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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Adults Select Committee held
at The Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Tuesday, 23rd
October, 2018 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor L. Brown (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: M. Groucutt, P. Pavia, J. Pratt, R. Harris and
S. Woodhouse

Also in attendance: County Councillor V. Smith

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mark Howcroft	Assistant Head of Finance
Tyrone Stokes	Accountant
Ian Bakewell	Housing & Regeneration Manager
Shirley Wiggam	Senior Strategy & Policy Officer
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Richard Williams	Democratic Services Officer

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Julie Nicholas – Monmouthshire Housing Association

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors: D. Blakebrough, L. Dymock and R. Edwards

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

2. Public Open Forum

There were no members of the public present.

3. Revenue and Capital Monitoring 2018/19 Outturn Statement

Context:

To scrutinise the revenue and capital outturn position of the Authority at the end of reporting period 1 which represents the financial outturn position for the 2018/19 financial year based on May inclusive activities.

Recommendations Proposed To Cabinet:

- That Members consider a net revenue forecast of £471,000 overspend.
- Members consider a capital outturn spend of £35.7m, which accords with budget provision for the year, after proposed slippage of £75,000. This describes a breakeven position not uncommon for this early in the year, although there is a

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potential for additional 21st Century Schools costs in respect of additional asbestos removal and treatment costs not anticipated, which colleagues indicate could be the order of £350,000.

- Considers the use of reserves proposed in para 3.8.1 of the report.
- Members note that the low level of earmarked reserves will notably reduce the flexibility the Council has in meeting the challenges of scarce resources, going forward.
- Members note the extent of movements in individual budgeted draws on school balances, and acknowledge a reported net forecast deficit of £622,000 resulting, and support the amendments to the County Council's Fairer Funding Regulations, as described in para 3.8.13 of the report, for onward engagement with schools forum and governing bodies.

Member Scrutiny:

- In response to a question raised regarding the long term duty of care for Monmouthshire's elderly population, it was noted that Monmouthshire has an aging demographic and the Welsh Government's older persons funding formula has Monmouthshire at the bottom of this formula with regard to funding allocation. The majority of the budget savings within Adults Services comes from the practice change agenda. This is a challenge but officers are looking at innovative ways of providing care to ensure that people's needs are met. Support is also available via the Gwent wide Frailty Programme, negotiations with external care homes, as well as the domiciliary care market. For this financial year it is anticipated that the Directorate will come in on budget. For the next financial year, the Directorate has to make a saving of £536,000.
- There is recognition at Central Government and Welsh Government about the fragility of social care funding.
- The Authority is actively engaging with its domiciliary care market, not only to identify whether they have the capacity but to make sure that they are financially sustainable, going forward.
- In response to a Select Committee Member's question regarding volatility of budgets within some directorates, it was noted that the Council has a number of choices when volatile situations occur. This is a challenge with declining budgets and decreasing settlements and therefore, budget volatility is a risk to local authorities.

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Committee's Conclusion:

We supported the report and recommendations proposed and that they be presented to Cabinet.

4. Review of the Mardy Local Lettings Policy

Context:

To scrutinise a request by Monmouthshire Housing Association to extend a Local Lettings Policy that relates to social housing stock in Mardy, Abergavenny.

Key Issues:

The Council has a statutory responsibility to identify housing need and to lead on actions to respond to this need. In this regard, the Council's Housing Register and Common Allocation Policy is a legal responsibility and is delivered by Monmouthshire Housing Association through the Homesearch Partnership, made up of the Council and local housing associations.

The Council's responsibility is to have an allocation scheme for determining 'priorities'. With regard to priorities, the scheme needs to ensure that 'reasonable preference' is given to certain categories of applicants, such as people who are homeless or need to move for medical reasons. However, there is scope to allocate accommodation to people of a particular description, whether or not they fall within the 'reasonable preference' categories and to certain types of property or those within an area, provided that overall compliance with the 'reasonable preference' requirements.

Under this provision, a Local Lettings Policy was established in 2015 in respect of four streets in the Mardy, Abergavenny – St Andrew's Crescent, St George's Crescent, Llwynu Lane and St David's Road.

