

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Economy and Development Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 20th November 2014 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor S. Jones (Chairman)

County Councillors: D.L. Edwards, J.L. Prosser, R.J.C. Hayward and A. Wintle.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

County Councillors P. Murphy and R.J.W. Greenland

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Ms. K. Beirne	- Chief Officer Enterprise
Mr I. Saunders	- Head of Leisure Tourism and Heritage
Mr D. Davies	- Events Manager
Ms N. Edwards	- Food & Tourism Strategic Manager
Mr R. Jones	- Improvement Officer
Ms H. Ilett	- Scrutiny Manager
Mrs S. King	- Senior Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

We received apologies from County Councillors K. Williams.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were identified under the relevant minute.

3. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

There were no members of the public present.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF MONMOUTHSHIRE'S DESTINATION PLAN

We received a discussion paper which informed of the revision of the Monmouthshire's Destination Plan and provided members with an opportunity to debate the proposed strategy.

The committee were informed that the existing Destination Development Plan was approved in November 2012. A need had been identified to assess and review performance of the current plan to ensure that it remained fit for purpose and continued to reflect priorities of Council, other public, private and voluntary sector stakeholder priorities.

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We were informed that tourism was vital to the county's economy, generating income to support a wide range of businesses. STEAM figures identified that tourism generated £165m for Monmouthshire in 2013 with more than 2m visitors. Opportunities for enterprise and employment could be provided through tourism and it was a significant employer within the county.

The report assessed the performance of the approved Destination Plan against stated objectives and outlined progress on delivery, designed to make the most of Monmouthshire's visitor product strength, addressed identified product deficiencies and capitalised on product development opportunities.

The new Head of Tourism, Leisure and Culture post presented an opportunity to raise the profile of the plan and a small team were now in place, for the strategy to be delivered.

The Chairman highlighted that the committee required progress developments as soon as possible and welcomed early sight of the plan.

We were informed that the current plan was coming to an end and this provided an opportunity to review positive outcomes which could contribute to a new plan.

Officers highlighted the main points within the plan:

1. To achieve a more strategically driven and coordinated approach to developing the visitor product of Monmouthshire.

The team was established on approval of the plan, however, ongoing restructures, budget cuts and changing priorities/roles had prevented the work continuing in a focused way.

2. To focus firmly on priorities in order to make the best use of available resources.

All externally funded projects were required to demonstrate links with the destination plan. Important that plan is revised and right set of priorities are identified and considered for future funding opportunities.

3. To engage tourism business and stakeholder organisations in productive partnership working that is relevant to their interests and makes the best use of available budgets and manpower resources.

Significant progress had been made and relationships had developed, so that identified priorities could be delivered.

4. To develop year round visitor demand.

Tourism is seasonal in Monmouthshire with more than two thirds of visits taking place between April and September, with a notable August peak. There was a need to develop demand in the off peak period and PR contracts had been specifically commissioned to address seasonality and late availability.

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5. **To increase visitor satisfaction with the Monmouthshire visitor experience.**
Importance of delivering positive experience to visitors and generating repeat visits, was an effective and sustainable form of marketing. 2013 visitor survey showed that scenery and countryside were the most enjoyable aspects of visiting Monmouthshire.
6. **To drive up tourism business performance in the county.**
Last presentation to committee presented on tourism business performance, continued to head in right direction. Tourist numbers increased overall by 2% between 2012 and 2013.
7. **To responsibly grow the economic, environmental and social contribution of the visitor economy of Monmouthshire.**
No KPIs were available however experience of projects which have been successful, i.e. MonmouthpediA, St Teilo's church and Llantilio Crossenny established footpath.
8. **To contribute significantly to the development of the regional and national visitor economy of Wales**
Particularly tough trading periods over 2012-2013 time, reduced from 2.72% to 2.68%.

