

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held at on Thursday, 16th November, 2017 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor J.Pratt (Chairman)

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

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Mark Cleaver	Environmental Officer
Susan Parkinson	Education And Awareness Officer
Rebecca Blount	Education And Awareness Officer
Mark Howcroft	Assistant Head of Finance
Paula Harris	Scrutiny/Democratic Services Officer

1. Apologies for absence

County Councillor A. Webb and Hazel Ilett.

2. Declarations of Interest

County Councillor A. Davies declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in respect of item 7 and the petition Church Road High Risk Traffic Chaos – Church Road, Caldicot.

3. Open Public Forum

There were no members of the public present to address the committee.

4. To confirm minutes of the previous meeting held on the 28th September 2017

The minutes of the Committee were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

5. Action list

County Councillor V. Smith raised concerns regarding the answers provided by People Services and asked as the questions were raised at a public meeting, the answers should be made available to the public, not just via email to County Councillors only.

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It was asked how a Member could contribute to the setting of the Council budget and we were advised that Mark Howcroft would be happy to meet with Elected Members to discuss ideas and concerns.

County Councillor A. Easson requested that funeral and burials were added to the work programme. In answer to this the Head of Operations advised the Committee he will ask the Head of Service to prepare a paper on this.

6. Re-use Scheme at Civic Amenity Sites

Context:

To update members of the Select Committee on the progress towards the establishment of a Re-use shop at Llanfoist HWRC and the proposed operational management model.

Key Issues:

3.1 Waste and Street Services carry out bi-annual satisfaction surveys of waste services and consult with residents on areas they would like to see improvements.

3.2 A specific resident's survey* was undertaken at Llanfoist HWRC in 2015.
98% of residents interviewed believed that a re-use shop was a good idea.
90% said that they had seen items in the skips that could have been re-used.
96% of residents said they would have items to donate to a re-use shop.
78% said they would occasionally buy items from a re-use shop. (*50 interviewed)

A successful re-use shop will establish the idea that HWRCs are no longer tips and dumps but places where re-use and recycling are the primary focus.

With procurement underway for the Transfer Stations and HWRCs, an onsite Re-use shop will be an additional and complimentary facility that can be achieved in tandem with the new contract.

Re-use shops on HWRCs are well established throughout the UK and the scale of operation and structure varies dramatically. Some shops are operated directly by the same council or contractors that manage the HWRC sites, whilst others are operated by SMEs, charities and community organisations.

Regardless of operational structure, they all have a common goal which is to turn waste into a valuable resource. Preventing good re-usable items from being disposed of. Returning items back into the economy - to be used again. Re-use shops can create new wealth and are a very tangible element of the circular economy. With a collaborative approach, they can be innovative and supporting of a diverse community, providing paid and volunteer career opportunities.

Appendix 1 describes in greater detail some of the operating models both locally and nationally and the proposed management structure for consideration.

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Member Scrutiny:

Members applauded the scheme and appreciated the service offered but asked if there was any profit being made for Monmouthshire County Council.

In respect of resources, a Member asked about the Environmental Sustainable Development Grant, we were told that it is currently used to fund recycling and special projects including dog fouling and the reuse shop.

A Member welcomed the scheme and despaired of perfectly good items currently being thrown away.

In regard to publicising the scheme Members recommended Officers used all means at their disposal to ensure its success.

The Homemakers criteria was questioned as it was felt that their current criteria was not open enough to those in need. We were advised that the reuse shop would be completely separate to Homemakers current work.

Members asked if a delivery/collection scheme would be available to residents who cannot drive.

A Member spoke of a post war year when people were more reluctant to throw things away, it was felt there has been a change of culture and today's throwaway society was much too wasteful.

It was asked if we were in a position to sell items which required PAT testing and were advised at this time there are no plans to reuse electrical items.

A local Member for Caldicot suggested using one of the empty shops in Caldicot town centre to run a pop up shop selling reused items with Caldicot Town Team support.

The Members pointed out that it was essential that Viridor staff working at the recycling centres were trained in approaching residents for items for the shops and that there is a clear procedure in place for staff to follow.

A Member spoke of residents support for this scheme and hoped that the residents of Monmouthshire will use it.

A point was made by a Member that it is not necessarily about profit, but ensuring items are used again and not taken to landfill.

A Members spoke of a visit made to a landfill site which shocked her with the sheer volume of waste of items which could be reused.

It was felt that people facing hardship and those on low incomes would be able to benefit from the items on sell in the shop.

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Committee's Conclusion:

Members applauded the scheme and support the further development of the business model. Members were keen to see serviceable items reused rather than sent to landfill. As part of our wellbeing strategy for our future generations, the responsibility lies with Monmouthshire County Council to be proactive with waste.

The Committee asked to receive regular 3 or 6 monthly updates on the scheme, with the results of the one year trial coming back to the Committee in Autumn 2018 along with plans to further develop the scheme.

