

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Thursday, 15th June, 2017 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor J.Pratt (Chairman)
County Councillor A. Webb (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: L. Guppy, A. Easson, A.Davies, L.Jones, L.Dymock, R.Roden and V. Smith

Also in attendance County Councillor(s): L. Brown, R. Edwards and R. Harris.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

David Jones	Head of Public Protection
Huw Owen	Specialist Environment Health Officer
Gareth Walters	Trading Standards & Animal Health Team Leader
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Mark Howcroft	Assistant Head of Finance
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Paula Harris	Democratic Services Officer

1. To note the appointment of the Select Chair

County Councillor J. Pratt was appointed as the Chair of the Committee.

County Councillor J. Pratt took the opportunity to thank the Committee's previous Chair, County Councillor Simon Howarth and Scrutiny Manager Hazel Ilett for their hard work and assistance in handing over the Chair of the Committee. County Councillor J. Pratt also praised the work of the committee which had been undertaken during the previous administration.

County Councillor J. Pratt reminded the members that this is an a-political committee and hoped that members would respect this.

2. Appointment of Vice Chair

County Councillor A. Webb was appointed Vice Chair of the committee.

3. Apologies for absence

None.

4. Declarations of Interest

None received.

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5. Open Public Forum

The Committee was joined by Mr Peter Sutherland, representing Llanbadoc Community Council who addressed the Select Committee raising the following points;

- The grass cutting at Usk Island carpark is excellent.
- Working with officers of MCC there has been interim gate locking at the Usk Island carpark. The new burger van and gate locking system will be in place by the end of June.
- Dissatisfaction was raised that subsequent to the meeting three months prior regarding the issue of speeding at Llanbadoc no action had been taken.

The Head of Operations replied that work had not progressed and asked that the issue is referred back to the Road Safety Task and Finish Group.

- There is a container park opposite the Usk Island, which now has a marquee erected. Mr Sutherland has been told that people are sleeping overnight on site.

The Head of Operations advised that he would speak to officers in planning to ascertain the status of the site.

Mr Sutherland asked for action rather than further meetings as the issue does not appear to have progressed.

County Councillor L. Brown, a non-committee member, spoke of areas of the County having Community Speed watch schemes and voiced her frustration of the Police's comments that they would not run community speed watch schemes whilst the review was taking place. County Councillor L. Brown felt that the Police were using the review as an excuse for inaction.

6. To confirm minutes of the previous meeting held on the 6th April 2017

The minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee dated 6th April 2017 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

7. Public Protection 2016/17 performance report

Context:

To undertake scrutiny of service delivery across Public Protection services in 2016/17, with comparison to previous years. The Public Protection division comprises of Environmental Health, Trading Standards & Animal Health and Licensing.

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Key Issues:

Cabinet approved a report in March 2014 recommending budget reductions to Public Protection services for 2014/15 and subsequent years. In January 2015 Cabinet asked for Public Protection performance to be reviewed regularly by this Committee to assess any negative impacts. As a consequence six monthly reports have been provided to Strong Communities Select committee, together with annual reports to Licensing & Regulatory committee.

The report summarises performance over the twelve months of 2016/17, and highlights the following –

- The four service teams, for the vast majority of the services they deliver, meet the Authority's legal obligations in relation to Public Protection services.
- There have been some notable successes in 2016/17, for example improving food safety and animal feed compliance, supporting major developments (A465) and events (Eisteddfod, Abergavenny Food Festival, etc.).
- As detailed in Appendix A, most proactive and reactive work is being carried out professionally, within prescribed response times. There are only a few exceptions, due to increased demand, e.g. some slippage in housing and private water inspections, which will be improved for 2017/18.
- Annual reports will continue to be made to this Committee to assess performance over time, and help inform future priorities noting the competing demands.
- Services may struggle to take on any new statutory duties that protect the public and the environment, and therefore funding must be sought to support any new work. In addition, where work is onerous on Officer time, funding will be pursued from major developers, etc.
- Future strategies for sustaining Public Protection services will be developed, (to include further income generation and collaboration), locally, regionally and nationally.