The committee debated the discussion paper and we noted the following:

- The Chair advised that there was an additional point required **9. To actively understand barriers to growth and linking with existing strategies to support existing businesses.**
- A member identified that as well as repeat visitors, there was a need for new visitors and an expanding market for the future. The events strategy would enable the market to broaden and for new visitors to be attracted. The committee were advised that a marketing strategy focusing on new visitors required a significant marketing budget, which Monmouthshire County Council did not have. The strategy, which was more sustainable was focused on delivering a positive experience to generate repeat visits and word of mouth recommendations.
- Figures were requested for performance data and how it was measured. We were informed that visitor figures were fed into the STEAM model and an increased footfall would impact on STEAM figures, visitors would be attracted by major events and these figures would be added. STEAM figures were based on the supply model, rather than demand, therefore figures would be provided by businesses and attractions.
- STEAM figures would be the best available for Monmouthshire and trends could be demonstrated.
- Members welcomed the report. However, concerns were expressed that scenery and attractions may be affected with ongoing developments within

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the County. In response, officers advised that there would be an evidence base before decisions were made.

- We recognised that facts and figures were presented, however, a question was raised regarding the accuracy and ability to assess performance based on data provided. We recognised the importance of provision of accommodation within the county, but also the high associated costs for it to be developed.
- The strategy would aim for accommodation to be linked with events, in order to maximise opportunities. There was added value in both day visitors and staying visitors, however, the spend per head would be increased with staying visitors. Occupancy figures for the whole county were available, by type of accommodation, but data was anonymous and very few establishments provided figures, therefore data was not sufficiently robust to provide figures per town.
- We were informed that there was a direct link between the profile and appeal of the event and the distance that people were prepared to travel e.g. NATO summit resulted in widely booked accommodation and for the food festival accommodation in the Wye Valley was booked.
- Members highlighted the need for opportunities to be considered, there was a requirement for new visitors and an expanding market, plus increased serviced accommodation. In response, we noted that there were identified recommendations that had to be considered and progressed at a senior officer level.
- The committee were advised that of the county's history would be promoted through the review of cultural service, more sustainable opportunities would be identified and different delivery models would be considered. We were reminded of the societies and clubs with resources and experience who would be able to assist Monmouthshire County Council.
- Castles within the County were operated by different organisations, there were advantages in marketing them together and to package castle experiences in a more coordinated way to visitors.

Officers presented identified opportunities for tourism growth as follows:

- **Re-balancing Monmouthshire's Accommodation Profile**
This remained a priority in order to balance the amount of serviced and non-serviced accommodation.
- **Town & Village experience development plans**
Identified to ensure that visitors needs are brought to the fore, and place plan process includes tourism businesses and make sure they are market focused.
- **Walking & Cycling product development**
Walking/cycling – developed product strategy, included audit of walking routes and need same process with cycling products, want to deliver consistent safe cycling experience to visitors. Need to make sure routes are consistently

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branded and that there is an effective inspection and maintenance process on the ground to ensure that the publicised route matches the actual route and they are all in passable and good condition.

- **Food tourism product development**

Food tourism – strongest area of competitive advantage. Number of awards by local restaurants, chefs and food producers. Also, food festival attracted 30-40k visitors and high percentage stayed overnight. One weakness is that it remained difficult to buy local food and drink, outside food festivals and markets, and good interpretation of Monmouthshire's rich food producing landscape is patchy.

- **Events & festivals development**

Events/festivals – tied in with events strategy. Need to use as tool to boost off peak demand and year round employment and benefit. Delivered new events, culture and history of Monmouthshire and achieved high profile in press. Events strategy to create legacy visitor products. Interest in Monmouthshire Christmas festival, industry keen to progress. Also from tourism association to be involved in development of major events and promotion.

- **Visitor information development**

The high percentage of visitors who return to the destination presents a significant opportunity to promote reasons to come back when they are here. Some concerns were raised in relation to the visitor experience and word of mouth was needed to increase the number of visitors who come to the area and spend money in a low cost way. Need to ensure high quality visitor information service and more sustainability. Digital information kiosks in 6 venues and looking to improve quality by working with ambassadors in towns. Transferring product data to new Wales Tourism Product Database. Continually working with partners. Encouraging visitors to create content and post on social media, need to get content online in places where visitors are searching for information (not just sites we control). Ambassadors encouraging visitors to provide feedback.

