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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held
at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Thursday, 11th January, 2018 at 10.00
am

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

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

Also in attendance County Councillor(s): P. Murphy

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Carl Touhig	Head of Waste and Street Scene
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Richard Jones	Policy and Performance Officer
Dave Loder	Finance Manager
Jonathan Davies	Central Accountancy Finance Manager
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Paula Harris	Democratic Services Officer

1. Apologies for absence

None.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Open Public Forum

The Committee was joined by Mr Peter Sutherland, Woodside resident and member of Llanbadoc Community Council. Mr Sutherland raised the following issues;

- Usk Hub – an event had been arranged for the 11th January with the community council clerk only receiving an email advising of this on the 9th January, it was asked that in future more notice was given.
- Usk Island Carpark – concerns that the area is rapidly filling up, a mobile home has appeared and a lorry is permanently parked inside the enclosure.
- Usk Gasworks – little consultation as a community council has taken place and the community councillors are being asked questions by residents. It was also asked that at the end of the work could a consultation on shared space be considered.

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- Speeding through Llanbadoc – although pleased to see the 20 mph speed has been applied in Usk, Mr Sutherland would appreciate an update on speeding issues.

The Scrutiny Manager advised that work is being done by Officers on the County wide road safety policy and will be able to reconvene the task group after speaking to partner agencies.

4. To confirm minutes of the previous meeting held on 16th November 2017

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted and duly signed by the Chair.

5. Action list

Member of the Committee spoke of their dissatisfaction with responses from People Services regarding questions asked at a previous meeting when they presented their annual report.

It was felt that the responses did not definitively answer the questions raised and Members felt the fact they were emailed internally did not lend itself to transparency with the public.

The Chair of the Committee advised that she will be writing to the Head of People Services requesting that they return to the Committee for further scrutiny and clarity on issues previously raised by Members of the Committee.

6. Performance Report - Quarter 2

Context:

To present information on how the Council is performing in 2017/18 against nationally set performance indicators that are under the remit of Strong Communities Select Committee.

Key Issues:

The council currently has an established performance framework, this is the way in which we translate our vision - *building sustainable and resilient communities* – into action and ensure that everyone is pulling in the same direction to deliver real and tangible outcomes. The framework was presented to the Committee in July 2017, further information on the council's performance framework for members is available on the Council's intranet, The Hub.

Performance data and information is essential to our performance framework to track and evaluate the progress being made. The performance data used comprises a range of nationally set performance frameworks across various services and locally set indicators that services have developed to evaluate their performance.

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One important nationally set framework used to measure local authority performance is 'Public Accountability Measures' set by Data Unit Wales. Appendix 1 contains the performance in quarter 2 2017/18 for the performance indicators that are part of this framework and are under the committee's remit.

The table in Appendix 1 provides trend data for each indicator, the target set, the performance so far in 2017/18 and comments providing further explanation and context of the performance. The indicators are also benchmarked annually compared to other Councils in Wales and the latest quartile ranking from 2016/17 is included, where available and applicable. This quartile ranking was reported to full Council in September 2017 as part of the Stage 2 Improvement Plan 2016/17. Due to the nature of some indicators data is only collated on a six monthly or annual basis. While there are some new indicators included as part of this set which have limited performance data available at this stage.

The Council is currently developing a Corporate Plan that will bring together a wide range of evidence, including from the well-being assessment and council's well-being objectives and statement 2017, to set a clear direction for the Council along with the resources required to deliver it. Once completed the Corporate Plan will form the framework for future performance reporting.

This performance report is supplementary to a range of performance reports select committee already receive or have requested as part of their work programme. Some activity measured by the Performance Indicators cross cuts select committee remits. These indicators are reported to the most relevant committee.

Member Scrutiny:

Members stressed the need for ease of access for this information.

The level of staff absence was a major concern to members of the committee and asked that People Services were invited back to address the committee on this issue.

It was asked how often members of staff were officially visited while on long term sick leave.

A member asked if agile working added to the levels of stress for members of staff.

It was asked if there is a standard holiday allowance for members of staff.

Committee's Conclusion:

Members scrutinised the performance of the nationally set indicators to assess progress and seek clarity from those responsible on future activities or whether performance can improve in any areas of concern identified.

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Particular concerns were raised regarding staff absence due to sickness and felt it imperative that People Services return to the committee to respond to the Committee's concerns.

7. Seasonal Garden Waste

Context:

This report seeks approval to alter the garden waste collection service from 12 months to 9 months from April 2018. This will take into account the seasonal nature of garden waste and align the costs of collection to income generated.

Key Issues:

The collection of garden waste is non-statutory duty and the Council have made a charge for this service since 2013. The Council is able to recover the full costs of collection and administration of the service but not treatment and disposal.

Garden waste is co-collected with food waste at present but changes in contractual arrangements for treatment for food and garden waste mean that this can no longer continue. From April 2018 the garden waste trucks will only pass customers houses and will no longer need to drive door to door. This standalone service allows us to accurately predict costs of delivering the service based on the existing customers and will also allow us to offer a seasonal service.

