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Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA with remote attendance on Thursday, 1st February, 2024 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor Lisa Dymock (Chairman)
County Councillor Jane Lucas, (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: Louise Brown, Emma Bryn, Tomos Davies, Maria Stevens, Jackie Strong, Laura Wright, Tudor Thomas

Also in attendance County Councillors:
Ben Callard, Cabinet Member for Resources
Paul Griffiths, Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development and Simon Howarth

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Peter Davies, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer, Resources
Will McLean, Chief Officer for Children and Young People
Frances O'Brien, Chief Officer, Communities and Place
Jonathan Davies, Head of Finance
Mark Hand, Head of Place-making, Housing, Highways and Flood
Cath Fallon, Head of Economy and Enterprise
Matthew Gatehouse, Chief Officer People, Performance and Partnerships.
Ian Saunders, Chief Officer Customer, Culture and Wellbeing.
David Jones, Head of Public Protection
Huw Owen, Principal Environment Health Officer (Public Health)
Tyrone Stokes, Accountant
Dave Loder, Finance Manager
Nikki Wellington, Finance Manager
Stacey Jones, Senior Accountant
Carl Touhig, Head of Neighbourhood Services
Craig O'Connor, Head of Planning
Deb Hill-Howells, Head of Decarbonisation, Transport and Support Services

APOLOGIES: County Councillors Martyn Groucutt, Cabinet Member for Education and Catrin Maby, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment

Note: the following minutes focus on the challenge from members – for the full discussion, the recording of the meeting is at www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZHCX3TvBsA&list=PLlmqn4nAaFJAaDA9m3C2P8ZdJsca-bkSU&index=11

1. Declarations of Interest.

None.

2. Public Open Forum.

None.

3. Scrutiny of the Budget Proposals - Scrutiny of the budget mandates relating to the committee's remit.

Cabinet Member Ben Callard delivered a presentation, introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Mark Hand, Debra Hill-Howells, Paul Griffiths, Jonathan Davies, Carl Touhig, Peter Davies and Cath Fallon.

Key points raised by Members:

1. Is there further information on the residents' meetings that will take place?
2. Is there a shortfall relating to car parks?
3. Can we be informed if the trade waste costs will now break even with the proposed increases and how this affects schools? How many schools currently use outside contractors and how do you think that the planned national changes for workforce recycling in April will affect the services and the income that we receive?
4. Do we need to provide residents with further information on what they can use as alternatives to plastic bags, such as bread bags and plastic food bags? And is it possible to assess the impact of this?
5. Do we receive any cash on saleable waste products as part of the waste incineration process?
6. Can we have more information on the drivers of increased costs of school transport? How are we avoiding these and making it cheaper by bringing it in-house?
7. Are we planning to electrify our bus services? Has money been set aside to invest in reducing the carbon of our home fleet?
8. Are other LAs doing the same with food waste bags?
9. How will ALN pupils be affected by the home-to-school transport proposals?
10. What will be the knock-on effect of increased parking charges to the use of supermarket car parks? When supermarkets were built the idea was that they wouldn't take trade away from towns. Are there any planning issues there?
11. Which council assets are possibly being used for homelessness? Is accommodation available at Severn View Care home?
12. Why have recycling cost pressures increased so much?
13. Why is there a 10% increase regarding garden waste?
14. Can we have more information about the cost pressures related to Council Tax premiums? Why isn't it cost neutral?
15. Have we pushed Welsh Government sufficiently in terms of getting extra funding? What extra consultation have we had to ensure we get the funding level to the Welsh average?
16. Are you looking into any other council properties for homelessness? What about county farms?
17. Can there be a press release or advertising so people will know that bread bags can be used as food waste bags?
18. Why is there no mention or breakdown in the budget of Highways?
19. There have been complaints from residents about the early closure of leisure centres on Sunday afternoons, and there are therefore concerns about the impact on the well-being of residents who participate in activities that will now be curtailed e.g. the badminton club in Monmouth. Surely the graph will look the same next year as usage naturally tails off at the end of the day? Could we not open for longer to get more people in, and increase revenue in the process?
20. Will the proposal to close Tintern Old Station and two museums for one day a week, except for bank holidays, be confusing to tourists?

21. The survival of local shops, particularly in Monmouth, is a great concern. Will car parking charges affect footfall and local businesses? We have received a suggestion from a resident to remove the charges from the main car park in Monmouth to support local shops.
22. What will happen to the electric buses?
23. Can you clarify the number of vehicles to be replaced? Will they be utilised for community transport?
24. If Severn View care facility isn't suitable for older people, with what confidence can we say it is suitable for homeless people?
25. The costs of provision for the building at Crick – was that dependent on selling Severn View for housing?
26. We're going to save £400k for B&Bs and homeless accommodation, but refurbishment of Severn View will be needed. Is it acceptable that all the people that are homeless in Monmouthshire will go to one place?
27. There are concerns about the waste strategy and the risk associated with incorporating trade waste.
28. Does trying to operate as a business make sense as a council? Should the focus not be on delivering public services? – **ACTION: To circulate the data on external fee income requested by Councillor Howarth to the committee**
29. For ALN children, why can we not find specialist transport and have a better price for it?
30. Can we have a further explanation of the budget associated with borrowing money to purchase transport? Is there not massive risk associated with this?
31. Note that if contractors don't put in a tender for a route then parents expect the authority to provide transport for children, and we can't save £22m without some reductions being made.