The aim of the policy was to tackle anti-social behaviour, low demand and failed tenancies resulting in a high turnover of properties and increasing void periods. The policy gives priority to applicants in full time employment or 50+ with a view to developing a balanced and sustainable community to tackle the said issues.

The following provides a summary overview of the impact of the policy:

- The demographic and socio-economic profile of the area has changed.
- A reduction in voids.
- Reduced applications from existing residents wishing to leave the area.

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- The average number of bids on vacant properties has improved, although remains well below average for comparable general needs stock.
- Whilst turnover has reduced and refusal rates are low, there was an increase in reported anti-social behaviour reported in the area in 2016/17 but this reduced in 2017/18.

The results of the policy are positive, but Monmouthshire Housing Association considers that there are further benefits to be achieved by extending the policy for a further two years. An implication of the policy, however, is that the policy effectively temporarily marginally reduces the 'wider pool' of accommodation available for those applicants in the greatest housing need, including homeless applicants. The majority of homeless applicants are not in employment and typically are under 50 years of age.

Options Appraisal:

The following options are available:

- Option 1 – not approve and bring the local letting policy to an end.
- Option 2 - approve for an extension of one year.
- Option 3 – approve for an extension of two years.

Member Scrutiny:

- The local Member for Mardy welcomes the report and supported option 3 to approve an extension of the letting policy for a further two years.
- The Member for Lansdown supports an extension of the letting policy for a further two years.
- In response to a question raised, it was noted that nobody is moved out to make way for people coming in to the area. Due to the naturally high churn rate that Monmouthshire Housing Association (MHA) had, MHA now applies the criteria to new people coming into the area. MHA has a very low eviction rate.
- In response to a request that the Local Lettings Policy (LLP) be extended into Lansdown ward, it was noted that MHA is working within a statutory context. The Housing register is about meeting statutory duty in terms of the allocation of social housing and monitoring housing need. There are certain categories of need that has to be responded to. The legislation does allow for LLPs, which have to be temporary. Therefore, there is scope to do more but the social housing needs still need to be met.
- MHA does not have any issues regarding letting a void property as Monmouthshire has very few hard to let properties compared with other valley areas. Monmouthshire has fewer people waiting for these properties. People with more complex needs can be concentrated in that area as these properties

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become available more often and fewer people are competing for these properties.

- Private sector rents are rising, creating more pressure on the housing market. Monmouthshire has a programme to build more properties with a view to alleviating this pressure.
- LLPs are time limited and are neighbourhood specific and can be established on new developments as well as existing neighbourhoods. LLPs will be used by multiple authorities across Wales.
- There is an increased number of working families coming into the area because of the priority. The age demographic is therefore falling. There will also be concentrations of older people living in the area.
- There has been considerable investment in environmental and Welsh housing quality standard works in the area. Partnership working has been undertaken to ensure the success of the LLP.
- In terms of the anti-social behaviour figures, only 154 properties are included in the LLP. Anti-social behaviour has been moving around this area and is currently higher in one area compared to others. The LLP was started with the four streets and the preference would be to continue with the four.
- The policy of the Council is to re-house those in greatest need. The Authority has very supportive partners which works well.

Committee's Conclusion:

We resolved:

- (i) to support the recommendation to Cabinet that the Policy should be extended for a further two years, subject to a review in one year;
- (ii) that the Select Committee receives a presentation one year from now outlining the progress of the Mardy Local Lettings Policy.

5. Social Housing Grant Programme

Context:

To scrutinise the report before the Cabinet Member is briefed on the completion of the Social Housing Grant (SHG) programme for 2017/2018 and seek approval for the new SHG Programme for 2018-2019.

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Key Issues:

It is recognised in Monmouthshire that house prices have risen to a level beyond that which is affordable to many local people. The average house price is currently £298,600 (Wales comparison £185,700) and the lower quartile affordability ratio is 9:1. Therefore, the provision of affordable housing is one of the Council's more pressing concerns, in both urban and rural areas.

The number of applicants on the Common Housing Register is currently 3082.