Member Scrutiny:

In respect of landlord harassment a Member asked how the new provisions in the Housing Wales Act 2014 would help tenants. The Member spoke of incidents locally where letting agents collecting rent allows landlords to step back from their responsibilities.

A Member asked if the large number of outside agencies resulted in overlapping of work.

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Considering the volume and scope of their remit and in view of the recent budget cuts, a Member praised and commended the Officers for the high quality of their work.

Whilst on the subject of rental properties a Member asked who responsibility it was to fit a fire alarm, in response we were told that this was the responsibility of the landlord.

In regard to category two hazards, damp and mould, a Member asked if the legislation in Wales allowed for tenants to take statutory nuisance action under the Environmental Protection Act.

A Member questioned if the issue with damp and mould could be a result of lifestyle rather than the building. The Officer confirmed that this was very often the case.

The issue of dog fouling was raised by a Member who had experienced dog fouling on a local football pitch. The Member commented that 'give dog fouling the red card' signs were in the vicinity but expressed concerns that the message of dog fouling was not clear enough and that members of the public were confused by the signs, some of which thought the signs related to football.

Committee's Conclusion:

The Committee considered the Public Protection Performance report 2016/17.

Members commented that at future committees it would be best to focus on a limited number of topics, approximately two or three or three, to provide further value to service prioritisation.

It was decided that officers will be guided by Members as to their particular areas of interest.

8. Progress Report on WAO Recommendations on Kerbcraft

Context:

Prior to submission to Cabinet, to provide Strong Communities Select Committee members with an update on the action plan approved by Council on the 20th March 2017.

Key Issues:

1. Following a review by Wales Audit Office (WAO) of the provision of kerbcraft training by MCC staff on behalf of Welsh Government an action plan was reported to Council in March 2017.

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2. Appendix 1 replicates the action plan but in italics under relevant headings an update is provided.
3. One of the actions requires the preparation and implementation of new procedures for the provision of kerbcraft training and that the future operating model be reported to Cabinet. This report offers Strong Community Select Committee members the opportunity to review the report before it is presented to Cabinet.
4. During March and April officers reviewed previous and current working arrangements and developed a new procedure for the provision for kerbcraft training.
5. The new policy and working procedures are provided in appendices 2,3 and 4. However the following points are brought to members' attention.
6. A major weakness highlighted by WAO was the control and recording of volunteers that supported MCC in the training of children at each school.
7. Since WAO expressed concern over the management of volunteers in August 2016 none has been used and all kerbcraft training has been provided by MCC kerbcraft trainers occasionally with assistance from school support staff.
8. The new procedure limits the use of volunteers to six at any one time so the checking and recording of safeguarding information relating to the volunteers becomes much more straightforward (previously records for up to 80 volunteers were required).
9. This change in procedure along with clear instructions on how the scheme is to be delivered will offer greater confidence that safeguarding is controlled in the provision of this service.

Member Scrutiny:

A Member praised the quick action taken by MCC officers and commended the policy as one which will improve MCC's quality and standards.

Members sought clarity on the current position of the scheme and we were told that at present the scheme is being run with paid officers (one full time and two part time) and the use of volunteers suspended.

Officers were told that feedback Members had received on the scheme had been entirely positive.

A Member raised the fact that in their report the Wales Audit Office felt that they had been misled and sought reassurance that this has been investigated and resolved.

In terms of delivery Members sought clarification on service provision and we were advised that in addition to the permanent officers there will be a team of six volunteers who will travel throughout the County delivering the training.

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Committee's Conclusion:

The Chair stressed the importance of safeguarding children and young people and appreciated the progress made against various arrangements within the action plan reported to Council on the 20th March 2017.

