

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held at on Thursday, 7th November, 2019 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor L.Dymock (Chairman)
County Councillor A. Webb (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Dovey, A. Easson,
V. Smith, J.Treharne, T.Thomas and
D. Batrouni(substituting for R. Harris)

Also in attendance County Councillor D. Batrouni

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Roger Hoggins, Head of Service - Strategic Projects
(Fixed Term)
Matthew Lewis (Countryside), Interim Performance,
Evaluation and Programme Development Lead for
MonLife
Peter Edward Sutherland
Cath Fallon, Head of Economy and Enterprise
Matthew Gatehouse, Head of Policy and
Governance
Colette Bosley, Green Infrastructure Manager
Charlotte Owen, Wales Audit Officer

APOLOGIES: County Councillor R. Harris

1. Declarations of Interest

2. Public Open Forum

Public open Forum

Mr Sullivan attended on behalf of Llanbadoc Community Council to raise 2 issues to the select committee and to request a meeting with officers to resolve them:

- Monkswood and signage regarding speed limits
- Parking outside St Marks Church for funerals

Mr Sullivan also advised that Church View cottages Llanbadoc had been subjected to flooding the previous night and expressed thanks to the council officer for visiting. He also expressed thanks on behalf of Llanbadoc Community Council for the regeneration works undertaken in Usk.

3. Reducing Child Poverty and social inclusion and improve economic inclusion: Scrutiny of the Wales Audit Office Report and its recommendations

WAO report.

The report context was outlined, members being advised that from the 79 steps outlined in the Corporate Plan, the step on child poverty and economic inclusion had been chosen against which to apply the 'sustainable development principle'. The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 requires public bodies to apply the 'sustainable

development principle' to their activities. The Wales Audit Office (WAO) explained that the report had focussed on the application of the sustainable development principle in reducing child poverty and promoting economic inclusion, as opposed to conducting a review of how the council is performing in those areas. The WAO advised that this was the first review of its kind and that the application of the principle through the 'long term' lens had enabled them to assess how well the council was applying the requirements of the act. The WAO reported that when they assess 'long term', they are looking to identify activities that span generations and to see evidence of plans for a 25-year timeframe. The primary finding was that the council has a good understanding of the requirements of the act and the key issues, but doesn't have a sufficiently 'long term' plan in place.

The committee heard that the 5-year Social Justice Strategy will help to deliver a coordinated approach and that exploratory work is being undertaken by the Public Service Board to gain a deeper understanding of factors related to wellbeing. However, officers acknowledged that a key area for improvement is developing a long term approach and a means by which to meaningfully measure performance outcomes. Whilst there is no specific budget to deliver the Social Justice Strategy, grant funding opportunities are being explored that could assist in developing longer term interventions and we have positive collaborative arrangements. For example, we are working with town and community councils and the business sector on initiatives to help alleviate holiday hunger. The Public Service Board also has established an Early Intervention Panel that can identify the most appropriate partners to help families. We need to access more innovative funding streams to do things differently.

The act applies different lenses to its requirements and one of the lenses is the 'involvement lens'. The council recognises that it needs to work closely with communities in order to identify who needs more support to assist them out of poverty. Officers advised that the council is developing its awareness around social isolation in rural and farming communities and is trying to identify the people for whom Brexit will have the most implications, acknowledging that links to its communities is crucial in developing the insight. The Department for Work and Pensions is undertaking a piece of work around universal credit and how data can be used to target those who need the most support and the council is similarly focussing on how data can be used to gain a better understanding of who needs help.

The committee were advised that unlike other WAO reports, this report did not provide 'proposals for improvement', however, the WAO will be working with the council to develop an action plan, which will be brought to the committee in the spring of 2020.

Challenge:

- Why did WAO choose to focus on this topic over other areas outlined in our Corporate Plan? Have similar reviews been conducted with other councils so that we can benchmark ourselves against others?

This topic was chosen as we felt whilst it was early days in terms of progress, we could usefully apply the sustainable development principle to assess how the council is performing in terms of the requirements of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015. The WAO hasn't reviewed this topic with any other

councils, but they will check to see if there is anything comparative that could help the council to benchmark itself in terms of its performance.

