

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 11th December 2014 at 10.00 am

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

County Councillors: D. Dovey, R. Edwards, A. Easson, V. Smith, S. White, K. Williams.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

County Councillors: P. Murphy, S.B. Jones and R.J.W. Greenland.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs. J. Robson	-	Head of Finance
Mrs. T. Harry	-	Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services
Ms. R. Hoggins	-	Head of Operations
Mr. M. Howcroft	-	Assistant Head of Finance
Mrs. R. Jowitt	-	Head of Waste and Street Services
Ms. D. Hill-Howells	-	Head of Community Led Delivery
Mr. R. Jones	-	Improvement Support Officer
Miss H. Ilett	-	Scrutiny Manager
Mrs N. Perry	-	Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

We received apologies from County Councillor S. Jones.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

County Councillor V. Smith declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest, pursuant to the members' code of conduct in relation to Coleg Gwent and Monmouthshire Housing issues.

3. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

There were no members of the public present.

4. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

We confirmed the minutes of the Special Meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held on 16th October 2014 as an accurate record and they were signed by the Chairman.

In doing so we noted the following:

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 11th December 2014 at 10.00 am

- With reference to Park Street School, a response had been received but it was agreed that Abergavenny Community Trust may need to be called in for a future meeting.
- Discussion regarding Raglan Public Conveniences would be brought to a future meeting

We confirmed the minutes of the Special Meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held on 24th November 2014 as an accurate record.

5. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING 2014/15 - MONTH 6 OUTTURN FORECAST STATEMENT

The item was deferred to a future meeting.

6. CAPITAL BUDGET PROPOSALS 2015/2016 TO 2018/2019

We received a report, for scrutiny and comment, from the Head of Finance which outlined the proposed capital budget for 2015/16 and the indicative capital budgets for the three years 2016/17 to 2018/19.

Members were advised to scrutinise the draft capital budget proposals, the issues were highlighted in the attached appendices of the report.

We were informed that the report heavily linked with the Risk Assessment, Item 9 on the agenda.

During discussion members were invited to ask questions and the following points were noted:

- Part of the 21st Century Schools programme included detail from 2014/15 as it included Raglan School.
- It was confirmed that Monmouth School swimming pool would need to be able to fund itself going forward in order to be afforded in the 21st Century Schools programme.
- The lack of receipts from the Abergavenny Cattle Market would not cause an issue in delivering projects at present. There may be a problem if Morrisons did not come in with the project.
- The compensation costs relating to Abergavenny regeneration were rejected by the court. It was felt that Members should be informed directly of such important information.
- The Cabinet Member confirmed that the business case for the swimming pool at Monmouth had been prepared and would be scrutinised shortly.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 11th December 2014 at 10.00 am

7. BUDGET PROPOSALS 2015/16 TO 2018/19

We welcomed a report from the Head of Finance to provide detailed proposals on the budget savings required to meet the gap between available resources and need to spend in 2105/16.

Members were recommended to scrutinise the budget savings proposals and consider what alternative proposals could be submitted by 14th January 2015. The Committee were asked to note Cabinet's intentions to continue to work on the areas required to balance the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Members were made aware that the reduction in funding for next year was 4.3%. The proposals made would narrow the gap but there would remain a difference of £10 million.

The budget process had been brought forward in order to give officers more time, when the budget had been agreed, to ensure savings would be implemented for a full year.

During discussion following the report, we noted the following points:

- A Member felt it would be beneficial to inform the public that the funding received was less than other authorities.
- The Chairman questioned how accurately the percentages on item 3.14 of the report reflected public opinion. A breakdown of the figures was requested to clarify this. It was agreed that the number of people involved in the survey would be important in understanding the accuracy of the figures.
- A Member questioned if the high figures that demonstrated members of the public felt keeping people safe to be the most important council service, could be connected to the reduced street lighting.
- A Member requested that it be noted that the street lighting in Over Monnow had become disjointed.
- The Chairman agreed that an update on street lighting be brought to a future meeting in March or April to discuss the implementation, and to ensure the budget savings were being made.
- A Member raised a concern regarding the proposal to reduce spending on highways maintenance. It was felt the upkeep of the highways infrastructure was imperative to delivering services.

