

**Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting
held at County Hall, Usk on
Thursday, 17th April 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**

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

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

County Councillor S.B. Jones attended the meeting by invitation
of the Chairman.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr. R. Hoggins	- Head of Operations
Mr. D. Harris	- Senior Project Engineer
Mr. R. Price	- Engineer
Mr. P. Mullen	- Infrastructure/Projects Manager
Mrs. R. Jowitt	- Waste Strategy & Resources Manager
Mr. W. Hodge	- Lead Operative Grade 5
Mr. S. Lane	- Area Engineer
Mr. P. Bevan	- Highways Superintendent
Miss H. Ilett	- Scrutiny Manager
Ms. R. Rawlings	- Democratic Services Officer

SCRUTINY OF CRIME AND DISORDER MATTERS

1. There were no crime and disorder items to scrutinise.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors M. Hickman, D.W.H. Jones, R.M. Edwards, A.E. Webb, K. Williams.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3. No declarations were made by Members at the meeting.

PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

4. No members of the public were present.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

5. The minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting held on 6th March 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

ACTION SHEET

**Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting
held at County Hall, Usk on
Thursday, 17th April 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**

6. We received the action list from the meeting held on 6th March 2014, and discussed the following:

- The Head of Operations had been in touch with some local farmers with regard to issues specific to Monmouthshire regarding hedge and verge cutting and why greater flexibility was being requested. The NFU at Builth Wells was forwarding correspondence from WG which had been received by them previously with regard to this matter and following receipt of that the Head of Operations would draft a letter on behalf of the committee.

It was requested that the Grounds Maintenance Department were instructing contractors of the guidelines with regard the nesting season and the timing of work to abide with the Authority's requests.

- The request to provide further information regarding the scale of charges for street naming and numbering in English Local Authorities would report to committee on 30th April 2014.
- With regard to providing information on Abergavenny Library and OSS, the Head of Operations informed Members that he was not in a position to provide a comprehensive update. Whilst the issue of contact centres was included within the systems review report on the agenda, the more general issue around OSS and the creation of hubs had been reported previously with the intention of putting more services together. No information was available to update on Abergavenny Library. Whilst the Authority's decision remains to develop a new library, there had been various reports and ideas on how the money could be best spent. At present this had not progressed as a building project and a report would be presented to Members in the fullness of time to seek their views.

We resolved to note the action list for information.

POLLINATOR POLICY PETITIONS

7. We received a report advising Member of two petitions received by Full Council in order for Members to make a decision on what action, if any, they would like as a result of the same.

Two petitions had been presented at Full Council on 27th February 2014, one in favour of the pollinator policy which had been adopted by the Authority and one opposed to the policy.

The Chairman informed Members that he had received a telephone call from Mr. Maddocks who had been led to believe that as a result of the decision of

**Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting
held at County Hall, Usk on
Thursday, 17th April 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**

Full Council, Town and Community Councils would be notified of any pollinator works in their location and that if the Community Council had an issue with highway safety they would inform the Authority accordingly.

The Chairman asked that this matter be taken up with the Operations Manager and it was agreed that the committee would consider the policy prior to the end of the current financial year to consider any costs or savings incurred as a result of implementing the policy.

LOCAL FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

8. We received a report updating Members on the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and other matters relating to flooding in Monmouthshire.

We were informed that:

- The committee had received the draft strategy eighteen months previously prior to the public consultation stage. Comments had been included in the final draft and the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy had been submitted to Welsh Government and had received ministerial approval in April, a month behind the target date of March 2014. The Authority were in the top quartile of authorities signing off the strategy and a number of other authorities had still not completed their strategy.
- As part of the strategy, there was a requirement to develop a series of objectives and measures which were provided in a spreadsheet for Members, summarising the measures, the timescales for which could be viewed on the Council's web page.
- As the Flood Risk Management Plan was produced the actions would continue to be reviewed.
- Officers had reviewed individual flooding events as a requirement of the document and investigated and reported on incidents that included five or more properties.
- There had been no events that fitted that criteria during the adverse weather conditions from December 2013 to February 2014, nevertheless officers treated any events during that period as important to get a better understanding of the mechanisms to put improved maintenance in place to reduce any risks.
- Over the period a lot of information had been collected by officers and collated into one document. Information was given with regard to

**Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting
held at County Hall, Usk on
Thursday, 17th April 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**

property flooding and culverts that had been investigated in terms of their origin, extent and condition. Where issues of water running off fields had been experienced, officers had been going out and recording the drainage assets that were in place on a database. An example of a cottage that had been flooded when water coming down the canal and across the road was outlined, which we were informed that the resident had not seen the extreme flows referred to as a resident of the property for many years.

