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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of North Monmouthshire Area Committee held
at The Council Chamber, Town Hall, Cross Street, Abergavenny. NP7 5HD on
Wednesday, 28th November, 2018 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor M. Powell (Chair)

County Councillors: M. Groucutt, R. Harris, P. Jordan, J. Pratt, T. Thomas and S. Woodhouse

Abergavenny Town Council: Councillor P. Simcock
Llanelly Community Council: Councillor G. Nelmes

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Matthew Gatehouse | Head of Policy and Governance |
| Owen Wilce | Community and Partnership Development Lead |
| Richard Williams | Democratic Services Officer |

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

| | | |
|---------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Inspector D. Sowrey | - | Gwent Police |
| K. Bailey | - | Gilwern Roots |
| H. Pickering | - | Gilwern Roots |
| P. Johns | - | Team Abergavenny |
| A. Michie | - | Team Abergavenny |
| H. Candler | - | Team Abergavenny |
| J. Lee | - | Clerk to Abergavenny Town Council |

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors: D. Jones, S. Jones, M. Lane and K. Williams

Councillors: O. Dodd and G. Thomas

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

2. Public Open Forum

There were no issues raised by members of the public present.

3. Update by Inspector Damian Sowrey regarding the closure of Abergavenny Police Station

We received a verbal update by Inspector Sowrey regarding the closure of Abergavenny Police Station. In doing so, the following points were noted:

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- The decision had been taken to close Abergavenny Police Station due to cost saving measures and that the station was no longer fit for purpose.
- Only six Officers were working at the station before it was closed.
- Collaboration was being undertaken with South Wales Fire and Rescue with a view to this building being extended to accommodate Gwent Police in Abergavenny.
- The Police also have accommodation within the One Stop Shop which is working well. More people are having contact with the police due to this location.
- The majority of Abergavenny Police Officers are currently based in Monmouth and are working from there.
- Rollout of digital / agile working allows officers to spend less time in the station and more time to police Abergavenny Town.
- The Neighbourhood Team remains in Abergavenny providing the same service that was provided before the station was closed.
- It is anticipated that the new upgraded Fire Station will be completed in the next 12 to 18 months.

Having received the verbal update, the following points were noted:

- Lost property can be handed over at the counter at the One Stop Shop. However, lost property cannot be kept at this location. It would be taken to Bettws Police Station, Newport at the end of the day.
- Though Police officers will be temporarily based in Monmouth, some officers will be based in Abergavenny to deal with immediate response matters. However, it was acknowledged that there is a response time of about 30 minutes for officers to travel from Monmouth to Abergavenny.
- The implementation of agile working allows officers to be more mobile and more visible in the locality.
- The decision to close Abergavenny Police Station was taken by the Police and Crime Commission.
- It was acknowledged that community police officers were doing an excellent job in liaising with local communities.
- Public Spaces orders will be established in every car park in Monmouthshire, in due course.
- The Police are doing the best that they can with the resources available to them.

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- Collaboration between the Police and the local community is key. Volunteers get actively involved in supporting the Police, e.g., representation on the Crime Prevention Panel.

On behalf of the Area Committee, the Chair thanked Inspector Sowrey for attending the meeting and providing an update in respect of the closure of Abergavenny Police Station.

4. Engagement with the Voluntary Sector Organisations - Gilwern Roots

We received a verbal update by representatives of Gilwern Roots. In doing so, the following points were noted:

- Gilwern Roots was established via a Facebook page with a view to encouraging engagement events within the Gilwern Community.
- A constitution has been established.
- Gilwern Roots supports the Community from the roots up.
- The plan is to establish more satellite groups within Gilwern, with Gilwern Roots being the 'Parent Group'.
- Gilwern Roots wants to improve access into the village, help to improve public transport and address isolation within the village.
- Gilfest is an event that helps low income families.
- Via the Facebook page, Gilwern Roots helps to connect the village and reduce issues of isolation.
- The Café has become focal point within the village.
- Collections are organised for the homeless. Gilwern Roots is also looking into establishing food collections for those in need.

Having received the verbal update, the following points were noted:

- The Committee commended Gilwern Roots for the work that it is undertaking throughout the village of Gilwern.
- Collaboration between Gilwern Roots and the local Authority has been undertaken.
- We, as an Authority can learn from the Gilwern Roots model, with a view to bringing local communities closer together.

