

## **MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 6th March 2014 at 10.00am**

**PRESENT:** County Councillor S.G.M. Howarth (Chairman)

County Councillors: A. Easson, D. Jones, M. Powell, V. E. Smith, K. Williams, S.White and A. Wintle.

#### **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mr R. Hoggins	-	Deputy Chief Officer, Regeneration and Culture
Mr M. Jones	-	Highways Network Management
Mr R. Jowitt	-	Waste and Resources Manager
Mr M. Howcroft	-	Assistant Head of Finance
Ms H. Ilett	-	Scrutiny Manager
Mrs E. Tapper	-	Democratic Services Officer

#### **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mr D. Maddox	-	Farmer
Mr J. Rowlands	-	Monmouthshire resident

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors, R. Edwards, M. Hickman, and A.E. Webb.

Apologies for absence were also received from Ms Stacey Harris, Street Naming and Numbering Officer.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

County Councillor S. White declared a personal, non - prejudicial interest pursuant to the Members Code of Conduct, Local Government Act 2000 as a farmer. Minute item 3: Public Open Forum, verge and hedge cutting.

County Councillor S White declared a personal, non – prejudicial interest pursuant to the Members Code of Conduct, Local Government Act 2000 within the capacity of Board Member of Monmouthshire Housing Association, Minute item: Pre – decision scrutiny of Monmouthshire County Council’s Street Naming and Numbering Policy.

### **3. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM**

The Chairman welcomed Mr D. Maddox and Mr J. Rowlands to the meeting. Mr Maddox expressed thanks to the Strong Communities Select Committee for recommending to Council that verge and hedge cutting should remain bi - annual where health and safety necessitated. Mr Maddox welcomed notice that all farm gateways would be cut under the terms of the Pollinator Policy.

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Mr Maddox expressed concern that the policy had been formulated with an apparent lack of consultation with road users and community councils. Mr Maddox felt that officers should develop a new coordinated approach to policy development with greater opportunity for consultation with interested parties.

Mr Maddox requested that the Committee considered drainage problems caused by blocked culverts. Mr Maddox suggested that the Authority could work with Community Councils to identify where drains and culverts were blocked.

The Committee supported this and stated that whilst hedge cutting was extremely important in terms of health and safety for road users, it was essential to remove debris to avoid blocked drains and culverts.

The late fall and heavy rain had exacerbated the issue within Monmouthshire. Mr Maddox queried whether cutting could commence on 1<sup>st</sup> August allowing leaves to go back into the hedges particularly as September tended to be the busiest month in farming.

The Deputy Chief Officer, Regeneration and Culture informed the Committee that the Authority had opted to invest in a gully emptier and stated that carriers would require flushing. We welcomed notice that the gully emptier would be fitted with a GPS system to locate gullies and that buried gullies would also need to be identified and dug out.

We heard that the Authority currently collects leaves using precinct sweepers, leaves which to date had been deposited in laybys. We were informed that the Environment Agency would no longer permit this given the potential for contaminated waste and that the Authority would need to deposit waste at approved sites in future years.

The Authority had resolved to invest in a leaf blower to blow leaves back into hedges in rural areas and would assess the success of this method going forward.

The Committee welcomed the Authority's attempts to address the issue of blocked gullies and drain and resolved to write to Welsh Government to request local flexibility in terms of commencement dates for hedge and verge cutting.

The Chairman expressed thanks to Mr Maddox and Mr Rowlands for their attendance and valuable input.

#### **4. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

i. The minutes of the special meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee of 7<sup>th</sup> January 2014 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendment:

RC Highways Operations and Traffic Management, Street Lighting: "Old Hereford Road" to read "Hereford Road"

During confirmation of the minutes the following issues were raised:

- The Deputy Chief Officer Regeneration and Culture advised that a more detailed analysis of the increasing number of day burning lights would need to be undertaken given the increasing number being reported.

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- We were advised that Torfaen County Borough Council was managing the disposal of the County Hall site and was due to take a report to its Cabinet regarding this shortly. We heard that the original intention was to dispose of the former county hall site as a whole, including Heddlu Gwent Police, but it was now anticipated that the site would be disposed of without Heddlu Gwent Police.

