

**Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting
held at County Hall, Usk on
Thursday, 5th June 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**

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

County Councillors: D.L.S. Dovey, A. Easson, S. Jones, V.E. Smith, S. White and K. Williams

County Councillors S.B. Jones and R.G. Harris also attended the meeting by invitation of the Chairman.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

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| Mr. M. Howcroft | - Assistant Head of Finance, S151 Officer |
| Mrs. R. Jowitt | - Waste Strategy & Resources Manager |
| Mr R.Jones | - Policy & Improvement Officer |
| Mr P. Keeble | - Traffic & Network Manager |
| Mr W. Mclean | - Head of Policy & Engagement |
| Ms D. Hill – Howells | - Head of Community Led Delivery, Enterprise |
| Miss H. Ilett | - Scrutiny Manager |
| Mrs. E. Tapper | - Democratic Services Officer |

PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE:

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|--------------|---------------------|
| Mr D. Maddox | - Devauden Farmer |
| Mr J. Miles | - Devauden resident |
| Mr N. Tatum. | |

1. SCRUTINY OF CRIME AND DISORDER MATTERS

There were no crime and disorder items to scrutinise.

2. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

We noted the appointment of County Councillor S.G.M. Howarth as Chairman of the Strong Communities Select Committee.

The Chairman welcomed County Councillor D. Dovey and S. Jones to their first meeting of the Committee and expressed thanks to outgoing Members.

3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

We appointed County Councillor V. E. Smith as Vice Chairman.

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4. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor R. Edwards, R.P. Jordan and A.M. Wintle.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made by Members at the meeting.

6. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

We welcomed Mr Maddox to the meeting.

Mr Maddox stated that the Authority's hedge and verge cutting policy was causing a health and safety risk due to overgrown cow parsley and overhanging vegetation. Farm gateways and signage in Devauden were yet to be cut out.

Mr Maddox referred to a school bus operator in Devauden who was currently experiencing difficulties accessing roads due to excessive cow parsley growth.

The Committee shared Mr Maddox's concerns and requested that any roads affected be cut frequently.

The Traffic and Networks Manager provided assurance that all junctions were risk assessed to meet visibility standards.

We received assurance that the Cabinet Member for County Operations would meet with responsible officers for the Pollinator Policy to ensure that they were conversant with its implications and how to action them whilst ensuring road safety was not compromise.

The Cabinet Member agreed to provide feedback to the Committee.

7. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

i. The minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting held on Thursday 17th April 2014 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following highlighted amendment:

Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, page 4:

"The Local Member informed officers of the danger when driving through the flood water and that the property Little Garth **was susceptible to flooding**"

ii. The minutes of the special meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held on Wednesday 30th April 2014 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

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We noted that a Member Working Group had been established to investigate the development of a Speed Management Policy for Monmouthshire. County Councillors VE Smith, S.G.M. Howarth, D.J. Evans, P. Farley and R.J. Higginson agreed to sit on the Member Working Group.

With regard to a reduction in the speed limit to 50mph on the B4598 and R64, the Local Member advised the Committee that a community speed watch was being held between 2pm and 3:30pm and that subject to police approval, local residents would receive training in the use of speed cameras.

The Traffic and Networks Manager had invited initial comments regarding the proposal to reduce the speed limit on the B4598 and R64 and speed monitoring would be undertaken at various locations prior to submitting a draft order.

8. ACTION SHEET

We received the action list from the meeting held on 17th April 2014, and noted the following:

- The Cabinet Member for Operations advised the Committee that a response from Jeremy Parr, Natural Resources Wales, regarding a Member Briefing Session remained outstanding.
- **The Committee requested that the issue of consultation with the Internal Drainage Boards regarding local planning applications be followed up with the Development and Building Control Manager.**
- **Clarification would be sought regarding the presentation of the Rights of Way Policy to Members**
- The Assistant Head of Finance informed the Committee that information regarding Usk Rugby Club would be made available shortly.
- Welsh Government had been contacted by the Authority requesting flexibility re: commencement date of hedge and verge cutting.
- In response to a Member question regarding the time restriction on S106 monies being spent, we were advised that monies were allocated for a three year period before they could be transferred to other projects. There is no legislation to state that S106 monies earn interest, therefore the longer a project's completion takes, the less impact and value S106 monies have. In accordance with the Authority's Treasury Management

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Strategy, S106 monies are administered collectively alongside other Council receipts.

9. DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN STATEMENT 2013/14

We welcomed the Assistant Head of Finance to the meeting. He informed the Committee that future budget monitoring reports would be reformatted to support more meaningful budget scrutiny. The reports would be less discursive, with adverse service areas highlighted for members' attention. Select Committee members would receive the financial reports at the same time as Cabinet, allowing members to ask questions in advance of select. Members' budget monitoring skills would be assessed in the first quarter to establish collective and or individual training needs.

We noted that the 2013 – 14 net expenditure budgets attributable to Strong Communities Select Committee oversight was £97 167 000 (credit). The related annual net expenditure forecast (using outturn data) was £98 803 000 (credit) which introduced an under spend of £1 636 000.

Despite this generally favourable position, a significant unanticipated deficit materialised in the Passenger Transport Services of £537 000 during the last quarter where previously only an adverse position of £150,000 had been reported by the manager. An exercise is currently being undertaken to review and revise administrative practices to mitigate the potential for such volatility in future. Some Members volunteered a concern that such work could fetter the innovation of the service. The Assistant Head of Finance volunteered his support for innovation, but not to the extent that it introduced such unanticipated adverse variances. He felt it could be addressed in a sensitive way, supporting the service whilst wrapping an improved financial net around it.

An under spend position within CEO's of £511 000 at outturn was reported. This was attributed to further employee savings and vacancies following 2014/15 structure changes.

Concern was expressed regarding the lack of resources and support within Democratic Services given the favourable budget position.

The Committee felt that there was a reluctance to provide Democratic Services support to the Joint Rail Transport Working Group, which given its strategic focus, required formal support.

Members felt that communication between Democratic Services and town and community councils should also be improved and queried whether Democratic Services was sufficiently staffed.

The Assistant Head of Finance remarked he had no detailed understanding of service standards in Democratic Services and recommended instead the

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situation addressed with the service manager, but proffered that very little of the underspend was actually attributable to democratic and member services.

The Committee resolved to refer the issue to the Democratic Services Committee.

The Assistant Head of Finance stated that the under spend within CEO been off - set by unbudgeted retirement costs. We noted that £500 000, from the Single Status reserve, had been transferred to replenish the pension and redundancy reserve.

We received assurance that the pressures going forward in the provision of education and social care were being mitigated by under spends in other service areas. We welcomed notice that the number of properties eligible to receive Council Tax benefit remained less than budgeted and a windfall payment of £67 000 had been received from Heritable Bank, above the anticipated recovery rate.

The Committee noted an under spend of £677 000 in Highways, £525 000 of which, was additional income from SWTRA work and an over spend of £72 000 in respect of car parks. This over spend was attributed to the delay in implementing price increases and a downturn in activity.

The Committee requested that the car parking review be progressed urgently in order to further avoid decline in activity.

We welcomed notice that a special meeting of the Economy and Development Select Committee was due to be held to discuss the car parking review.

With regard to the under spend position in Highways, members felt that some monies should be diverted to repairing pot holes in the County.

The Cabinet Member for Operations stated that the under spend was due in part to the mild winter and the decision not to renew leases on some vehicles whilst the residual balance was used to support other service areas exhibiting budgetary pressures.

In response to a Member question regarding an over spend of £24 000 relating to markets the Head of Community Led Development stated that Abergavenny market was struggling to attract market traders due to the number of permanent low value competitors within the town. We received assurance that this would be considered as part of the town centre regeneration scheme.

In response to a query regarding Abergavenny Library, we were advised that the Authority's current position remained to build a new facility. 81% of 600 respondents in a survey conducted by Friends of Abergavenny Library indicated a preference for the existing library to be refurbished.

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Consequently, further public consultation in open and accessible locations across the Bryn Y Cwm area would be undertaken in July.

The Committee cited Chepstow Library as an excellent facility which had increased foot fall in the town centre. The Committee suggested replicating this facility in Abergavenny.