During 2017/2018 the Housing Options Team received 533 enquiries from households threatened with homelessness. They determined 258 S66 (at risk of becoming homeless within 58 days) and 261 S73 and S75 (actually homeless).

Member Scrutiny:

- In response to a Select Committee Member's question regarding the potential use of empty properties within the high street, it was noted that this matter is more difficult to achieve via the Social Housing Grant Programme. However, empty properties are looked at and any properties that are suitable for Social Housing Grant would be considered.
- The Pobl Group's Development Team had previously been asked to look at the availability of empty properties located above shops in the high street. However, no positive outcomes had arisen from this venture as it had proved difficult in making this a financially viable option. Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) could be contacted again with a view to taking this matter forward and to investigate the possibility of further exploring the use of empty properties located above shops in the high street for the use of affordable housing units.
- Members congratulated the Senior Strategy & Policy Officer for her work in accessing grants which has led to a number of quality developments being established.
- Due to an error in the report, the following figures were provided as being the correct figures:

Social Housing Grant	£1,250,044
Housing Finance Grant 2	£ 716,213
Total Grant	£1,966,257

- In response to a question raised regarding the percentage of affordable housing units, it was noted that it is getting more difficult to reach the affordable housing percentage targets due to viability issues and high land values.

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Committee's Conclusion:

We recommended that the Housing & Communities Manager contacts Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to investigate the possibility of further exploring the use of empty properties located above shops in the high street for the use of affordable housing units.

6. Rural Allocations Policy

Context:

To seek approval to amend the Rural Allocations Policy.

Key Issues:

The policy was originally intended to cover small rural villages where there was little opportunity for households to find affordable housing. Areas such as Llanfoist and the Severnside Settlements were never intended to be included and have had large housing allocations, both in the UDP and the LDP, which have allowed local people in housing need to have access to affordable housing.

The criteria of the policy, as it currently exists, has caused difficulties for the Homeseach Team when allocating rural properties and has resulted in households with no housing need being allocated a property ahead of local households in genuine housing need.

Member Scrutiny:

- In response to a question raised by a Select Committee Member regarding availability of affordable housing in the Llanelly area, it was noted that Llanelly Hill falls within the remit of the Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP) Policy. New builds would go to local people. BBNP has a local lettings policy which is equivalent to Monmouthshire County Council's Policy as it was some years ago.
- The policy allowed for children who were born and brought up in an area to be able to return to the area, as they had left due to there not being affordable houses for them to live in. The first two points within the criteria referred to people living in an area now and had lived there for five years and had lived there for five years in the past. However, households who were living in an area at the present time were given priority over households who had lived there in the past but had moved due to a lack of affordable housing. The policy now allows for people living in an area at any time, for a period of five years or longer, to be eligible. This will allow people who were born and brought up in a rural area to be able to return should they wish to do so.

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- In response to a question raised regarding information outlined in bold print on pages 86 and 87 of the policy, it was noted that this information had been put into the policy in bold print to ensure that Monmouthshire's Regional Social Landlords (RSLs) adhere to these guidelines.
- Monmouthshire's allocations policy is five working days. The RSLs are monitored on their empty properties. From a service delivery perspective, RSLs do not want to lose rent. It is standard practice for people to provide verification prior to being allocated a property.

Committee's Conclusion:

We resolved to support the recommendations of the report, namely:

- To consider the need and benefits of a Rural Allocations Policy for rural communities.
- To approve changes to the Rural Allocations Policy in order to assist the correct allocation of future affordable housing in rural areas and to align rural areas included in the policy with those of LDP Spatial Strategy.

The Scrutiny Manager informed the Select Committee that the Economy and Development Select Committee is leading on the scrutiny of the Local Development Plan (LDP). The Select Committee will be establishing and leading on a number of workshops in respect of this matter. However, all Members will be invited to attend and take part in these workshops.

7. Confirmation of Minutes:

7.1. Joint Select Committee (Adults and Economy and Development Select Committees) dated 7th September 2018

The minutes of the Joint Select Committee (Adults and Economy and Development Select Committees) dated 7th September 2018 were confirmed and signed by the Vice-Chair.

