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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee held
at The Council Chamber, County Hall, Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Tuesday, 18th
December, 2018 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor P.Pavia (Chairman)
County Councillor A.Davies (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: J.Becker, A.Davies, D. Dovey and R.Roden

Also in attendance County Councillors: J. Pratt and V. Smith

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Peter Davies	Chief Officer, Resources
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Ian Kennet	Head of Outdoor Education Centres
Ian Saunders	Head of Tourism, Leisure, Culture and Youth
Tom Burrett	Site Co-Ordinator, Hilston Park OEC
Stuart Lovell	Site Co-Ordinator, Gilwern OEC

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors M.Feakins and B. Strong

1. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

2. Procurement: Scrutiny of a performance report on Procurement and the Council's strategic direction

The Chief Officer, Resources provided a presentation entitled "Delivering the initial phase of the Procurement Strategy – A Case for Investment" to convey the substance of a report for Cabinet. Following the presentation, comments and questions were invited:

- A Member suggested that independent assessment would be beneficial, and also that there should only be reports following notable change to save Officer time and assist progress. It was also suggested that everyone should have a target to encourage better efficiency and responded that arbitrary targets won't achieve ownership by departments. Instead, by working with the local authority partner to gain a good level of insight and data will lead to well-informed targets to enable Chief Officers to be challenged. Responsibility will be transferred to the Head of Transformation for phase 1. Additional resource and expertise will be brought in on an informed basis based on outcomes after the 3 month period.
- Members praised the thorough and measured presentation. Concern about cultural shift was expressed seeking a tighter bond between Enterprise and Procurement. It was stressed that a pathway of training and feedback of information is key.
- In response to a question, it was explained that the change will be "sold" to staff by starting early with good data to produce a better understanding of future procurement

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work. The importance of working with staff, training and engaging with suppliers was agreed as key.

Committee Conclusions:

The Chair summed up that the Select Committee has explored the cultural change associated with the new Procurement Strategy and had considered who will drive it in the future referring to the need for independent assessment .

Members commended the measured and informed approach. The Select Committee was assured that the early engagement of staff would be an important step in introducing the new strategy

The Chief Officer, Resources was thanked for his presentation. The Select Committee Members looked forward to progress and requested an update on in April.

3. Outdoor Education: Scrutiny of the service re-provision proposals.

Purpose:

1. To consider the dissolution of the Gwent Outdoor Education Service partnership for which the Council is the lead partner, working with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (BGCBC), Newport City Council (NCC) and Torfaen County Borough Council (TCBC) further to the withdrawal of partner subsidy.
2. To consider the closure of the Talybont Site, returning the site to Newport City Council for disposal, and subsequently to consider the associated staff redundancies if suitable redeployment cannot be found.
3. To engage Select Committee Members in initial ideas on future opportunities for service delivery and to receive a presentation from the Service with a view to return when detailed plans are complete.

Key Issues:

1. Gwent Outdoor Education Service (GOES) has three residential centres at Hilston Park near Monmouth, Gilwern and Talybont (in Powys). The Council operates and manages GOES on behalf of the partner authorities i.e. BGCBC, NCC and TCBC, the Council own the Hilston Park and Gilwern sites whilst NCC own the Talybont centre. The service currently provides around 20,000 visitor days annually, the vast majority being residential school groups from South East Wales.
2. Post local government reorganisation in 1996, the joint service was supported by annual subsidies from the four Local Authority partners. NCC, in 2013 withdrew from the Shared Service Agreement and subsidy arrangements due to financial reasons. In 2016, TCBC decided to apply a tapering reduction in subsidy for 2016/17 reducing to nil subsidy in 2017/18. BGCBC also reduced their subsidy and are considering withdrawal.
3. Since 2013/14 the Service made a small profit until 2017/18 when income levels dropped slightly. This does not include the cost of building maintenance, grounds maintenance or insurances. If included in the costs of delivering the service, it has operated at a deficit for four

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of the last five years. A net overspend of £50,000 is predicted for 2018/19. Reasonable income has been maintained and future operation needs to be reviewed. The Shared Service Agreement needs to be ended and subject to approval, this will be terminated from 31st March 2019.

4. Hilston and Gilwern sites are owned by the Council and will remain with the Authority. Talybont will be returned to NCC. The return of the Talybont site to NCC will result in the loss of two posts at Talybont and subsequently, redundancy costs. The Agreement states that if the host authority has to make a redundancy payment, the Authorities should make a fair and reasonable contribution but it is anticipated that this be met from the service budget.

5. There will be new possibilities for service design and delivery particularly if the proposed new Alternative Delivery Model, MonLife, is approved by Council in 2019. Efforts will be concentrated on two Council owned sites by reviewing staff structures, improving efficiency, increasing income and identifying potential new markets.