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- It was noted that Monmouthshire County Council and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council are subsidising the no.1 bus which goes to Gilwern Village.
- There is a need for a dog free area in the park.
- Gilwern Roots is looking to provide a minibus service to help local people within the village. A Grass Routes system of transport would benefit the village.
- The Head of Policy and Governance informed the Committee that Gov Tech had announced five projects to be funded via UK Government, Cabinet Office funding. Five prototypes would work with local groups, two of which are transport based. The Head of Policy and Governance would liaise with Gilwern Roots regarding this matter.

On behalf of the Area Committee, the Chair thanked the representatives of Gilwern Roots for attending the meeting and providing the Committee with an insight into the work being undertaken.

5. Progress report by Team Abergavenny

We received a report by Team Abergavenny on progress to date. In doing so, an update was received in respect of:

- Public Realm.
- Signage.
- Car Parks.
- Local Development Plan.
- The Spreading of the Word Theme Group.
- Town Hall.

Having received the report, concern was expressed that that whilst Phase 3 of the Public Realm was scheduled to start in January 2019, a number of issues required further information.

We resolved that Highways Officers be invited to the next meeting of the Area Committee to provide an update on progress in respect of Phase 3 of the Abergavenny Public Realm.

6. Evaluation of the Pilot

We received an evaluation of the pilot arrangements that has been operating at North Monmouthshire (formerly Bryn y Cwm) Area Committee whereby the Area Committee has acted as the sole political structure to support joint working at a community level.

In March 2017, the local Authority approved the piloting of a new model in what was then called Bryn y Cwm, whereby Area Committees were to be retained as the sole structure to support joint working.

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Area Committees should be citizen focussed and able to influence at the interface between strategic and local decision-making ensuring that resources are directed to local priorities. The terms of reference include championing the area by raising issues of concern to residents, organisations and businesses with the County Council and other organisations, and influencing how services are delivered as well as spending plans for the area. It should also support the co-development of area-based plans and respond to the issues and need of Monmouthshire's Well-being Assessment and other key legislation and policies.

The criteria agreed at the outset of the pilot were:

- The number of issues raised by the public appearing as an agenda item, and,
- The resulting outcome from these.
- The number of recommendations reported to the local authority by a County Councillor on behalf of the Committee; and
- The number of representatives attending regularly from other Area Committees.

The evaluation concluded that the pilot has not succeeded when measured against the criteria established at the outset. It is not making any measurable contribution at the interface between local and strategic decision-making. However attendees welcome it as a forum for information exchange.

Options Appraisal

The options below are presented to inform debate and will be subject to decision at a future meeting of the County Council.

The broad options are:

- I. Continue with the committee in its current form and extend this model to the other area committees.
- II. Decommission the Area Committee model across the County.
- III. Re-purpose area committees as a local information-sharing forum rather than a council committee.
- IV. Extend the pilot for a further three months to allow democratic services committee to conclude its work on increasing involvement in local democracy.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- We have not been good enough at letting the public know what the purpose of Area Committees are.
- Some issues raised at a Select Committee should have been referred to the Area Committee, as the matter related to a local issue.

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- It was suggested that information regarding the purpose of Area Committees could be included within Council Tax bills when these are posted out to the community.
- The Public Open Forum could be publicised at post offices and supermarkets.
- Some Members considered that many people are only interested in attending the Area Committee when they have an issue to raise.
- The public can also contact their local Councillor directly if they have an issue that needs addressing.
- There is merit in keeping the Area Committee community based.
- Holding meetings within the community away from Abergavenny Town has not led to an increase in the numbers of the public attending Area Committee meetings.
- The public are discouraged from attending Area Committee meetings as they are not decision making bodies.
- Area Committees are information gathering bodies. It was considered that the appropriate people are not in attendance at Area Committee meetings to provide answers to questions raised.
- Not all of the community councils within the North Monmouthshire area send representatives to the Area Committee.
- It was noted that the Area Committee should consider fewer but more substantial issues that affect the North Monmouthshire area.
- The Area Committee is better at dealing with local issues rather than information gathering.
- Regarding the lack of response to issues raised by the Highways Department, the Head of Policy and Governance stated that it would be beneficial if the information required was publically available.
- It was noted that the North Monmouthshire Area Committee comprises of three Cabinet Members who are well placed to answer questions raised.
- County Council decides when Area Committee meetings are held, not the local community.
- Abergavenny Chronicle could publish details of future Area Committee meetings but do not do this.