7. Tree Maintenance Approach

Context:

To present to the Select Committee a draft of a new Monmouthshire County Council Tree Policy

Key Issues:

Over the past few years, a range of factors has led to the County Council response to managing its tree stock to become out of date and not fit for purpose. Factors include;

- Cuts to funding - changes in staff and structures has led to a fragmentation in responsibilities for trees decision-making process.
- Cuts to funding - Proactive inspections and maintenance has all but gone leading to an increase in risk and potential future workloads and costs.
- Lack of written process/policies - changes in structures and job roles and natural turnover in staff has meant that historic knowledge of council operations and behaviours has been partially lost and without clarity or process and policies, decisions are not consistent.
- The introduction of the My Council Services CRM system has made it easier for residents to contact us regarding all issues including those related to trees. This has led to an increased workload.
- Changes in our understanding of the value of trees in our rural and urban environments and the benefits they bring to our society and economy prompts us to think differently about how we care for our trees.
- New legislation relating to the natural environment and the wellbeing of future generations requires us to re-appraise our management of our natural assets.

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Given the above, it is clearly time for a policy refresh to ensure that we provide up to date, fair and consistent service to our residents. To ensure that our service response to residents is efficient and that our decisions and actions are transparent and can be held to account, it is also necessary to update our outward facing documentation that explains how and why we are managing our trees and what the level of service they can expect when issues/concerns are raised.

With respect to how we approach this review, in an ideal world we would start with a wider review of our open spaces and natural assets as, in the same way our understanding of trees has improved, so has our wider understanding and approach to managing open spaces and natural assets of which trees are a part. A new tree policy would then, therefore, nest under, and align to, a broader Green Infrastructure Strategy. However, given the lack of clarity and consistency in our current service provision relating to tree safety, it is expedient to deal with the tree policy with regard to our reactive tree management in the first instance and give due regard to potential forthcoming views on the wider environment. Therefore, it is proposed that the tree policy be approached in three stages:

1. Production of a Tree Policy outlining our level of service with regard to the reactive management of trees.
 2. Production of a proactive strategy for managing trees to ensure that potential tree related risks and future costs are mitigated
 3. Incorporation of wider tree related issues in a new Green Infrastructure Strategy
- The Tree Policy outlines our actions in response to residents' concerns about trees and therefore requires the support and agreement from members.

The tree Policy has been produced in consultation between Waste and Street Services (responsible for the parks, gardens and verges) Highways, (responsible for Highways related tree enquiries) Leisure (responsible for trees in country parks and rights of way), Estates (responsible for trees in cemeteries and other areas of the county land holding). Comments have also been taken from Health and Safety, Legal Services and Insurance Section. The policy has been benchmarked against other Welsh

Member Scrutiny:

A Member raised concerns about the section of the report regarding 'works not undertaken by Monmouthshire County Council' and spoke of the impact trees can have on mental wellbeing which can be adversely affected by light removal due to tree growth. The Member felt that there should be some flexibility in this area if residents are willing to pay privately for pollarding.

The wish to preserve our trees for future generations was welcomed by the Committee and praised Officers for their excellent and prompt service in their ward.

The increase in demand was commented upon with Members of the Committee questioning if this was sustainable without additional resources.

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A Member questioned how often landowners were served with demands to maintain their hedges and verges and were told that a written response would be provided.

(ACTION RH)

It was asked if Monmouthshire County Council would provide a service for residents willing to pay for our services privately and were told that we would not be willing to do so.

In regard to the right to light, a Member quoted the Right to Light Act 1959 which states if a property has received uninterrupted light for twenty years, the resident does have recourse if the right to light is lost.

A Member asked for a training booklet to help them to direct residents to the correct department.

A Member commented on the report stating there are no resource implications and asked if this is a true statement given the volume of work which needs to be carried out.

Committee's Conclusion:

Members noted the report and Provided Officers with comments on the proposals for the Tree Policy prior presentation to Cabinet for approval.

It was felt that trees are an invaluable asset to our County and that we should do all we can to avoid losing trees. Members also commented that wherever possible the impact of the trees must make a positive impact on people's wellbeing.

8. Receive 2 Petitions

The committee received two petitions;

1. Church Road High Risk Traffic Chaos – Church Road, Caldicot

County Councillor Alan Davies initiated the petition and has grave concerns for the safety of residents, especially the children that attend the local school.

There has been instances of the road being gridlocked with Police attending on a regular basis.

In response the Head of Operations told the committee that they have looked at this issue previously to attempt to reduce the level of traffic. Previous options have not been progressed to date.

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He advised that he will ask his team to look at the issue again and will report back to the local Elected Member with a response.

2. Petition for road safety measures on A40 Raglan bypass

This petition has been presented to the County Council, however it is a trunk road and the Head of Operations will write to Welsh Government to advise them of the petition, reinforced by the local and Cabinet Member. **(ACTION RH)**

Members were in agreement that this letter should be sent as a priority and asked that a copy of the letter is distributed to the committee.

9. To exclude the press and public from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information

10. Partnerships in Waste: Anaerobic Digestion

Context:

The Committee received a report from the Head of Operations regarding the HoV Food Waste Procurement – Evaluation of Invitation to Submit Initial Tenders & Identification of Preferred Bidder

Key Issues:

These were outlined by Officers.

Member Scrutiny:

Members scrutinised the report.

Committee's Conclusion:

Members commended Officers for their work and supported the recommendations in the report although some concerns regarding the tender process which will be followed up by Officers.

11. Strong Communities forward work programme

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Members noted the work programme and asked that cemeteries and burials was added for a future meeting.

12. Cabinet & Council forward work programme

Members noted the Cabinet & Council forward planner.

13. Confirm the date and time of next meeting 4th January 2017

The meeting ended at 12.30pm