Member Scrutiny

Following a presentation from the Head of Tourism, Leisure, Culture and Youth and Gwent Outdoor Education Centre Officers, questions were invited from Select Committee Members:

- Given the regional drive for educational achievement and innovative curriculum, regional working on health and social care and the pressures on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), it was asked why partner authorities wished to withdraw. It was responded that the reasons are mainly financial and reflect many years of budget cuts. The service has continued due to schools' and/or parents' funding for what is viewed as a valued service.
- Other similar facilities are available at Storey Arms, Swansea and Carmarthen. All Powys CC facilities have been closed. 6 authorities in North Wales funds a shared service.
- A Member asked why the Talybont site is being closed. It was explained that prices have risen and it is the most difficult site to fill. Schools tend to choose 2 ½ day visits instead of 5 day visits; there is a drop off in winter bookings. A large extension provided new accommodation but the money was not available to complete the project to upgrade the Grade 2 listed building and consequently there are lower standard facilities there albeit in a great location. It was confirmed that it is owned by Newport CC and administered by Monmouthshire CC. Both Gilwern and Hilston Park sites cater for larger numbers.
- It is unclear if Monmouthshire would have any portion of the capital receipt if the site was sold.
- A Member shared his very positive experience of a visit with a school commenting on the impressive quality of instruction and the contribution to the health and wellbeing agenda but also recognised that school budgets are under huge pressure. Opportunities exist but with cross border schools and diversification e.g. for Management training. Officers confirmed that the priority is to provide services for Monmouthshire schools.
- A Member asked if there are any unique features at Talybont and it was responded that the location is the best aspect. Lack of investment, however, has meant operating the service from steel containers, additionally there are licenses for basic activities only.
- Regarding leadership, the Head of Tourism, Leisure, Culture and Youth confirmed that there are excellent, well qualified staff capable of providing the skills and leadership for the other two sites going forward.
- Regarding bookings in the school holidays, it was explained that there is work all year round with e.g. the National Citizen Service
- Regarding diversification, it was confirmed that any new markets would not take precedence over schools.

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- Sales and Marketing posts have been added to publicise and sell services throughout Tourism, Leisure, Culture and Youth. Partnership with students of video marketing was offered. The importance of careful research was emphasised.
- A Member supported opportunities to improve outcomes for children especially those from a deprived background. Work with the international student and schools market was suggested. Investment and working better together was also supported e.g. making better use of underused facilities like Clydach Village Hall for persons caving and walking in Clydach Gorge. A question was raised about surplus S106 money for Gilwern and plans for its expenditure. It was explained that £12,000 will be used by the Youth Service, the remainder is for improvements to Gilwern Village Hall and an update on progress was provided.
- A Member supported that other facilities in the County could complement future services. It was strongly suggested that the Select Committee scrutinises proposals going forward.
- In response to a question about parental contribution, it was explained that the highest charge is £286 per 5 days with reductions in winter and for Free School Meals pupils. Subsidised places are not offered to pupils from the other authorities that have withdrawn funding. A Member stressed that the main purpose should be confirmed as providing better education for young people.

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Committee Conclusions:

The Chair, on behalf of the Economy and Development Select Committee, summarised views as follows:

1. The Select Committee explored some of the reasons why the other authorities had disinvested in the service and recognised the pressure this placed on the Council.
2. The Select Committee fully explored the issues pertaining to the Talybont Centre.
3. The Committee considered the opportunities for diversification at the Hilston Park and Gilwern Centres including accessing the private sector market for example in respect of business management training and development. In doing so, the Select Committee was clear that research must be robust and welcomed future opportunities for scrutiny. The Committee advocated the use of key data to ensure a good response to the commercial market and to shape future services.
4. The Select Committee were pleased to hear the praise of the leadership and management team; Members shared personal and positive feedback.
5. The Committee considered staffing levels and particularly recognised the importance of sales and marketing going forward to ensure information is efficiently promulgated throughout South Wales, the South West and West Midlands.
6. Whilst seeking new funding streams, the Select Committee wished to ensure that the improved services mainly benefitted children from this and other authorities.
7. The Select Committee questioned use of Section 106 funding and noted that it will be used to double glaze a community facility – more information was to be sought.

The Select Committee voted on the recommendations to Cabinet contained in the report and unanimously supported:

1. The approval of the dissolution of the Gwent Outdoor Education Service Partnership with effect from 31st March 2019.
2. The formal closure of the Talybont site on 1st Feb 2019 returning the site to Newport City Council with effect from 28th Feb 2019.
3. The approval of the deletion of two posts i.e. Talybont Site Co-ordinator – Staffing and Environment Education and the site Cook and to approve corresponding redundancy payments, if suitable redeployment cannot be found.

The Officers were thanked for their attendance at the meeting.

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4. To confirm the date and time of the next meeting as Thursday 10th January 2019 at 10.00am

Members' Seminar on Brexit: 15th January 2019, 2.00pm. The Scrutiny Manager has circulated some information to all Members to assist development of questions.

A series of Local Development Plan workshops have been arranged as follows:

1. 22nd January 2019 at 2.00pm – Vision and future economies workshop
2. Members seminar: 28th January 10.00am – To discuss potential candidate sites
3. 25th March 2019 at 10.00am: Workshop on Planning Policy Wales v.10 and its implications.

The Chair, Vice Chair, Scrutiny Manager and Head of Planning and Place will meet to prepare for the above workshops to ensure there is clear purpose and clear outcomes.

In discussing infrastructure and the removal of the tolls on the Severn Bridge, the Chair agreed to chase progress on publication of the Weltag Stage 1 report on the Chepstow Transport Study.

The meeting ended at 4.30 pm