- If this review has not been conducted before, who defines 'good' and what 'good' looks like? And without any ability to draw comparisons with others, would the WAO be taking into account the individual demands of each county?

The Future Generations Commissioner sets the standard against which to assess whether public bodies are meeting the requirements of legislation, as opposed to drawing comparisons between them. We recognise that each county has individual needs.

- It's positive that the WAO has appreciated through their review the GovTech work the council has been undertaking and it is good to see it has been recognised. Members are looking forward to seeing the impact of this work.
- We note the lack of a definition of child poverty and social isolation and we feel that without a clear definition, assessing performance is difficult.

This review did not specifically analyse the performance of the council in terms of reducing child poverty or promoting economic inclusion, so no definitions were referenced in the report. The review was based solely upon the application of the sustainable development principle through the 'long term lens' in order to form a view as to whether the council is implementing the act's requirements.

- We find this very difficult to scrutinise given that the scope is limited. For example, we would expect a review on this topic to consider the community meals service or to consider the work that the Strategic Transport Group have undertaken, but we recognise that this was a different type of review.
- How have you approached your analysis? Who was interviewed as part of this review?

We held workshops with officers and cabinet members as the review had a specific focus. We will be doing a full review on an annual basis of how the act is applied across all services, so there will be more scope to provide full feedback on how the council is doing.

- In terms of paragraph 18 of your report, this is a question for the council's officers. How do you propose to improve how you measure outcomes?

It is very difficult to know how to measure success until an action has been implemented but we recognise we need to put more capacity into this, particularly in gaining the data. Swansea University is undertaking work on poverty and are developing a data model which would take into account a wide range of complex factors and this may help us to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that lead households to fall into poverty and to identify patterns. The work is at a very early stage, but would be the first opportunity for a university to test a research methodology in a public sector context, so we look forward to reporting back to the committee on this.

- How can we be confident that we are working with right people?
The Community and Partnerships team are the team whose key role is to bridge between the communities and the council in setting policy and some of the work being undertaken by those team members to tackle poverty is delivering real progress.

- We cannot see any reference in the report to 'social capital' and this is a really important consideration for lonely and isolated people. Income and deprivation measurements are pretty established, but in terms of social capital, who people have access to, what help they have available to them should be an important

consideration when assessing the extent to which the act has been applied and yet it isn't reflected under 'prevention measures'. Why?

The WAO were only examining this using the five ways of working. There is a lot of work being undertaken around this, such as community schools, the volunteering work and this can be brought to the committee in the spring.

- I appreciate this, but I don't believe this review has analysed this from a holistic perspective.

This review has only examined the arrangements the council has in place, not the actual outcomes, but we would like to look at this from a wider perspective as a future piece of work if that is helpful to the council.

- Accepting that we cannot draw comparisons with other councils to give us insight on the issues we really need to be addressing, we need to have some way of identifying the issues we are not yet suffering from, but are likely to, so how can we be geared up?

The report highlights that we need to grow our capacity around data to better understand what's going on and what may be coming. Whilst this review only focuses on 1 of our 79 actions, there are lots of pieces of work such as the work on Adverse Childhood Experiences that examines factors that lead to worse outcomes for young people, so in terms of preventative work, all public services are looking at preventative work that can enable us to put early interventions in place.

Cabinet Member Contribution:

We really welcome this report and we can see there are early outputs from the Social Justice Strategy, so we would be keen for the WAO to return and examine the elements within the strategy. The feedback is really helpful for us in terms of reflecting on our practice and bolstering what we are doing. The Social Justice Strategy is an overarching strategy and if the chair and committee are in agreement, we would like to return in the spring with the Action Plan. We would like to update you on the GovTech work, the work on mental health and social isolation within the farming community and the Community and Partnerships Team can offer a full update on the work they are undertaking with communities.