The new policy and procedure checklist for the provision of kerbcraft training was scrutinised and found to be a vast improvement. The Members of the Committee were happy to recommend this progress report to Cabinet.

9. Revenue and Capital Monitoring 2016/17 Outturn Statement

Context:

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information on the revenue outturn position of the Authority at the end of reporting period 4 which represents the financial outturn position for the 2016/17 financial year.

This report will also be considered by Select Committees as part of their responsibility to,

- assess whether effective budget monitoring is taking place,
- monitor the extent to which budgets are spent in accordance with agreed budget and policy framework,
- Challenge the reasonableness of projected over or underspends, and
- monitor the achievement of predicted efficiency gains or progress in relation to savings proposals.

Key Issues and recommendations proposed to Cabinet:

1. That Members consider a net revenue outturn unspend of £884,000, an improvement of £805,000 on quarter 3 outturn predictions.
2. Members consider a capital outturn spend of £40.03m against a revised budget of £40.98million, after proposed slippage of £17.5 million, resulting in a net underspend of £951k.
3. Consider and approve the £17.5m capital slippage recommended (detailed in appendix 2), paying attention to those schemes described in para 3.3.6 where slippage has been requested by the service manager but is not being recommended to slip (£198k).
4. Considers the use of reserves proposed in para 3.4.1,
5. Supports the apportionment of general underspend in supplementing reserve levels as described in para 3.4.3 below, i.e.:

Priority Investment Fund £570k
Redundancy & Pension Reserve £114k
IT Transformation Reserve £100k
Capital Receipts Generation Reserve £100k

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Total £884k

6. Members note that the low level of earmarked reserves will severely reduce the flexibility the Council has in meeting the challenges of scarce resources going forward.

7. Members note the significant reduction in the overall school balance at the end of 2016/17 and supports the continuing work with schools to ensure that the Council's Fairer Funding scheme requirements are met and that the overall schools balance remains positive in 2017/18.

Member Scrutiny:

A Member asked that the original budget figures were included in the report to allow for accurate comparison.

A number of Members requested a one to one session with the Officer to help their understanding of the budget generally.

An update on the disposal of County farms was requested by a Member and we were advised part of last year's disposal policy involved bringing a farm forward, however it slipped into this year resulting in an underspend.

Members raised concerns regarding the low uptake of staff pensions.

Committee's Conclusion:

The Committee thanked the Officer for the update and advised that all relevant points will be feedback to Cabinet.

10. Action list

11.

Raglan Cattle Market

The Council has received an interim payment of £234,000 on the lease. A final lease has not been agreed.

Street Lights

New control gear is being supplied by the manufacturers and there are currently approximately 50 dayburners.

Street Lights bulb guarantee

The existing guarantee on the 28 watts is five years and the 14 watt bulbs are 10 years.

Borough Theatre

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The running of the theatre was outsourced to a management team who have been paid a fee of £160,000 per annum. There are other costs including staff overtime of £50,000 per year. The continued viability is being discussed and will be presented to Member as part of the Alternative Delivery Model for Leisure due in September 2017.

11. Strong Communities forward work programme

We discussed the Strong Communities Select Committee Forward Work Programme. In doing so we decided that the Scrutiny Manager will prepare a report for the next meeting to allow members to debate work they would like to prioritise.

In regard to the Road Safety Task and Finish Group a number of members professed an interest in joining the group and the date of the next meeting will be distributed shortly.

12. Cabinet & Council forward work programme

We scrutinised the Council and Cabinet Business Forward Plan, the contaminated land inspection policy was highlighted for scrutiny.

13. To confirm the date and time of next meeting as 20th July 2017 at 10am - pre meeting at 9.30am

Members discussed the time of meetings it was agreed that a 10am start (pre-meeting at 9.30am) would be the preferred time.

County Councillor Ann Webb thanked the new Chair, County Councillor Jane Pratt on her excellent Chairing of the meeting.

The meeting ended at 12.17 pm