8. SERVICE AREA BUDGET MANDATES

We received details of the budget mandates from Officers. During discussion the following points were noted:

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 11th December 2014 at 10.00 am

i) Transport Review and Fleet Rationalisation

- The number of vehicles would be reduced in relation to Passenger Transport Unit and Waste services. The fitters would be reduced by one.
- The position would initially be redeployed, moving to voluntary or compulsory redundancy thereafter.
- Driver training had been undertaken to ensure drivers were driving more fuel friendly. We were informed that vehicles were monitored in terms of fuel consumption and repairs.
- A Member questioned if we could look at an all over service for the whole authority. The Operations Manager confirmed that the Social Services vehicles were managed through Passenger Transport and were utilised across the authority as much as possible.
- It was suggested that if schools staggered the start and finish times, the amount of school transport could be reduced. It was noted that in some areas the primary and secondary schools did stagger the times, but cooperation was required from the schools.
- The Chairman requested clarification if the £31k saving related to the current year. It was confirmed that vehicles had been removed during the year, savings on fuel and maintenance would be made going forward.
- Staff would only take vehicles home if they were on standby or during adverse weather conditions.
- With regards to the purchase of new vehicles, each vehicle would be looked at individually and assessed whether purchase or lease would be most effective.

The Committee resolved to support the mandate

ii) Property Review

- In the next financial year £100,000 savings had been identified through the Asset Management Plan, and largely revolved around reduction of running costs, disposal of surplus assets, the generation of additional rental income and a reduction in rental grant subsidies.
- It was noted that the figures were revenue costs rather than capital receipts.
- A Member expressed regret that the TIC in Abergavenny did not provide a service on the weekend as it was moving for another rental agreement.
- The Chairman requested clarification on the 95% rate relief for community groups. We were informed that this related to rent rather than rates.
- Magor 2 building had one year remaining on the lease so was being used for meetings and training facilities. As the policy was to rationalise holdings not increase them, Magor 2 would come under savings in 2016/17.
- An Asset Management Steering Group had been set up whose responsibility would be the Asset Management Plan.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 11th December 2014 at 10.00 am

- A Place Programme Board had been established to focus on accommodation and buildings. The Place Board would be invited to attend a Strong Communities meeting in the following few months.
- A Member expressed that Members should be notified when a property was being put to market in the local area.
- The Chair requested to see further information regarding Magor 2.

The Committee agreed to support the mandate.

iii) Community Hubs and Contact Centre (1HR24)

- The contact centre intended to bring staff from the One Stop Shops and switchboards who presently answered telephones, together to operate an upgraded telephony system, to be implemented by SRS, in order to provide an improved service.
- The proposed office for the contact centre was a vacant office at Chepstow Library.
- It was noted that current staff were concerned regarding the outcome but were involved in the idea process, and provided support. Staff had been working together to put forward ideas on how best to take the proposal forward. It was agreed that the staff were most knowledgeable on what the public needed from the service, and the support was important.
- A Member expressed that he did not support the mandate in its current form and was concerned that Chepstow may not be the most suitable location.
- A Member stated that it would be beneficial for the contact centre to open on a Saturday and that opening hours should be consistent across Monmouthshire. We were informed that opening hours would be looked into further when the new system was fully established. It was felt that opening hours should not be operated on a 'one size fits all' basis, and should be assessed on local needs.
- The telephone numbers would remain the same as present.
- A Member suggested that there should be an extension of opening hours to correspond with the library opening times.
- Concerns were raised regarding the training of staff to provide an effective service.
- A Member expressed that it was difficult to support the mandate without a firm decision on where the contact centre would be based for Caldicot area.
- With regards to Abergavenny, a hub could be located within a newly built library. Other proposals included using Market Hall. Officers were putting the considerations together on an options paper for Members to consider.
- Firm proposals for Usk were to relocate the library and adult education service into the existing youth building.
- A Member queried that members of the public would struggle to contact the correct person with local knowledge. It was noted that even though the

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 11th December 2014 at 10.00 am

proposal did not create staff, it did bring staff together. People would be connected to the correct person.

The Chairman advised the Committee that there would not be another opportunity to agree the mandate, and a decision should be made at the meeting. It was agreed that the mandate was a 'work in progress' but needed to be moved forward. Members were not confident in the proposals relating to venues, but supported the idea of the hubs.

The Committee agreed to support the mandate in principal, but agreed that more work was needed to support the content.

iv) Waste Management – Efficiency and Realignment

- There would be an 8% reduction in frontline staff across the mandates. The posts identified would be released from agency staff. Operatives would have more responsibility where possible.
- Clarification was sought regarding the budget for street cleansing, as to whether the Authority was obliged to maintain this. We were informed that if the Authority had provided the bins we were obliged, if a Town Council had provided the receptacle they would be responsible.
- The Head of Waste and Street Services confirmed that they were looking to expand the work with prisoners for street cleansing.