We resolved to note the report and expressed thanks to the Assistant Head of Finance.

ii. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2013/14 OUTTURN STATEMENT

We received the Capital Programme 2013/14 Outturn Statement from the Assistant Head of Finance and in so doing noted that the current capital receipts forecast and the capital budgets in place for 2013 – 17 are forecast to be £33 369 000. The Assistant Head of Finance highlighted the importance of assessing receipt levels periodically given the significance use (£32 million) presumed in affording the Council's 21st Century Schools Programme aspirations.

We were advised that the over spend on Abergavenny Cattle Market was attributable to legal challenges.

We resolved to note the report.

10. WHOLE PLACE UPDATE: THINKING BIG JUNE 2014

We received a presentation on the concept of Whole Place.

Whole Place demonstrates the Authority's recognition that area regeneration can be achieved by working with, facilitating, enabling communities and gaining an understanding of what is important to them within an environment of decreasing public funding.

Whole Place has the potential to improve the relevance of public services and release the capacity and skills of the community.

We heard that Whole Place for Severnside commenced in 2012. Since that time a Town Team, with key themes identified by key stakeholders had been established. £225 000 of S106 funding was provided by the Authority to support the company's ventures in addition to £17 000 from Welsh Government. Caldicot Town Team had registered as a Community Interest Company in order to lever additional funding. The Town Team had been extremely active and had made visible contributions to the community.

The Head of Community Led Delivery, Enterprise believed that the success of Severnside Whole Place could be replicated in Bryn Y Cwm, citing the business improvement district as a significant opportunity.

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In response to members' concerns, it was acknowledged that Whole Place should encompass Bryn Y Cwm and its environs to tap into the capacity and for the benefit of rural communities.

Members queried the likelihood of Whole Place proving as successful in Bryn Y Cwm as in Severnside should the new library facility fail to materialise. In response, to a member statement that Severnside could only deliver Whole Place because it had the financial resources to do so we were advised of funding avenues available to enable Whole Place to succeed in Bryn Y Cwm.

We heard that S106 monies could be utilised in a more strategic and structured way. Members supported the alignment of Whole Place with SIL and S106 monies but expressed concern that monies generated within local communities could be utilised for the benefit of the town centre. Careful management and clarity of responsibility would be essential.

We received notice that £1.25 million was available to local authorities in the form of an interest free loan which could be utilised creatively and a further £1 million had been allocated to the Business Improvement District to enable Whole Place to succeed in Bryn Y Cwm.

The Committee emphasised the need to sell the Authority's hub towns by tapping into and promoting their unique selling points, obtaining the buy in of key business owners and branding towns to reflect their strengths.

New employment opportunities would be required to generate new housing developments and education within schools tailored to meet the needs of businesses. Members expressed support for the conversion of empty properties located above retail properties into residential use to restore the vibrancy of Monmouthshire's towns.

We welcomed notice that the Authority was currently negotiating with MHA to restore void properties for residential use.

The Committee felt that the Authority should sell the County and its attributes as a whole.

We noted the presentation and resolved to receive the WAO Review of the Whole Place Approach to Area Regeneration at the next meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee.

11. IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVE AND OUTCOME AGREEMENT PERFORMANCE 2013 - 14

We received the Improvement Objective and Outcome Agreement Performance report from the Policy and Improvement Officer in order to assess the Authority's performance and progress against:

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- Improvement Objective 4: “We want to work with our residents to reduce the impact we have on the environment and use our resources more sustainably” set in the Improvement Plan 2013 – 16.
- Outcome Agreement Theme 4: “Living within environmental limits and acting on climate change” set in the Outcome Agreement 2013 – 16.

The Improvement Officer advised the Committee that Improvement Objectives were set annually by the Council to deliver its priorities whilst the Outcome Agreement was agreed with Welsh Government, for a three year period, to demonstrate delivery of the Council’s contribution to the Wales Programme for Government Outcomes. We noted that Improvement Objectives were scored against the Council’s self – evaluation framework, ranked from level 1 – “unsatisfactory” to level 6 – “excellent.” Outcome Agreement themes were scored against Welsh Government criteria, defined either as “unsuccessful” – 0 points, “partially successful” – 1 point or “fully successful” – 2 points.

