look at low carbon objectives in the public sector and create an action plan to influence others. Your output from this course will be evaluated by the Carbon Literacy Project in order for you to be certified as Carbon Literate.

The course will run over three evenings, from 18:00 - 20:20, on Wednesday 20th November, Monday 25th November and Wednesday 27th November.

To book onto the training, email melanie.garton@cat.org.uk and paul.williams@cat.org.uk referencing that you are registering as part of the T&CC conference package.

N.B. You do not need to attend the conference to be able to attend the training.

Please circulate this information and the attached publicity flyer to your local climate and nature community groups and invite them to attend. Two tickets are available per organisation.

Cabinet and Full Council meetings

Cabinet met on 15th and 29th October.

Cabinet meetings are open to the public and are live-streamed and also recorded, both for public view. The links to the live-streaming and the webcasts, the Minutes, and all documents discussed, are available on the PCC website.

The pathway to access this is:

PCC homepage > My Council (top menu bar) > Committee Meeting Information (select 'Cabinet and Committee Meetings') > Calendar of Meetings > The relevant date and meeting in the calendar grid

Items discussed on 15th October included:

- A report for Quarter 1 on items managed on the county council's Strategic Risk Register
- The Treasury Management report for Quarter 1
- The Cabinet forward work programme

The page can be accessed via the pathway above, or via this link:

<https://powys.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=137&MId=8087>

Items discussed on 29th October included:

- The annual monitoring report for 2023/24 for the Powys Local Development Plan
- A report on the council's corporate safeguarding activity
- A report setting out the inclusion of Ystradgynlais in the core hub towns, now five, under Sustainable Powys
- The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales's annual report for 2023/24 about complaints against Powys County Council

The page can be accessed via the pathway above, or via this link:

<https://powys.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=137&MId=8088>

Full Council met on 3rd and 17th October.

Full Council meetings are open to the public and are live-streamed and also recorded, both for public view. The links to the live-streaming and the webcasts, and to all documents discussed, are available on the PCC website.

The pathway to access this is:

PCC homepage > My Council (top menu bar) > Committee Meeting Information (select 'Cabinet and Committee Meetings') > Calendar of Meetings > The relevant date and meeting in the calendar grid

Questions from the public discussed at the meeting on 3rd October were as follows:

- A question relating to the council's approach to supporting renewable energy provision for council tenancies.
- A question relating to the potential link between the closing of sixth forms in Powys and the council's problems with attracting, recruiting and retaining staff.

Other agenda items considered and approved included:

- Budget virements requested by the Adult Social Care service and recommended by Cabinet, to be approved by Full Council
- Amendments to Sections 9, 18 and 20 of the council's Constitution, recommended by the Democratic Services Committee

- Two proposed Motions, as follows:
 - To request the UK government to pause the policy linking Winter Fuel Payment to Pension Credit entitlement and to reconsider introducing a fairer threshold for determining eligibility.
 - To resolve that PCC engages actively with local MPs and MSs to encourage Welsh and UK Governments to work cross-party to improve support for unpaid carers, to make caring a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010; and to provide emergency funding for respite care for persons needing care and support cared for by unpaid carers, to provide those unpaid carers themselves with respite from caring.

The page for the meeting on 3rd October is available here:

<https://powys.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=149&Mid=8390>

Full Council met on 17th October to discuss and decide on the proposal to change the voting system in Powys to STV, as described above. As noted above, the papers and the webcast recording of the debate can be accessed via the pathway outlined, or directly here:

<https://powys.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=149&Mid=8792>

Questions are invited from the public for all Full Council meetings. Questions must relate to the county and the services the council provides, and if accepted by the Chair of Council they will be added to the agenda in the order in which they were received. A total of four valid questions will be considered at each meeting, again in the order that they were received. Where the council receives more than four valid questions for a given meeting, the remaining questions are held over until the next full council meeting.

More information on public participation at council meetings is available here:

<https://powys.moderngov.co.uk/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD672&ID=672&RPID=9845814>

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11th November 2024