

**Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting  
held in Steve Greenslade Conference Room, County Hall, Usk on  
Thursday, 10th July 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**

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

County Councillors: D.L.S. Dovey, S. Jones, V.E. Smith and S. White.

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mr R Hoggins	- Operations 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

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

County Councillor S. B. Jones – Cabinet Member County Operations

Ms N. Jenkins	- Wales Audit Office
Ms A. Rees	- Wales Audit Office

**PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mr D. Maddox	- Devauden Farmer
Mr J. Miles	- Devauden resident
Mr T. Lewis	- Usk resident
Mr J. Davies	- Gwehelog resident
Mrs K. Davies	- Gwehelog resident
Mr N. Tatum.	

**1. SCRUTINY OF CRIME AND DISORDER MATTERS**

There were no crime and disorder items to scrutinise.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors, A. Easson, R.P. Jordan and K. Williams.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations were made by Members at the meeting.

**4. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM**

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We welcomed Mr and Mrs Davies of Gwehelog to the meeting.  
Mr and Mrs Davies expressed concern regarding the speed restriction of 60 mph along the A472, an issue which they had raised with the local member, PSCO and Parish Council previously.  
We heard that Mr and Mrs Davies' property is one of 5 properties, located in a lane off the A472 .The 60mph limit along the A472 poses a significant danger to residents given that there is no pavement or street lighting. Mr and Mrs Davies requested that consideration be afforded to extending the 40mph zone which currently governs the village past the public house to the equestrian centre to include the existing 60mph zone.

We welcomed Mr Lewis to the meeting.  
Mr Lewis expressed concern regarding the speed at which vehicles, in particular motorbikes, were travelling along the Usk to Abergavenny road.  
Mr Lewis had recorded motorcyclists travelling and overtaking at speeds in excess of 100mph. We heard that Mr Lewis had contacted Heddlu Gwent Police on six occasions regarding the matter and had been advised that the police had no jurisdiction to act in the national speed limit area which fell between the 30mph restriction entering Usk town and the 40mph limit at Llancayo. Consequently, the noise and danger exacerbated by significant silt on the pavement and over hanging vegetation causing residents to walk onto the road, was intolerable.  
The Head of Operations advised the Committee that the Authority was in consultation with Heddlu Gwent Police to reduce the speed limit from Usk to the Steel Horse Café junction and speed limits across the County required review.  
We welcomed notice that a working group had been established to assess the appropriateness of speed limits throughout the Authority.  
The Head of Operations requested that Mr Lewis submit a written representation regarding the issue to the Head of Highways, copied to the Head of Operations.

**We resolved to invite Mr and Mrs Davies and Mr T. Lewis to the next meeting of the working group.**

We welcomed Mr Maddox and Mr Miles to the meeting.  
Mr Maddox stated that the Authority's hedge and verge cutting policy continued to be inconsistently applied causing a health and safety risk due to overgrown cow parsley and overhanging vegetation. In some instances, where verge cutting had been undertaken, it was sub – standard.  
This view was echoed by some Members present at the Committee.

All farm gateways and signage had not been cut out as promised posing a danger for road users; this was a particular concern on the B4290.  
Mr Maddox requested that Cabinet reconsider the Pollinator Policy and its implications for hedge and verge cutting in the County.

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Mr Nick Tatum, Abergavenny Town Council, stated that Mr Maddox had a vested interest in the issue. This statement was strenuously denied by Mr Maddox.

We acknowledged that growth patterns vary year on year and that it was difficult to envisage the most appropriate time to undertake verge and hedge cutting but we did not consider one cut per annum sufficient for B roads. Mr Maddox referred to a school bus operator in Devauden who was currently experiencing difficulties accessing roads due to excessive cow parsley growth.

We noted also that the size of agricultural machinery and vehicles had increased in recent years, increasing the width required on rural roads.

The Committee shared Mr Maddox's concerns and requested that the Pollinator Policy be applied consistently with particular consideration afforded to school bus routes in order to address health and safety concerns. The Cabinet Member for County Operations also emphasised the need to enforce the cutting regimes referring to private landowners.

**5. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting held on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2014 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

**6. ACTION SHEET**

We received the action list from the meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2014, and noted that Mr Jeremy Parr, Natural Resources Wales, would be contacting Mr Tim England, Area Flood Risk Manager with reference to providing a Member Briefing Session in autumn 2014.