We welcomed notice that Improvement Objective 4 had been assessed as “level 4, demonstrating important strengths with some areas for improvement” and Outcome Agreement Theme 4 scored as “fully successful”. Further to this, a score of 8 out of 10 was anticipated for the Authority’s Outcome Agreement for 2013/14, thus the Authority would receive 100% of £800 000 funding available from Welsh Government, however all scorings across all five themes were subject to Welsh Government approval.

We received a detailed breakdown of how the Authority’s planned to and was fulfilling Improvement Objective 4 and Outcome Agreement Theme 4. In so doing we noted the following:

We received a detailed breakdown of how the Authority’s planned to and was fulfilling Improvement Objective 4 and Outcome Agreement Theme 4. In so doing we noted the following:

- It was recognised that currently 2,300 tonnes of trade waste is landfilled and contributes to the LA baseline for overall waste arising and if this waste wasn’t received there would be a beneficial impact on the recycling rates. However the Authority is legally obliged to provide a collection service for trade waste. The cost of trade waste collection currently stands at c.£400 000.
- The percentage of households satisfied with the waste collection service provided by the Authority had reduced but this was expected with the major change that was initiated in 2013.
- The use of CA sites had increased and the volume of white goods deposited at CA sites had also increased. The Head of Waste informed the Committee that the possibility of extending the opening hours of CA sites had been explored with Viridor but that an extension would increase

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the cost of the contract by £30 000 per annum per site. We received assurance that the Authority was working closely with Viridor to mitigate any health and safety issues arising from the increased use of CA sites.

- £173 000 was generated by the sale of brown garden waste collection sacks.
- Rejection at the MRF impacts upon the Authority's recycling rates.
- The ongoing recycling review into collections to determine whether MCC is legally compliant was discussed and the Committee were informed that the 12 Comingled LAs in Wales were working together to develop a consistent and strong defence to a recent Welsh Government consultation on collections and the statutory framework.

We resolved to confirm the evaluation scores based on the evidence provided.

12. 10 TONNE MGW STRUCTURAL WEIGHT LIMIT, PART OF CHURCH ROAD GOVILON.

We received for consideration the proposed Order to impose a structural weight limit of 10 metric tonnes applicable to all vehicles on Church road Bridge Govilon (REF 1018). The order was proposed in response to a structural inspection and assessment of the bridge which identified that its structural strength and capacity did not meet current standards to carry all vehicular classes and weights.

The cost of strengthening or replacing the bridge was estimated at £60 000 and given its location and limited use it was not considered to be as high a priority as other bridges, such as the Caerwent/Caldicot bridge.

In response to this, the Committee requested a list all structures within the County requiring strengthening and or replacement, the capital expenditure required to fund the works and any repairs to the Monmouthshire road network.

We noted that Asset Management Plans were being developed and the Authority was actively lobbying to extend the Local Government Borrowing Initiative which was due to end in 2014 to obtain funding for such repairs.

Concern was expressed regarding the decision to close the Wye River Bridge for six months during Wales in Bloom. The Traffic and Networks Manager informed the Committee that the bridge would not be closed for the entire 6 months, but for specified periods of time, of which the Authority would receive advance notice.

We resolved to note the report and expressed thanks to the Traffic and Networks Manager for his attendance.

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13. STRONG COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME/CABINET FORWARD WORK PLANNER

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

We agreed to:

- Defer WAO Review of Whole Place Area Regeneration to the Committee meeting of 10th July 2014
- Defer Park Street School Project performance update to the Strong Communities Select Committee of 18th September 2014.
- Add burial provision to the Committee work programme.
- Arrange a joint special meeting of Adults Select Committee and Strong Communities Select Committee to scrutinise the performance and outcomes of Monmouthshire Housing Association and to receive a position update regarding Affordable Housing.
- To receive a position update on Public Conveniences to include the sale of Raglan Toilets and the scheme of delegation.

We resolved to note the Committee work programme and Cabinet Forward Work Planner for information.

14. TIMINGS OF FUTURE MEETINGS

We discussed the timings of future meetings following discussions held at Council on 15th May 2014.

The Committee expressed concern regarding poor attendance at Select Committee and habitual non attendees.

We resolved to agree the existing diary and timings of meetings but agreed that flexibility should be encouraged, particularly when arranging special meetings.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

We noted that the next meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee would be held on Thursday, 10th July 2014 at 10.00 a.m.

The meeting terminated at 1.45 p.m.