The Committee agreed to support the mandate.

v) Waste Management – Modernising Trade Waste Services

- A Member questioned how many people used private waste company, and would a charge to the public drive people away from the service. We were informed that due to charges being introduced in January we could expect to see private companies move to recycling services. In a competitive market Monmouthshire did not hold the largest share of business. Customers were often from rural areas where the private sector would price themselves out of the market.
- The Chairman raised a query with reference to trade waste in that previously implementing a charge had resulted in a significant loss of income. If customers now return and pay us for the service would we have to double the waste processes. The Committee were advised that people were recycling more and using smaller waste bins.
- A Member suggested that it would be of interest to see a list of the businesses using the collection service under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

The Committee resolved to support the mandate.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 11th December 2014 at 10.00 am

vi) Waste Management – Waste Collection Changes

- At present there was a small supply of grey bags in stock. If there were to be any remaining it would be a minimal amount which would be used internally.
- It was confirmed that the issue of tiger bags would continue until a time where split back vehicles were introduced.
- Black bags would be phased in from April or May, as residents ran out of grey bags.
- There was a concern that without transparent bags people would be discouraged from recycling correctly.
- A Member suggested that better communication be distributed to residents to explain the new processes.
- The Chairman suggested that without supplying yellow bags, and encouraging residents to use any bags, could create a significant saving.
- It was confirmed that yellow bags would be collected on the same vehicle as black bags, and could also be taken to waste sites.

Following a vote, the committee resolved to support the mandate.

vii) Democracy and Regulation Services

- Income would be generated through the LDP.
- Clarification was requested if the street numbering charges would go through planning. The Head of Operations would investigate further.
- A Member requested further information on the management structure. It was considered to be top heavy.
- It was confirmed that the mileage allowance for travelling to Magor had been removed.
- There would be a management restructure, including Legal Services, under the portfolio of the Head of Democracy and Regulatory Services.
- A Member suggested that further information regarding the restructure could be called in if necessary.

The Committee resolved to support the mandate.

viii) Highways

- A Member asked how confident the officers were that the proposals would be sustainable in the long term. Officers recommended that Members considered that the mandate related to day to day maintenance on county highways. It was important to maintain flood and winter management, these services may take longer than at present.
- There was also a concern regarding the use of zero hours contracts. It was noted that there was a mandate within the highways mandate in error. This was due to a draft problem and should have been brought before Economy

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 11th December 2014 at 10.00 am

and Development Select Committee. The Committee agreed to discuss that mandate following the highways report.

- A Member expressed that reductions in highways was a huge concern. It was thought that making reductions would reduce efficiency, and result in an inability to deliver services.
- It was noted that administrative and management staff had been reduced, and the mandate now focussed on operational staff. Resources would be drawn from other areas to maintain services.
- The Chairman questioned if revenue from work on trunk roads for Welsh Government would be invested within the department. We were informed that income could be spent through highways but budgets would be looked at and prioritised.

Following a vote the Committee resolved to not support the mandate

URGENT ITEM OF BUSINESS

The Chairman agreed to consider the mandate included in the agenda in error, for Additional Market Stalls in Abergavenny.

During discussion we noted the following:

- The mandate was driven by an assumption that extra markets would create additional income.
- The Committee were impressed with the mandate and recommended that it be referred to Bryn Y Cwm Area Committee.

The Committee resolved to support the mandate.

9. WHOLE AUTHORITY RISK LOG

We received the Strategic Risk Assessment to provide Members with an overview of the current and future strategic risks facing the authority.

Members were required to identify whether the risks identified within the report were the most significant issues the Authority faced over the following three years.

The risk assessment ensured that

- Strategic risks were identified and monitored by the Authority
- Risk controls were appropriate and proportionate
- Senior managers and Elected Members systematically reviewed the strategic risks faced by the Authority.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 11th December 2014 at 10.00 am

During discussion it was noted that the report was more concise than in previous years. We were informed that there would be updates available on the HUB throughout the year.

- It was queried whether waste would be a risk due to the loss of grants from Welsh Government.
- A concern was raised regarding the risk of the infrastructure and highways budget reductions.
- The Morrisons project could be considered a high risk.

It was noted that during the next meeting of the Committee the risk log would be more detailed. We agreed that the following areas would be looked into in further detail at the next meeting in January:

- Highways
- Volunteer sector
- Waste
- Asset management

10. WORK PROGRAMMING

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

We noted that a Special Meeting would be held to discuss Anaerobic Digestion on Tuesday 10th February 2015

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

We noted future meetings of Strong Communities Select Committee as:

- Thursday 29th January 2015
- Special – Tuesday 10th February 2015

The meeting ended at 2.35pm.