The charges for the provision of the service have risen from £8 to £18 over the last five years. The proposed charge for 2018/19 agreed through Fees and Charges Report is £18.45. The increased cost for 2017/18 saw the largest number of complaints and biggest reduction in service uptake since the scheme began. Many customers suggested a seasonal service would be better than the 28% increase in costs and that any future increases should be in line with standard council indexation. There is a substantial drop in usage of the service during the winter months and anecdotal evidence suggests this could be as low as 10% weekly set out rate from December to March. Torfaen and Newport operate a seasonal collection service for garden waste and report no additional issues of flytipping or increased usage of household waste recycling centres during this period.

A programme of work was designed with systems, contact centre, hub staff and customers in mind so that we can alleviate the pressure of trying to renew or register circa 12000 customers. Last year the contact centre had restricted leave during the renewal period, average handling times of 8 minutes, (maximum was 58 minutes) and approximately 200 calls per day

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to try and manage. Two additional agency staff were paid for from Waste and Street Services budget over the busiest period.

This year our aim is to contact existing customers in batches from the end of January which allows us 2 weeks per batch, ahead of April new permit period. We have reduced the agency staff requirement based on the plans to batch renew customers and are only looking for one additional agency staff and are working closely with contact centre and hubs to try

and manage the demand. We have both listened to customer feedback, and made changes to try and alleviate the pressures that sending 12,000 renewals out at one time have caused in previous years.

Member Scrutiny:

A Member applauded the scheme as a well thought out piece of work to save money.

A Member suggested that a frozen price of £18 for two years would be more acceptable to the public.

December to March were felt to be the best months to suspend the service.

It was asked if all costs were covered by the fee charged.

A Member asked if green waste fly tipping may become an issue going forward.

Committee's Conclusion:

Members agreed to approve the move to seasonal garden waste collections March 1st to November 30th and agreed the £40,000 budget saving in 2018/19.

Members agreed to maintain the current price of £18 per permit.

Concerns were raised that fly tipping needs to be monitored.

8. Budget Scrutiny - Revenue Budget Proposals

Context:

To highlight the context within which the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) will be developed for 2018/19 to 2021/22.

To agree the assumptions to be used to update the MTFP, and provide an early indication of the level of budget savings still to be found.

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To update Members with the implications arising out of the provisional settlement announcement of Welsh Government.

To consider the 2018/19 budget within the context of the 4 year Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to be incorporated within the emergent Corporate Plan

To provide detailed draft proposals on the budget savings required to meet the gap between available resources and need to spend in 2018/19, for consultation purposes.

Key Issues:

Members will know that we have faced and will continue to face significant financial challenges. Over the last four years, the Council has had to manage £19.1 million of savings from its service budgets, whilst additionally also taking advantage of the cashflow savings effect of revising its capital finance arrangements of circa £3.3million. Funding from Welsh Government has reduced over the period and austerity looks set to continue for the foreseeable future. At the same time pressures on the budget have been increasing in terms of demographic growth, demand and expectations in children's services, contract price inflation and redundancy costs.

Whilst setting the budget annually within the context of a MTFP, the development of multiyear budget proposals has been a challenge. An ongoing forecast resource gap is being predicted however with the absence of future year's indicative settlements from Welsh government, planning for the future is challenging.

The *Future Monmouthshire* work programme recognizes that the challenges faced by the County and Council are not limited to financial pressures, but these should be seen in the round with other significant challenges. Taking a holistic approach to this work will ensure that the needs of our communities that we serve are put first within the financial constraints that we operate.

The year end position for 2016/17 and the current year monitoring continues to demonstrate the tightening of our financial position. The reports also assess the delivery of the savings we have previously identified. Overall the outturn position for 2016/17 delivered a small surplus, and meant that there was a minor opportunity to replenish some of our reserves.

A review of the earmarked reserves position was undertaken in June 2016 and agreed by Cabinet on 6th July 2016. The report highlighted that as reserves have been used extensively and there is less opportunity to replenish reserve balances as budgets get tighter, ear marked reserves need to work harder to help the Authority through the financial challenges and risks it faces. Reserves should not be used to plug the funding gap and fund on going expenditure, they are needed to help with one off costs to invest and transform services so that they can operate within a reduced financial envelop. Having clearer protocols and responsibility assigned can help to ensure the return from the use of reserves in the future is maximised.

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Member Scrutiny:

It was asked if we offer advice to local community councils when setting their precept.

The fact that town and community councils are not capped was raised as an issue by a Member.

A Member voiced frustrations that public perception is that Monmouthshire County Council is 'rolling in money' and asked that figures and examples are readily available to members of the public to raise awareness.

A Member said that local councils could and should take on more responsibilities.

The Cabinet Member for Resources joined the meeting at this point to speak on the budget setting and advised there will be a joint select committee meeting to allow scrutiny.

Committee's Conclusion:

The Committee understand there will be further work to be done on the budget before it comes to joint scrutiny.

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. Budget Scrutiny - Capital Receipt Forecast Appendix

The Committee provided scrutiny on this item.

11. Strong Communities forward work programme

Members noted the work programme.

Members were asked to note the date of the Special Meeting on the 26th Feb 2018.

12. Cabinet & Council forward work programme

Noted.

13. Confirm date and time of next meeting as 15th February 2018 10am - pre meeting at 9.30am

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The meeting ended at 12:40pm