Chairs Conclusion:

As a committee, we recognise that this review had a narrow focus, but it has been helpful in terms of helping us identify the direction of travel. The committee would be very interested in the work that Swansea University are undertaking in relation to the data modelling and similarly, the committee would like an update on the GovTech work. We look forward to inviting you back in the Spring of 2020 to present your action plan and we thank you for all your hard work on this very important topic.

4. Green Infrastructure Strategy: Pre-decision scrutiny of the strategy

Pre-decision Scrutiny of the Green Infrastructure Strategy

The committee were presented with the draft strategy which is due to be considered by Cabinet on 20th December 2019, full details contained within the presentation attached

as Appendix 1. The officer explained that the strategy is a live document which will be updated to reflect emerging priorities, but intends to provide an overarching framework for green infrastructure and provide a framework that will be helpful for stakeholders and the authority in managing the approach to green infrastructure.

[CLICK HERE FOR PRESENTATION](#)

Challenge:

- We recognise there is a substantial element of volunteering which supports what you intend to achieve. Please can you expand on the volunteer base and how actions will be carried out to support this strategy?
Volunteering is an integral element and is very much appreciated. The action plan is the critical part that will implement the strategy and needs the ownership of communities and the various groups involved.
- You refer to the Gwent Levels project and we feel this is very important in terms of the success in implementing this. How deeply you are involved in partnership working with the project?
That is a very important point ~ we are highly involved. We lead on some of the key projects and the proposal is that the strategy will add value to the work of the Gwent Levels Project. The work is fully integrated and we know we are adding value. We are very sure of this and that makes it more rewarding.
- Please can you explain how the funding streams work?
There wider project is grant funded through a combination of European Union funding monies and Heritage Lottery Funding and is centred around making the Gwent Levels a more attractive place to visit. There are key elements on the natural environment and community involvement, volunteers and specific events. In the primary hubs, visitors will find some consistent information. Initially, some criteria are set, but then communities are able to input what is required to enhance it. The projects delivered are legacy projects, for which funding can be sought.
- We feel it's vital that the public are aware of the project, even in areas such as the Brecon Beacons National Park. Do you ensure they are updated and can signpost visitors?
Yes, they were involved in the workshops and have inputted into the strategy and we work closely together.
- We notice that other groups play their part and an example is Llanbadoc Community Council who have produced a good footpath leaflet and the work of their volunteers is to be commended.
Yes, we recognise the need to raise awareness, so the intention is to take the strategy to Cabinet and hopefully it will be approved and then we intend to produce some material to distribute within communities.
- How does this integrate with other policies?
This isn't a separate planning policy, it is part of our overall framework, providing critical information at strategic level but also for the public who may be submitting applications. This provides a broad vision and sets the direction. It sits alongside the Destination Management Plan and is embracing the green economy, looking at the whole range of factors, including social wellbeing and ensures everything is complementary.

Chairs conclusion

We thank you for bringing this to us for pre-decision scrutiny. We have raised some questions which you have fully answered and we are in full support of this strategy which will provide the clarity needed and will ensure our approach is integrated to the work of our partners and communities. We fully endorse that this strategy should be adopted by the Executive and request a further report in due course on the implementation of the action plan.

5. To confirm minutes of the previous meetings:

Approval of the Minutes of Previous Meetings

The minutes of the meetings on the 10th September, the 26th September and 15th October were approved subject to amendments relating to attendance. The Scrutiny Manager will ask Democratic Services to check the attendance register and make the necessary adjustments.

6. Minutes of the Special Meeting held on 10th September 2019

The minutes were approved subject to the addition of apologies for absence from County Councillor J. Treharne, and the removal of Squires and N. Vincent from the list of Councillors present.

7. Minutes of the meeting held on 26th September 2019

The minutes were approved subject to the removal of County Councillor J. Pratt from the list of Committee Members as she was in attendance in her capacity as Cabinet Member.

8. Minutes of the meeting held on 15th October 2019

9. Strong Communities forward work programme

The Forward Work Programme was received.

10. Cabinet & Council forward work programme

The Cabinet and Council Forward Work Programme was received.

11. Date and time of next meeting to be confirmed

The meeting ended at **Time Not Specified**