**7. WAO REPORT: WHOLE PLACE APPROACH TO AREA REGENERATION**

We received the review of the Authority's Whole Place Approach to Area Regeneration for scrutiny.

We heard that the Whole Place approach succeeded the Authority's former project based, physical approach to regeneration. Going forward, regeneration would be social, economic and environmental delivered via initiatives, projects and services aligned in a geographical area.

In response to a Member question, we were advised that Whole Place was not a new approach but Monmouthshire's application of the approach was unique.

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The report was issued in April 2014 and its content referred to work undertaken in January 2014 as part of WAO's regulatory programme for 2013 – 14. The work included focus groups, interviews with members, officers, Town Teams and a review of documents and sought to answer the question; "Has the Council established a Whole Place strategy that will deliver improved performance and outcomes for citizens?"

WAO concluded that whilst officers and members were enthusiastic about Whole Place, there was a lack of a single agreed strategy and inconsistent understanding. Progress to date was slow and the Council, as yet, had been unable to demonstrate added value from the approach. WAO stated that the Authority needed to consider to how Whole Place could add value particularly in the light of the financial settlement from Welsh Government.

WAO arrived at this conclusion given that whilst officers and members were enthusiastic and committed to Whole Place the understanding of the new approach was inconsistent. This was exemplified by the Whole Place plan for Bryn – Y- Cwm being more informed than for Severnside, in addition to the Programme Board for Severnside having only met once at the time the review was undertaken.

WAO also concluded that the Authority had made slow progress in implementing Whole Place arrangements, and roles, responsibilities and accountabilities were unclear. We welcomed notice that momentum had started to increase and new governance mechanisms had been implemented. We noted that at the time of the review, it was unclear whether Whole Place was adding value to the Council's existing activities.

Some Members expressed concern that Whole Place marked a duplication of effort and fragmented Monmouthshire particularly in the rural areas. The Head of Policy and Engagement responded that the naming convention of Whole Place was of significance to ensure that it benefitted Monmouthshire's towns and their environs. It was acknowledged that each area required a different approach to reflect different priorities and challenges. Localism rather than fragmentation was the driving force. The next stage of Whole Place would include greater partnership involvement and service delivery. We welcomed notice that Mr David Jenkins would address Council in autumn 2014 regarding the Engagement Framework and that this information would be disseminated to Select Committees.

The Local Member for St Kingsmark commented that the Authority should identify its strengths and promote them in order to attract greater inward investment, in particular from green industries. The local member felt that the appropriate form of investment would encourage new schools to educate pupils to meet the needs of businesses and would retain Monmouthshire's

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talented population of youngsters. Section 106 monies were considered insufficient to achieve the intended outcomes of Whole Place.

We noted the following WAO recommendations and welcomed assurance from the Head of Policy and Engagement that the Authority was in the process of addressing them.

**Recommendation 1**

**The Council should clarify its approach to area regeneration by:**

- Establishing and agreeing the aims of Whole Place, what the programme consists of and plans for the future.
- Establishing and agreeing the role and aims of area plans as part of the overall Whole Place approach.
- Simplifying and agreeing terminology used to describe Whole Place.
- Outlining roles and responsibility in some detail, to include lead officers, select committees, area managers, town teams and corporate performance and improvement teams.
- Reviewing governance arrangements and clarifying and agreeing the relationship between Programme Boards and Area Committees if they are to continue.
- Communicating the approach so that there is a common understanding amongst all Council staff, members and local people.

**Recommendation 2**

**The Council should build on the new momentum that exists by:**

- Reviewing and evaluating progress to date, identifying and addressing barriers to progress.
- Clarifying leadership and management arrangements for Whole Place, including detailed roles and responsibilities.
- Developing clear and agreed arrangements for the future of the programme in the two pilot areas and the remainder of the Borough if the approach is to be rolled out.

**Recommendation 3**

**The Council should put mechanisms in place to assess the added value that the Council is getting from Whole Place by:**

- Developing measures of success for the Whole Place approach and two area plans that include broad outcomes, added value and community wellbeing.
- Improving programme management arrangements, to include performance, project progress, finances and risk.
- Developing an approach to systematic review and evaluation to inform the future of the programme.