7.2. Adults Select Committee dated 11th September 2018

The minutes of the Adults Select Committee meeting dated 11th September 2018 were confirmed and signed by the Vice-Chair subject to the following amendment:

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Minute 2 - Presentation by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) regarding progress on South Monmouthshire Care Closer to Home work and it's alignment to Monmouthshire Integrated Services.

Committee's conclusion:

Bullet point three be amended as follows:

The Health Board (including Chief Executive, Judith Paget) should return to a future meeting to provide more information on generic services at Chepstow Hospital.

8. Adults Select Committee Forward Work Programme

We received the Adults Committee Forward Work Programme. In doing so, the following points were noted:

- A workshop for the Select Committee is being held on Friday 26th October 2018 at 10.00am regarding the requirements of the Gypsy and Traveller Assessment Needs.
- A special meeting of the Adults Select Committee will be held on the 26th November 2018.

The Vice Chair provided the Select Committee with an update on the report on the A to Z Social Care system of records, as follows:

- County Councillors Brown and Pratt met with a number of service mangers and the Lead Systems Analyst.
- There has been an integrated approach to the care service since about 2008.
- About five to seven years ago, integration of record sharing included district nurses and community physiotherapists.
- Three years ago a Flo record system started.
- There are information sharing protocols with the health board.
- The system provides access to the records listed under their own worker names and job titles.
- Underneath this system is an A to Z system of records held on a drive. The drive files come from manual files being placed on to the computer system. In comparison, the health service still has a number of manual file records. There are 3381 people on the system across all services. The caseload per person is an average of 20.

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- The drive covers legacy and new information and is the prime source of records. In terms of a paper trail, the network drives are not the best system for a document management system but operate across the Council. There are 750,000 documents off the network drive into the share point.
- The access to the A – Z system of adult social care records operates based on trust with induction training of staff and the signing of confidentiality agreements.
- In Councillor Brown's opinion, the main disadvantage of the system is that it lacks a computer paper trail. Whilst ease of access on an A – Z system of all names may help in health care, it would be better if it had a computer generated document management monitoring system to monitor access to social care records and did not solely rely on staff trust and staff confidentiality agreements.
- In Councillor Pratt's opinion, the advantage of easy access to records outweighs the small risk of data breaches.
- It is important in the current system to ask managers to keep records / monitor new staff and ensure that induction is at the outset prior to any access and includes signed confidentiality agreements and not to access any data before having received this training and unless relevant to the persons under their care. It is also important to ensure that all current staff have up to date training in this area, have all signed, and abide by the confidentiality codes.
- Under the GDPR, there is no longer a need for consent but adults with social care records have a right to be informed of the purposes of the data collection and a right to restrict it. In terms of any restriction, it was noted that patients can ask for certain information to be restricted if they wish but this may have implications for their level of care.
- In terms of how long records are kept, depends on the situation. Children's records are kept for longer. It can vary depending on the legal requirements for record keeping.
- There is an all Wales system called the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS), which eight or nine of the 22 Welsh authorities have moved into. In terms of the future, the WCCIS has a more robust document management system with one E File per person but it is not a shared record for health and local authority.
- Councillors Brown and Pratt would like the Select Committee to receive further updates on how we could improve our system in the future on the document management side from the Chief Officer for Social Care Safeguarding and Health, as the Chief Officer is a member of the WCCIS Board.
- Councillors Brown and Pratt considered that it would be helpful if they could visit an authority with the WCCIS in place and report back their findings.

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In response to the update, the Scrutiny Manager informed the Select Committee:

- The Chief Officer for Social Care Safeguarding and Health sits on the WCCIS Board and confirmed that she is progressing with the idea that Monmouthshire County Council would join that system in due course.
- A visit can be arranged for Members to view the system in operation with a view to the Members reporting back their findings to a future meeting of the Select Committee. County Councillors Brown and Pratt would be the Select Committee's representatives.

9. Council and Cabinet Business Forward Work Programme

We received the Council and Cabinet Business Forward Work Programme.

10. Next Meeting

- Special Meeting - 26th November 2018 at 10.00am.
- Ordinary Meeting - 18th December 2018 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 12.01 pm.

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