- **Business tourism development**

Monmouthshire County Council had performed well and was third most popular local authority in Wales for business trips. There was significant opportunity to generate income and benefit.

- **Group travel/travel trade development**

Collective of group travel organisers coming to the area in April, attractions will be discussed. Group buyer event being held in February and travel guide currently in production.

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- **Business support & skills**

Business support and skills to ensure businesses have access to a well trained skilled workforce to deliver high quality experience.

Members were invited to consider priorities, and whether they, reflected those of the select committee, if anything additional should be consulted and when a progress update was required.

We debated the points raised:

- We welcomed the information presented and recognised that there were a lot of positive aspects within the report. It was suggested that cycling should be promoted and encouraged as a potential business opportunity. Officers noted the point and advised that the opportunity would be explored.
- Page 8 of the report listed food and drink awards that had been won. A member highlighted that a list should be publicised of good restaurants within Monmouthshire, to ensure that they were promoted effectively. In response, we were informed that the list within the report only included premises that had obtained awards, the website contained all restaurants and events which agreed to be included. Further information was requested regarding how smaller events were promoted and whether local organisations and volunteers were used for support. Volunteers based within the Tourist Information centre had undertaken ambassador training, which Monmouthshire County Council staff would also be invited to attend. It was anticipated that volunteers would be used, where required.
- In terms of business support and skills, it was recognised that CMC² operated an apprentice scheme however further information was requested regarding apprentices to the catering trade. Officers were not aware of specific apprenticeship schemes for the hospitality industry but some ambassadors had completed accredited course BTEC Level 2.
- The committee were informed that officers attended exhibition shows which specifically targeted markets which had been identified as priorities. However, the team were very small and conscious that attendance at events, prevented work being done in other areas, therefore, the team were very careful in choosing which exhibitions would be attended to ensure direct contact with buyers.
- Further information would be provided to the committee in relation to the apprenticeship schemes being established in conjunction with Melin Homes.
- Some members perceived that the digital kiosks had been introduced, however, use was not significant and the information was slowly generated. Further information was requested regarding costs

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associated with the kiosks. In response, we were advised that there was no cost incurred with the kiosks, they were purchased 3 years previously as a pilot project with RDP funding. There would be a need to pay maintenance costs in future but at present there were no costs. It was anticipated that a new database would be effective in managing information and that details would only have to be entered once by each business, which should result in more updated data. Businesses would be encouraged to ensure information remained updated and businesses would be monitored by ambassadors to ensure that details of closed businesses were not included. The committee were reminded that the purpose of the kiosks was for Monmouthshire County Council experiences to be promoted.

- We agreed that the kiosks appearance should be promoted, so that the interactive purpose was emphasised.
- Feedback was requested following the NATO conference. The Chair highlighted the need for PR and communications strategies to reinforce events that had been held in the area.
- Officers advised that due to its size the marketing strategy had not been included within the report, however, it was recognised that this should be fully integrated.
- We envisaged that progress would be made through a consultation document being created, based on discussions with members. The document would be circulated to all stakeholders and groups/individuals involved in original consultation. The opportunity would be provided for contributions and priorities to be identified going forward. Stakeholder feedback would be the next stage.
- Members welcomed sight of information as a result of the stakeholder sessions.

5. IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVE

We received the Quarter 2 performance data for Improvement Objective 3, under the remit of Economy & Development Select Committee 'We Want to enable our county to thrive'. The report presented the wider key performance targets under the committee's remit and set in the Council's publicly available key performance plans.

The Improvement Objectives were annually set by the Council to deliver on priorities. The objectives were focused on the long term, however, the specific activities that supported them were particularly focused for the year ahead.

Performance had to be monitored in relation to inward investment projects and jobs created through Monmouthshire Enterprise and partners support, however, it was expected that jobs created should rise significantly with the completion of two larger projects in the second part of the year.