In response to these recommendations, the Authority had taken the following steps:

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- The Bryn Y Cwm Project Board would meet in August 2014, 40 stakeholders had been invited to attend. The Board would discuss its purpose, intended outcomes and how to strengthen governance arrangements.
- The Caldicot Town Team had been established as a Community Interest Company providing greater financial leverage.
- Lower Wye would commence Whole Place in September/October 2014.
- A Community Delivery Team dedicated to Whole Place had been established and the Engagement team had been strengthened.

**We resolved to receive an update regarding Whole Place prior to December 2014.**

**8. FLEET MANAGEMENT AND HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE ENQUIRIES**

We received a response to queries raised by Members regarding fleet management and highway infrastructure matters from the Head of Operations.

As requested, the Committee received a schedule of council vehicles and clarification of the practice of employees using Council vehicles to travel to and from work.

To date employees of the Council were permitted to take home suitable works vehicles (approx. 30 – 40) reducing the need for secure parking at depots. In 2013 – 14, given the increased cost of fuel, this benefit was withdrawn. It was anticipated that the withdrawal would generate a saving for the Authority of £60 000 per annum.

Consequently additional parking would be required. We heard that additional land was secured in Raglan at a cost of £20 000 with £75 000 assigned for its development. We noted that the facility would be ready for use in autumn 2014 subject to no further delays due to newt monitoring occurring.

Staff affected, were already being asked to park vehicles at an appropriate depot overnight

We heard that any vehicles being taken home, considered as a tool of the trade or for the use of on – call staff would be liable for personal taxation on a “benefit in kind” basis.

We received a schedule of structural repairs for 2014 – 15 through to 16 and 17 and a schedule of landslips, all of which predominantly require capital expenditure.

We noted that capital expenditure available for routine repairs to highways and structures had been reduced to fund landslips meaning that routine works were being pushed back. With regard to landslips, the landslip at Grosmont had been particularly problematic. To date, £150 000 had already been spent and a further £700 000 still needed to be found. We received position

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statement of landslips in Monmouthshire and an explanation of the criteria used to assess the priority for addressing land slips was sought. We heard that no priority criteria currently existed.

Concern was expressed regarding the lack of funding available for Monmouthshire given that £200 million had been made available to English local authorities for repairs to pot holes.

The geographic profile of Monmouthshire meant that the County was more susceptible to issues such as landslips.

We heard that for the previous three years the Authority had received LGBI funding equating to £1.8 million per annum providing the Authority with a total budget for capital highways and structural works of £4.5 million. LGBI funding would not be available going forward reducing the budget to £2 million to undertake existing scheduled works.

We acknowledged that all Welsh authorities were exhibiting pressures relating to the maintenance of the highways infrastructure. The challenge for the Authority remained how to manage increasing demand with reducing expenditure.

**We resolved to receive the information and requested that the Head of Operations prepare proposed criteria for prioritising highways and infrastructure works including legal obligations on the Authority.**

**The report would be presented to the Committee at its meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2014.**

**9. STRONG COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME  
2014 – 15 & 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 pre – decision scrutiny of the Rights of Way policy to 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014 pending receipt of the green paper.
- To receive the Sustainable Energy Initiatives for pre decision scrutiny at the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee of 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014.
- Scrutinise the Review of Public Protection, included in the Cabinet Forward Work Planner for 5<sup>th</sup> November at the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2014.

We considered whether this item could be scrutinised as a crime and disorder matter. We concluded that the Committee required training in crime and disorder scrutiny prior to inviting Heddlu Gwent Police to attend Committee.

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- To receive a Whole Place Area Regeneration update on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2014.
- Hold a joint meeting of all Select Committees to discuss partnership activity and to scrutinise collaborative arrangements in October 2014.
- Defer Park Street School Project performance update to the Strong Communities Select Committee of 18<sup>th</sup> September 2014.
- Receive the People Strategy for pre – decision scrutiny on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2014
- To accept Cemetery Provision as a work item.

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

**10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

We noted that the next meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee would be held on Thursday, 18<sup>th</sup> September 2014 at 10.00 a.m.

We resolved to amend the start time of the meeting scheduled for 20<sup>th</sup> November 2014 to 2:30pm, with a pre – meeting for Members at 2pm.

**The meeting terminated at 12:52 hrs.**