

**Minutes of the Adults Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk on
Tuesday 24th February 2015 at 10.00 a.m.**

PRESENT: County Councillor P.S. Farley (Chairman)

County Councillors: R. Chapman, R. Edwards, R.G. Harris, M. Hickman, P. Jones, P.A. Watts and A. Wintle.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

County Councillor J. Prosser.

CO-OPTED MEMBERS:

Mr. D. Hill.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr. I. Bakewell	-	Housing & Communities Manager
Mr. M. Howcroft	-	Assistant Head of Finance
Mr. T. Stokes	-	Finance Manager
Ms. H. Ilett	-	Scrutiny Manager
Mrs. N. Perry	-	Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Delia Hudson.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

County Councillor A. Wintle declared a personal, prejudicial interest under the Members' Code of Conduct as a board member of the Monmouthshire Housing Association, and left the meeting during consideration of Item 4 of the agenda.

3. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

There were no members of the public present.

4. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF THE HOUSING REGISTER AGREEMENT

We received a report from the Housing Communities Manager regarding the future delivery of the Housing Register. Members were required to consider a proposal to establish a new three year contract with Monmouthshire Housing Association to continue the delivery of the Council's Housing Register.

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Members were asked to agree to a new three year service level agreement with Monmouthshire Housing Association, with the option to extend for a further twelve months, for the future delivery of the Housing Register and the Homesearch service, with effect from 1st December 2015.

To support the proposal, the Committee were informed that an independent health check had been undertaken. The health check considered a number of themes, which included:

- To check that the arrangement allowed the Council to meet its statutory obligation under the Housing Act 1996.
- To consider whether the current arrangement was fit for purpose.
- To check whether the SLA provided value for money.
- To consider the performance of Monmouthshire Housing and consider their effectiveness in terms of making improvements.

The health check provided positive feedback about the Homesearch service, and also provided reassurances that the delivery of the Housing Register was of a high quality.

The Chairman clarified that should the Committee approve the proposal, all appropriate checks had taken place and the Housing and Community Services team fully endorse the proposal.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- We were informed that the independent health check had been carried out by Andy Gale, who had previously supported the Housing Services team on homeless prevention work and was therefore familiar with the Authority's policies.
- A Member questioned if there was a possibility that, as an excellent system, it could it be recommended to other authorities, or marketed in some way. We heard that this was not possible as many authorities across Wales and the UK had similar arrangements. The system being used centred around a Locator IT system, which was owned by Monmouthshire Housing Association.
- A Member, in his role as the Armed Forces Champion, expressed that one of the key movers for the future, under the covenant agreement, was that Welsh Government had recommended five principles laid down in a British Legion document. One of the principles stated that we should make tangible changes to our social housing allocations policy, in order to take Armed Forces as a priority in certain areas. We heard from the Housing and Communities Manager that the policy was reviewed regularly but had been postponed due to the Service Level Agreement under discussion. The Armed Forces aspect would be considered as part of the next review, to take place in the summer.
- It was noted that with regards to the allocation of houses to Afghan translators, 36 households were to be allocated, working on a basis of 2/3 per month. Further meetings were being arranged to consider how best to move forward.
- A Member queried the recommendation that Monmouthshire County Council should consider purchasing the Locator system, and what the cost implications

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would be. We were informed costs were not available, but the module in use supported the case management arrangement, was proactive, and supportive.

- A Member questioned whether people in circumstances without access to IT could get fair access to interviews. We were told that the Housing Options team were involved with Homesearch for more urgent circumstances, providing support and advocating applications. In a bidding process Homesearch would act on and applicants behalf.
- The Chairman questioned the costs detailed in the health check paper. It was confirmed that the total cost of the service was £160k, of which Monmouthshire County Council contributed £40k. It was felt that the health check paper was helpful in setting out what consequences would be if we decided not to agree the proposal.

In summary the Committee thanked the Officer for the report, and resolved to accept and recommend the proposal. It was recommended that Monmouthshire Housing Association should be invited to a future meeting of Adults Select Committee.

5. JOINT HOUSING SOLUTIONS SERVICE – MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

We received a report from the Housing and Communities Manager in order for members to consider a proposed Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and Torfaen County Borough Council to support and underpin the delivery of a new joint Housing Solutions Service for Monmouthshire and Torfaen.

Members were made aware that there had been a number of discussions in order to establish a joint Housing Solutions Service with Torfaen, which was now moving at pace and set to go live as of March 2015. In order to create the new service a Memorandum of Understanding had been established. The document would be necessary in order to resolve disputes with TCBC should they arise. The document was modelled similar to the Memorandum of Understanding for Housing Benefit.

It was noted that the document had been to Committee had various stages throughout development.

Members were invited to ask questions, during which time the following points were raised:

- Clarification was sought on acronyms in the document.
MAPPA – Multi Agency Public Protection Authority
MARAC – Multi Agency Risk Assessment
It was agreed that definitions should be provided within the document.
- A Member requested further explanation on item 1.1 of the document. It was agreed this would be amended to provide clarity.
- A Member requested that the document should contain explicit reference to the Armed Forces covenant agreement.