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The Local Government Wales Measure 2009 places a duty on local authorities to “make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of [their] functions.” The council needs to understand in practical terms what service improvement means in a context where it faces budget reductions of 4.3% a year over the course of the next medium term financial planning period.

Improvement could be demonstrated by using fewer resources to deliver a similar outcome. Increasingly there may be a need to set targets which do not show improvement in absolute terms but which may be about maintaining a minimum level below which standards will not fall or maintaining performance levels while spending less money. It can also be shown that the authority is exercising its duty if it makes changes that will not deliver improvement in the current year but which are likely to lead to improvement in subsequent years.

The committee scrutinised the information presented and during debate we noted:

- We highlighted that community led plans were equally as important as Whole Place and it was requested that these were used for measured data. Officers advised, that measures for community led plans were contained within the RDP therefore the framework had been populated. There were clear outcomes and it was suggested that it could be reviewed by the committee in the future.
- The Whole Place evaluation would be agreed by Cabinet in early 2015 and community led planning would go into the wider framework.
- A member requested consistency through the information reported as some figures were presented in % and others in number format. Officers noted the point and advised that it would be progressed.
- The committee were informed that specific data for each performance scorecard was available on the Hub, for each directorate.
- The systems review undertaken sought positive responses for planning applicants and enabled progress, the status of a good application would be determined by the authority.
- Clarification was requested regarding inward investment and members sought assurance that the area was being considered and there were no points of weakness that had to be addressed.
- In response, we were informed that inward investment was a major priority and three opportunities were being considered at present. The Monmouthshire Enterprise website was being developed and information could be provided to members.
- We received the definition for ‘broadly compliant’ as meeting the standard set by Welsh Government for the nationally set performance indicator.
- Further clarification was requested regarding figures for Monmouthshire Enterprise, specifically what was achieved in relation to how new businesses and people obtaining employment were supported. We were informed that a variety of requests were received, businesses created jobs for a small number of people, however, significantly more jobs would be created by larger employers.

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- The committee were advised that the purpose of the presented report was to focus on target, any changes and future projections that had occurred. Data was now available for actual figures, the improvement objective would be received by the committee at the end of the year and actual figures could be included.

The committee resolved to agree recommendations:

1. Members scrutinised the performance achieved and impact made to assess progress and performance against the objective.
2. Members identified and explore any areas of underperformance or concerns, and to seek assurance from those responsible for future activity where they conclude that performance needs to improve.
3. Members agreed the targets and any revisions for the key Performance Indicators that fall within the remit of the Select Committee

We thanked officers for attending.

4. WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

We received the Economy and Development Select Committee Work Programme for 2014/15. We noted that the format had changed and we noted the following:

- Special meeting 4th December 10am, budget mandates would be discussed – leisure, museums, ICT. The risk log would be presented alongside mandates, to ensure alignment.
- Every year challenge cabinet members and officers, make sure members are satisfied that risks are being managed effectively.
- 8th January 2015 – ordinary meeting to challenge on risk, the appropriate Cabinet members would be invited to attend.
- There were various items identified within the planner, however, specific allocation had not been agreed.
- It was suggested that the Events Strategy would be considered in February, along with the Destination Plan.
- End February/early March – anticipated the performance report from CMC² would be received by the committee.
- April – anticipated SRS performance.
- Other areas to be considered were identified as, Planning Development and S106, which were provisionally allocated for May.
- 5th February – Events Strategy, Tourism Management and Cardiff Capital region board.
- We resolved that the work programme would be finalised at the next meeting.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

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5. COUNCIL AND CABINET BUSINESS FORWARD PLAN

We received the Council and Cabinet Business Forward plan and noted the following:

- The Business Improvement District and Town Centre Regeneration report would be circulated to the committee.

We resolved to receive the Council and Cabinet Business Forward Plan and noted its content.

6. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

We noted that the next ordinary meeting of the Economy and Development Select Committee would be held on Thursday 8th January 2015 at 10.00am.

The meeting closed at 4.21pm