- Various other sites were reported which created a list of hotspots across the county and included a number of private drainage issues. The current maintenance practises were being reviewed to ensure that highways were kept clear and it had been identified that there were problems where clay and concrete pipes joined and the water was unable to pass through the culvert. The current software would record all the assets that could have a significant impact of flooding.
- As a result of the data gathering exercise, and within the powers held under the Land Drainage Act, requests could be instigated to remove blockages in private culverts whereby a notice could be served on owners to ensure culverts were cleared. Whilst the Authority were able to increase the size of culverts to accommodate increased flows, it held no powers to force riparian owners to increase the size of their systems.
- The Authority would ensure that their own culvert systems were maintained and it was reasonable to apply the same principles to third parties. If culverts were not structurally affected there would be no action taken in instances that were unusual one-off events.

Members raised the following:

- Wonastow Road had been omitted from the list and this area had been greatly affected during the flooding at the beginning of the year. We were informed that only the sites which had been reported at the time were on the list which had been compiled off the database. Officers were aware of the various different size culverts at this site and to overcome the problems there the channel would need to be widened and all culverts replaced. Officers had not been aware that any properties were flooded at this site. The Local Member informed officers of the danger when driving through the flood water and that the property Little Garth had flooded.
- Concern was expressed with regard to the debris under the Wye Bridge and Monnow Bridge. We were informed that the Head of Operations had contacted NRW and had received information that they

**Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting
held at County Hall, Usk on
Thursday, 17th April 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**

would be clearing the debris in the forthcoming week. Officers would continue to monitor the sites. Information was requested with regard to who the elected Member representative was on NRW. Whilst it was raised that Councillor S.B. Jones was the Member representative on the Flood Risk Management Group which covered the whole of Wales, the responsibility was moving towards the Internal Drainage Board which had Member representation.

- With regard to Natural Resources Wales it was requested that a report be received with regard to the structure, membership and responsibility for all Members and the Cabinet Member would approach Jeremy Parr with regard to attending a Member Briefing Session.
- Concerns were expressed with regard to the development of further housing within the county, which were not within an identified area of flooding but could be subject to flooding from run-off water. We were informed that as part of the Flood Risk Management Plan, work had been undertaken and was on-going identifying those that could fall within the 1:1000 events to identify those at risk. When considering the next Local Development Plan Members would need to take into account both the Strategy and the Flood Risk Management Plan. Improved maps had been requested from the Environment Agency who had undertaken studies of each site within the LDP and officers had a view from a land drainage perspective.
- Natural Resources Wales were a statutory consultee on planning applications and if the Internal Drainage Board were not being consulted on applications within their area, this matter should be raised with the Planning Department.
- Local residents and Community and Town Councils should be encouraged to monitor culverts within their areas and report any incidents to the Authority.
- Officers had written to the Trunk Road Agency requesting information on their maintenance policy for two culverts in the Plas Derwen area, once a response was received officers would assess whether the policy was deficient and if so request that improvements were made.
- When the Flood Risk Management Plan was produced, which was estimated to be June 2015, more information would be available with on-going work which it was hoped would ensure that some elements would be clearer and therefore managed more effectively in the future. This would be reported to the Select Committee early in 2015. Information was awaited from the Environment Agency with regard to

**Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting
held at County Hall, Usk on
Thursday, 17th April 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**

maps that could be converted into a usable format which outlined the depth and velocity of flooding.

- There was a need to look at a culverting policy following the consent to transfer watercourses to the Authority the previous year, which was set out in the Strategy and a copy of the existing Environment Agency was provided for Members in the appendix to the report. Once complete this would report to Members and would include the avoidance of building culverts as open watercourses were easier to maintain.
- Sustainable Drainage Systems would come into effect in Wales in April 2015 which would move away from formal systems and consider other systems which would allow water to be drained away until safe to discharge.
- Concerns were raised with regard to how issues were prioritised as situations could change weekly with regard to different areas as well as the funding for such issues. We were informed that two applications had been submitted to Welsh Government with regard to landslips and both applications had been rejected. Officers were establishing systems to better manage flooding incidents and a grant from Welsh Government over two years would ensure investigation of these systems. The Authority were responsible for the highway system which included the need to require cleansing etc. In terms of putting in new improved and upgraded systems, there was no capital funding stream to support this.
- In relation to the EFAS scheme and bidding, the requirements were quite prescriptive. The Leader had also written to the minister advising of the costs incurred as well as those likely to be incurred in the foreseeable future due to landslips. In the meantime road closures were put in place which became a traffic management issue and a view was taken on whether to re-open roads and their importance in whether to divert capital from other schemes. There was no contingency budget available to use as it was not possible to anticipate these types of works and there was a need to balance whether there was a requirement for an emergency response. There was no certainty on where flooding would be experienced and recently some areas where flooding had never been experienced before required the Authority's response. Officers asked callers comprehensive questions in order to categorise priorities.
- During the flooding there were 150 calls for sandbags which provided information which was built into the database. Properties that did not fall within the 5 properties criteria under the Flood Risk Management

**Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting
held at County Hall, Usk on
Thursday, 17th April 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**

Plan were also responded to. There were properties that were not reported at the time which are now being investigated.

- Officers were aware that any additional work would require funding and the views of Members were requested regarding the maintenance strategy, in terms of:
 1. If the culvert is in good condition and not compromised, did they agree that no action should be taken.
 2. If there was a way to improve capacity did they agree it should be done.
 3. Did they agree that officers would look at improvements where five or more properties were affected.

- Members raised that there was no funding to increase capacity of culverts for one off infrequent events and that they were reliant on officers expertise in dealing with these issues. It was important to advise property owners on what they could do to protect their properties and with the community infrastructure levy there was a need to look to developers to contribute to sustainable ponds.

- A leaflet had been produced by officers for riparian owners which would be distributed for Members information.

We resolved to note the report and that officers should continue to work within their proposals that:

- If a culvert is in good condition and not compromised no action should be taken.
- If there was a way to improve capacity it should be done.
- Officers would consider improvements where five or more properties were affected.

SYSTEMS REVIEW OF HIGHWAYS, WASTE AND GROUNDS

9. We received a report briefing Members on progress with the implementation of the Systems Review of Highways, Waste and Grounds Maintenance which was commenced in 2012 and reported to Members in January 2013.

Members were informed that the following improvements were being implemented:

- The creation of a business unit had been extended into the integration of the management and administration of grounds, waste and street cleansing into a single unit under a single head of service.

**Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting
held at County Hall, Usk on
Thursday, 17th April 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**

- The combination of the county highways and infrastructure services with the burgeoning flood management role and the SWTRA services into a single business unit.
- The development of a customer contact centre to provide a better and more comprehensive response to customer's enquiries.
- Creation of these units had been approved through the Operations restructuring report that was approved by Cabinet in March 2014. The report created the integrated structures and delivered reductions in staff costs of £580,000 which included £130,000 reduction in administrative costs highlighted by the systems review.
- A further improvement arising from the review was the development of an IT support system entitled the 'Connected Worker' which was intended to make significant improvements in communications with front line work force and stream line administrative systems which contributed to improved systems with improved response times and feedback on projects.
- Progress had been made with the IT system and was presently being trialled to undertake various functions. Feedback to date had been encouraging and Members were provided with a demonstration on how the system worked.

We discussed the following issues:

- The Customer Contact Centre was consistent with what Members had previously been working towards with Tim Macdermott and wherever possible resources were taken from the service area to the first point of contact, to enable measured accurate responses via one call. Work on the structure was underway.
- The 'Connected Worker' system was outlined for Members which outlined information in allowing workmen to be more productive in their day to day work, following the systems thinking which had examined the processes. Examples were given which outlined how vehicle defect sheets were previously submitted via a paper format and this system allowed defects to be logged immediately through a handheld system and would be more streamlined and efficient.
- Each driver was trained to VOSA requirements in checking vehicles and submitted data via a live electronic system. Anything required beyond those checks would be carried out by a qualified person.

**Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting
held at County Hall, Usk on
Thursday, 17th April 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**

When the vehicle registration was entered in the system it told the worker what to check as different types of vehicles required different checks. This was one of twenty apps that were being developed to allow proper data analysis of all vehicles

- This system was being developed in highways and took out the administrative burden of vehicle checks whilst any faults could be reported immediately. The Transport Manager as the responsible officer for vehicles would roll out the system across the Authority.
- The workman was at the centre of gathering the information, it was imperative that vehicle checks were done to ensure that vehicles were roadworthy and there were no problems, so when the device was used they could not access other areas such as timesheets and other work until the vehicle check had been completed. Supervisors or anyone with access could then go into the back office system to see anything that had been logged in order to check if there were any defects and order parts and create the job for the fitter.
- The system also allowed personnel to access payroll information rather than timesheets having to be completed, taken to Raglan to be checked in before being input into the system. All payroll information was now checked electronically.
- There were tracking systems on vehicles to record speed and times that vehicles were being used.
- The system was aimed at ensuring that all vehicles were legally roadworthy and that all health and safety elements were covered, it was not about management of the whole fleet at present.
- All crews were trained on using the system and each was dependent on the service needs. It created live information and ensured that there were no delays through paperwork being submitted. The system would allow for the better management of data and as the system evolved information on other issues, such as pothole reporting could be responded to in a shorter time as information would be readily available on the system and would allow workmen to be more easily proactive as part of the organisation.

**Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting
held at County Hall, Usk on
Thursday, 17th April 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**

- SRS were developing the system which was bespoke and being developed for Monmouthshire. The system would allow a change in the culture and roles of officers and would be linked into the restructure.
- In terms of lone working, when people were out working at night, the system could be linked that if they did not arrive at destination that an alarm would be sent out to the Manager who would then be able to phone them to identify their location.
- More applications and information could be added to the system when further development was required.
- The information was not currently in lease vehicles and should Members wish they could request information from the Transport Manager in this regard.

We resolved to note the information and supported the system in progressing the information management within the service.

CHARGES FOR STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING

10. This item was deferred for consideration at the Special Meeting of the Strong Communities Select Committee to be held Wednesday, 30th April 2014 at 10.00 a.m.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2013/14 MONTH 10 FORECAST OUTTURN STATEMENT

11. We received a report presenting the forecast outturn capital expenditure position as at month 10 for schemes relating to this committee compared to the budget for the year, as follows:
 - An adjusted budget of £10,222,000 being based upon £7,292,000 original 2013/14 approval, £6,703,000 slippage from 2012/13, £2,806,000 of budget revisions, less £49,000 virements to other select areas and less provisionally slipping £6,530,000 into 2014/15;
 - Actual expenditure was £6,851,000 being 67% of the adjusted budget at month 10, compared to £10,755,000 at month 10 of 2012/13;
 - A forecast net underspend of £110,000 resulting from under spends on County Hall Demolition and Remodelling and IT Schemes.

**Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting
held at County Hall, Usk on
Thursday, 17th April 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**

Monmouthshire's saving relating to the County Hall scheme was £47,500 and the IT Schemes was £87,000.

Members asked whether more questions should be asked regarding slippage and it was reported that the schemes were progressing in a timely fashion. With regard to the cost to Welsh Water at Caldicot, the Authority had requested the diversion of the sewer the cost of which was for the Authority. It had been difficult as it had been identified late in the scheme with very little negotiation.

In terms of S106 money for Caldicot Astro Turf, we were informed that there was a timing issue in reporting this had originally been reporting to Cabinet in April but had been deferred and had not yet reported to Cabinet for approval. In terms of information with regard to funding for Usk Rugby Club, information would be sought and Members informed accordingly. Concerns were expressed that should projects not move forward this money would be lost.

Members requested the following information:

- An explanation on the detail of virements for ICT schemes.
- There was no information on spend for the Abergavenny Cattle Market site, were the Authority on target and any costings or overspends.
- Information on the £270,000 unfinanced expenditure at item 5.12.

We resolved to note the information on the month 10 forecast outturn position for the 2013/14 capital programme for schemes within the select committee portfolio.

**STRONG COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE WORK
PROGRAMME/CABINET FORWARD WORK PLANNER**

12. We received the Work Programme for the Strong Communities Select Committee and the Forward Work Planner for Cabinet and Council Business.

A Call-in meeting would be held on 30th April 2014 which would consider the Cabinet Decision regarding Sale of Land at Mynyddbach. This meeting would also consider an item following presentation of a petition to Full Council with regard to speed management and the Street Naming and Numbering Policy.

The meeting on the 5th June 2014 would receive reports on Performance Monitoring, Quarterly Budget Monitoring and Affordable Housing.

Clarification would be sought as to when the Rights of Way Policy would be ready to report to Members.

**Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting
held at County Hall, Usk on
Thursday, 17th April 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**

The Review of Public Protection report would report in September following crime and disorder training.

We resolved to note the work programmes for information.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

13. We noted:

- There would be a special call-in meeting of the Strong Communities Select Committee on Wednesday, 30th April 2014 at 10.00 a.m.
- The next diaried meeting of the Strong Communities Select Committee would be Thursday, 5th June 2014 at 10.00 a.m.

The meeting terminated at 1.45 p.m.