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The Area Committee voted on the four options, noting that these options will be subject to a decision at a future meeting of the County Council.

- I. Continue with the committee in its current form and extend this model to the other area committees. **7 votes**
- II. Decommission the Area Committee model across the County. **0 votes**
- III. Re-purpose area committees as a local information-sharing forum rather than a council committee. **1 vote**
- IV. Extend the pilot for a further three months to allow democratic services committee to conclude its work on increasing involvement in local democracy. **0 votes**

The North Monmouthshire Area Committee supported Option 1 - Continue with the committee in its current form and extend this model to the other area committees.

7. Monmouthshire Well-being Plan

We received an update on the latest developments of the Well-being Plan approved by Monmouthshire Public Service Board.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- It would be beneficial to the Area Committee if an invitation was extended to a representative of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to outline what it is doing for the North of the County due to concerns raised at the lack of NRW resources.
- Concern was expressed that Welsh Government was reducing its funding for Local Government, NRW and the Police which is having a detrimental impact on services being provided by these bodies.
- These are challenging times with the local Authority being required to make difficult decisions. The Authority is having to think and work differently in order to solve the challenges being faced.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

8. Update regarding Abergavenny Station by Network Rail

We received an update report by Network Rail regarding the footbridge refurbishment at Abergavenny Railway Station.

The Chair informed the Committee that she had recently met with representatives of Network Rail and had been informed that the application to the UK Access for All has been submitted and the final decision will be announced in April 2019.

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9. Update by County Councillor S. Woodhouse regarding progress in respect of the Strategic Transport Group

We received a verbal update by County Councillor S. Woodhouse.

The next meeting of the Strategic Transport Group will be held on 16th January 2019.

The following issue was identified to be raised at the next Strategic Transport Group meeting:

- That the Passenger Transport Unit takes on the role of printing bus timetables and erecting them at the relevant bus stops.

Members were asked to contact Councillor Woodhouse directly if they had any other items to be raised at the next Strategic Transport Group meeting.

10. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the North Monmouthshire Area Committee dated 26th September 2018 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

11. Monmouthshire Scrutiny Work Programme

We received and noted the Scrutiny Work Programme.

12. Forward Planner for Cabinet and Council Business

We received and noted the forward planner for Cabinet and Council Business.

In doing so, it was noted that there were highways issues at Neville Hall Hospital which had led to buses finding it difficult to negotiate the site resulting, on occasions, with ambulances being held up.

It was suggested that representatives from Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and representatives from Monmouthshire County Council's Highways Department be invited to a future meeting of the Area Committee to discuss this matter further.

13. North Monmouthshire Area Committee Future Work Programme

We received the Bryn y Cwm Area Committee future work programme.

We resolved that the following items be added to the work programme:

- **Representatives from Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and representatives from Monmouthshire County Council's Highways Department be invited to a future meeting of the Area Committee to discuss highways issues at Neville Hall Hospital which had led to buses finding it difficult to negotiate the site resulting, on occasions, with ambulances being held up.**

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- **An invitation be extended to Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to attend a future meeting of the Area Committee to outline what it is doing for the North of the County due to concerns raised regarding the lack of NRW resources.**
- **To receive an update at a future meeting of the Area Committee regarding progress in respect of Phase 3 of Abergavenny Public Realm.**
- **To receive an update at a future meeting of the Area Committee on progress in respect of the refurbishment of Abergavenny Hub.**
- **To receive an update at a future meeting of the Area Committee regarding Active Citizenship.**

The Area Committee was provided with information regarding social media training and Inspiring Evaluation Training for volunteers.

14. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held at Llanover Village Hall, subject to availability, on Wednesday 30th January 2019 at 1.00pm.

All future meetings of the North Monmouthshire Area Committee will commence at 1.00pm.

The meeting ended at 4.20 pm.

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