In response to a Member question, the Deputy Chief Officer, Regeneration and Culture confirmed that consideration had been afforded to leasing Magor Wales 1 to Heddlu Gwent Police.

- ii. The minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2014 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

During confirmation of the minutes we noted the following:

- A fence and trap system had been installed at the Authority's vehicle holding car park to remove newts from the site. We were advised that subject to favourable weather conditions and temperature and the number of newts caught, the development of the car park would commence in May 2014.
- The proposed Council Vehicle Usage Scheme, charging employees to take vehicles home was no longer considered feasible. We were advised that the Authority was planning to reduce its fleet of vehicles by working differently and more effectively.

The Local Member for Dewstow requested a breakdown of the Authority's vehicle fleet.

- The number of front line staff reductions had been minimal within Highways, Waste and Transport to date. The impact upon managerial and supervisory staff had been greater. 3 highways road workers were due to retire and these posts would not be refilled. We heard that the section was required to make a salary saving of £585 000 in 2013/14 to 2014/15 and that this would inevitably lead to some compulsory redundancies. We heard that the AEF for Monmouthshire had traditionally been low therefore structures were already in place to manage and operate within an adverse financial environment.

The Local Member for Overmonnow expressed full support for the Authority's duty of care towards staff.

## **5. REVENUE BUDGET FORECAST STATEMENT 2013/14 MONTH 9**

The Assistant Head of Finance reported an under spend revenue position of £1, 225,000 at month 9. We were advised that the under spend would be required to compensate for an over spend of £500 000 within the Children and Young People Directorate, £460 000 of which was attributable to redundancy costs, and an over spend of £800 000 in Social Care and Health.

During consideration of the report the following issues were noted:

- Budget savings had fallen disproportionately on the Regeneration and Culture Directorate.

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- We welcomed an improving financial position within Infrastructure and Networks, with a reduction of £197 000 in the forecast overspend position to £97 000. We heard that the Directorate had inherited an over spend of £130 000 relating to school meal catering provision.
- Concern was expressed that at month 9 none of the schools' transport savings had been achieved resulting in an over spend of £148 000 in the passenger transport unit. We resolved that this should be addressed urgently.
- A net shortfall in parking income was reported. We heard that the increase in car parking income assumed during the budget setting process had failed to materialise.  
Some Members felt that income forecasts should be based upon historical data in order to avoid budgetary pressures.  
We were advised that a comprehensive review of Car Parking had been undertaken and further to initial scrutiny by the Economy and Development Select Committee, the report would be taken to Area Committee for further consultation.
- Net costs of cleaning outsourced facilities management contracts introduced a pressure of £40 000. This resulted from compensation payments to staff for TUPE consultation deficiencies and a £25 000 budget saving assumption that has yet to manifest itself.
- An under spend of £304 000 was forecast within CEO.
- At month 9, the Corporate Costs section forecast an under spend of £1, 128, 000 in respect of single status and pension auto enrolment costs. We heard that single status expenses had been settled in full leaving an under spend of £781 000. This would be transferred to reserves pending the 2013 -14 outturn position.
- We welcomed notice of a dividend receipt of £138 000 from the Joint Crematorium Committee.
- Council Tax benefit continued to be less than anticipated.
- Less road salt was utilised within Highways given the mild winter. However, man power and overtime payments increased due to flooding. 10 land slips occurred within the Authority at a cost of £1 million and there had been a significant deterioration in the condition of the Authority's roads which would require rectification.

With regard to the landslip at Llanfoist, we were informed that the poplar trees had been removed and residents had been advised of the measures being taken by the Authority. The Authority did not believe that it was negligent.

The Local Member for Llanbadoc requested the insertion of the original forecast budgetary position in future reports to facilitate comparisons with virements and activity.

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We resolved that the report be noted. The Local Member for Llanbadoc requested the insertion of the original forecast budgetary position in future reports to facilitate comparisons with virements and activity.

**6. PRE DECISION SCRUTINY OF THE AUTHORITY'S STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING POLICY**

We received the street naming and numbering policy and guidance notes for scrutiny.