Chair's Summary:

The committee recognises the budget pressures that the administration is trying to manage and there were a number of questions such as around the trade waste increases and whether we know the impact that this will have on our businesses across Monmouthshire. We wanted some reassurance on the home to school transport proposals and wanting to ensure it doesn't have a detrimental impact on additional learning needs. We needed more understanding with regards to homelessness and the savings that will be made, utilising Severn View care home and whether or not it's a suitable facility. There's concern over the Welsh Government settlement of 2.3% when the average is 3.1%. We hope that the Cabinet Member will continue pushing for extra funding. There were some questions around Second Home Council Tax premiums and concern that there's a lack of information on highways. There are concerns about the early closure of leisure centres on Sundays and the impact on health and well-being, as well as the confusion and impact on tourism caused by the proposed closures. The effect of car parking charges on footfall in towns was also discussed.

4. Public Spaces Protection Order Dog Controls - To scrutinise the latest report.

Cabinet Member Paul Griffiths introduced the report and answered the members' questions with Huw Owen and David Jones.

Key points raised by Members:

1. Why was there a low number of responses from sports clubs?
2. What are the practicalities of enforcement, especially where play areas aren't fenced in?
3. Can we assess the effectiveness in 6/12 months' time and ask for public feedback about how it's going?

4. We have a high bar to reach for raising awareness: some dog owners are very unhappy about not being able to run their dog on the pitch at Bailey Park, for example.
5. Compare with anti-social driving measures, in which a patrol car would visit problem areas – what are the equivalent enforcement options in this case?
6. Could the location of the old swimming pool in Bailey Park be a free running area?
7. Can you the point about exclusions on school land, and certain exceptions?
8. Will the consequence of these measures be an increase in dog fouling on pavements? Will enforcement officers be able to look at that, and is there a fine for that?
9. What methods will be used to inform/educate the public on the PSPO and how it affects green spaces?
10. We previously had the impression that the red card wouldn't be used as there was too much dialogue on it – the boards would be more graphic. Do we have more of an idea on that?
11. Will the order be printed on the signs – that it's 'a designated area etc.?
12. Some authorities have dog bag vending machines, which are very cheap – has anything like this been considered?
13. In terms of intelligence, how/who do members or residents contact?
14. Would town council be able to utilise some of the enforcement officers?
15. Can you clarify the exclusion areas in relation to Caldicot Castle Grounds?
16. In Caldicot, are the exclusion areas not inconsistent with the active travel routes e.g. the route from Deepweir to the village, and back in front of the cricket club?
17. Will this not discourage people from walking with their dogs or children to and from school?
18. If there is a tarmacked pavement, will people not naturally assume that they can walk on it with their dog?
19. Will there be a FAQs section on the website when this is rolled out?
20. We need to be aware of what communities spend e.g. Gilwern spends £14-15k on dog bins, but dog users from other areas come into the community because there hasn't been sufficient enforcement, so work with town and community councils is crucial
21. Can we work with dog owners to find areas for them to use – could they form an organisation or user group to have their own area designated for dog walking and exercising?
22. We need to recognise the importance of the Dangerous Dogs Act, as some of the feelings from communities about dogs coming on to playing fields, for example, is that there have been instances of big dogs frightening children
23. At Chippenham Mead, will marking on signage indicate where dogs can be taken off lead?

Chair's Summary:

This is a controversial paper but welcomed by the committee today. We all want spaces that are safe for both people and dogs, and I think the administration has taken a sensible approach and heard the residents' feedback in the consultation. We asked them to reassure us how they will enforce this PSPO, and the challenges of enforcing it on open play areas. Awareness and education are crucial for the success of this measure, and town and community councils will have an important role, as well as we as county councillors, in managing it going forward. We also need to consider exceptional cases, such as therapy dogs in schools and the effects of the PSPO on the cleanliness and hygiene of pavements, and we need to know how the public can provide information. Thank you to the Cabinet Member and officers for bringing this report. There were many questions and we support this fully. There may be some areas that are difficult, but if we educate the residents and make the zones clear, it will be very beneficial for the county overall.

We note that regarding Recommendation 2.3, the allocation of costs will be considered during the capital pressures review that will go to council on 29th February.

5. Place Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Action List.

The RLDP Deposit Plan will move back from the 10th April meeting to 23rd May, ahead of a council date in June.

6. Cabinet and Council Work Planner.

7. To confirm the minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes were confirmed, proposed by Councillor Thomas and seconded by Councillor Strong.

8. Next Meeting: Wednesday 6th March 2024 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at **1.07 pm**

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