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In summary the Chairman noted that the Committee were pleased to see the service come into fruition. It was confirmed that Committee would like an appropriate way to be found to include reference to the Armed Services Covenant. It was confirmed that this would relate to both Monmouthshire County Council and Torfaen County Borough Council. The Committee would welcome an update in the future on how the partnership progressed. It was recognised as a positive achievement for officers and the Committee resolved to accept the report.

6. REVENUE MONITORING 2014/15 MONTH 9 OUTTURN FORECAST STATEMENT

We received a report from the Assistant Head of Finance to provide Members with information on the forecast revenue outturn position of the Authority at the end of month 9, for the 2014/15 financial year. The statement would allow Members an opportunity to consider how services were provided and whether resources were being used efficiently.

Members were required to consider the position concerning the third quarter revenue monitoring and to seek assurances of actions being taken by Chief Officers to address over spends in their areas.

During presentation of the report we were informed of the following points:

- At month 9 the predicted outturn was expected to be £144,000 deficit, being an improvement on month 6.
- Actual expenditure costs included £545,000 redundancy costs which were not a budgeted expense throughout the year.
- The biggest challenge for the Authority going forward would be in the Social Care and Health area, largely around Children's Services rather than Adult Services.
- Adult Services showed an adverse position of £41,000, the predominance of that was savings as part of the mandate process not having been made. Operationally there was actually a £70,000 under spend.
- Since month 6, savings of approximately £500,000 had materialised which meant around £500,000 remained to be found by the end of the financial year.
- The breakdown of over and under spends showed underspends in Community Care and Resource and Performance which mitigated the over spends in Adult Services.
- New to month 9 was data relating to performance management which was designed to pull out data activity against costs.

Following the report Members were invited to ask questions. We noted the following points:

- A Member raised a query relating to the performance management data in reference to the number of older people who received a package of care to support them in the community. It was felt that the figure reported in the table was considerably less than the actual figures. We heard from the Finance

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Manager that Social Workers input figures onto the SWIFT system which were lifted from actual, relevant care plans. This, therefore, reflected the correct figure. It was suggested that the definition of 'package of care' could cause higher figures to be reported elsewhere.

- A Member questioned if the £40,000 over spend was predicted to the end of the financial year. We heard that if there were no changes this would be the predicted outturn.
- The Finance Manager confirmed that the over spend of £40,000 for Adult Services included the under spend of £47,000 predicted for Community Care.
- A Member raised a query on item 1.2 of the revenue outturn forecast. It was noted that causes for exception were provided for exceptions over £25,000. The Committee agreed that, as a public document, causes or explanations should be provided for all over and under spends.
- A Member requested clarification on the Monnow Vale partnership cost apportionments. It was noted that costs had been agreed but the budget was not in line with actual costs. If there were to be an over spend there would be early indications of this.
- The Assistant Head of Finance explained that the Adult Education Service exhibited a £54,000 over spend. There had been a number of challenges over the year. The latest situation was that funding for the Novis project, a digital inclusion project for adults, was to be withdrawn, resulting in what would resemble a £45,000 over spend.
- The Chairman expressed a concern that Adult Education would fall between two stools and requested an opportunity to scrutinise Adult Education, suggesting that the Head of Service and Director of Department be invited. It was a concern that the service was not being scrutinised.

The Committee resolved to accept the report, noting recommendations made.

7. ADULTS SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Manager detailed the Adults Select Committee Work Programme. We noted that the next regular meeting to be held on 14th April 2015 should include:

- Budget Monitoring
- Careline
- GWICES

It was suggested that a special meeting be arranged to invite Monmouthshire Housing Association, also inviting Strong Communities Select. The Committee agreed it would be beneficial to arrange the meeting after the system had been in place a few months.

A meeting would be scheduled to discuss an issue brought to Committee by a member of public relating to continuing healthcare. It was felt that in order to do the issue justice, research would need to be carried out. Therefore the meeting should be arranged for May / June 2015 to provide sufficient time.

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To summarise the meeting the Chairman noted the following recommendations:

- We had accepted the recommendations for the Housing Register. The health check had been a useful exercise. The Committee recommended it go forward with the addition of the Armed Forces aspect.
- We accepted the Memorandum of Understanding and would like to see it go ahead with the recommendation of inclusion of the Armed Forces dimension.
- The revenue report had provided factual and helpful explanations, and had not required a management perspective. We had asked for the causes to be completed for all over and under spend, for future reference.
- We would like Adult Community Education to come before Committee.
- We would arrange for Monmouthshire Housing Association to come before the Committee.
- Reports should provide full explanations of acronyms

8. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

We noted the next Adults Select Committee Meeting would be held on Tuesday 14th April 2015 at 10.00 am.

The meeting ended at 11.30 am.