We heard that currently the Authority does not charge for street naming and numbering and that the proposed charging mechanism would generate an income of £10 000 for the Authority, excluding the 4000 properties included in the Local Development Plan. Pending construction of the properties contained within the LDP, an additional income of £8000 would be generated.

The Committee appreciated the complexities of the street naming and numbering policy and cited examples of problematic numbering systems and duplicate street names. The Highways Network Management Officer agreed to meet with Members outside of the formal meeting to discuss individual issues.

We received assurance that the Authority would engage with developers and planners at an earlier juncture to ensure that any marketing names proposed did not conflict with existing developments/areas. We were advised that the issue of post codes fell under the remit of Royal Mail; in rural areas a number of properties would be assigned the same post code, in urban areas, post codes would be assigned by street.

We heard that the budget of £8000 for the renewal and or provision of new street nameplates was insufficient to cover the number of requests received by the Authority.

We reviewed the proposed scale of charges and resolved that the fees were disproportionate given that a developer who constructs more than 76 homes would be required to pay little more than a developer who constructs 1 to 5 properties.

The Highways Network Management Officer advised the Committee that the proposed scale of charges fell within the Welsh average. The Committee requested that the charges enforced by Local Authorities in England should also be considered and reported to Committee for further scrutiny.

We resolved to note the report.

**7. STRONG COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14**

We received the Strong Communities Select Committee Work Programme from the Scrutiny Manager and in so doing the following information was requested and or noted:

- The Local Flood Risk Management Strategy would be presented to committee for scrutiny at the meeting of 17<sup>th</sup> April 2014.
- We resolved to remove Glascoed Gates from the work programme

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- The Deputy Chief Officer, Regeneration and Culture that the Library and OSS function had been assigned separately to Enterprise and Operations. We were advised that an order had been placed for a telephony system but that the front desk issue remained outstanding. The Whole Place Plan for Bryn – Y – Cwm would impact on future plans for Abergavenny Library.  
We received assurance that a progress report would be presented to Strong Communities Select Committee as soon as possible.
- The Scrutiny Manager invited the Committee to consider subjects for discussion with GAVO in view of the budget mandates and partnership working arrangements. The Committee requested that the Democratic Services Officer distribute correspondence regarding GAVO's Action Plan for information.
- Following a discussion, the Committee resolved to continue to hold its meetings at County Hall, Usk.

The Committee requested that the Scrutiny Manager and Chairman should meet outside of the meeting to update the Strong Communities Select Committee Work Programme for 2014 – 15.

**8. CABINET FORWARD WORK PLANNER**

We received the Cabinet Forward Work Planner for information. The Committee requested that the report, "Poverty In Monmouthshire" be emailed to Members.

**9. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

County Councillor A. Easson proposed the exclusion of the press and public during discussion of an urgent item, relating to Prosiect Gwyrdd, in accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the item involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the Act. This was duly seconded by County Councillor S White.

We resolved to exclude the press and public during discussion of the item.

**10. PROSIECT GWYRDD**

We welcomed the Waste and Resources Manager to the meeting and duly considered the information provided.

We resolved to support the proposal presented by the officer and welcomed notice that an interim report regarding Prosiect Gwyrdd would be presented to Committee in September 2014.

**11. RE ADMISSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

County Councillor S. White proposed to re - admit the press and public to the meeting. This was duly seconded by County Councillor A. Easson.

We resolved to readmit the press and public to the meeting.

**12. WASTE AND RESOURCES**

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In response to a Member query, we were advised that it was Council policy not to collect items placed outside of the brown waste sack.

We welcomed notice that the Authority's One Stop Shops were now able to accept cash and card payments for the brown bag collection scheme at a cost of £10 per annum.

A resident from Llanelli Hill had reported that the waste collection crew had failed to collect a purple sack given that it contained an oven chip bag. The Waste and Resources Manager advised that the Authority had a 12% contamination rate and that collection crews required clear guidance in terms of collection when serving 2000 households.

As part of the recycling review consideration would be given to methods of food waste collection.

**13. TIME AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

We noted that the next meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee would be held on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> April 2014 at 10am.

**The meeting ended at 13:05 hours.**

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