

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held
at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK - County Hall on Wednesday, 13th
February, 2019 at 10.00 am**

PRESENT: County Councillor J.Pratt (Chairman)
County Councillor A. Webb (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: L.Dymock, A. Easson and R.Roden

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
David Jones	Head of Public Protection
Jan Baldwin	Cleaning Manager

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors V. Smith

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. DRAFT LOCAL TOILETS STRATEGY

Purpose:

To undertake scrutiny of the draft Monmouthshire County Council Local Toilets Strategy.

Key Issues:

Part 8 of the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 'Provision of Toilets' came into force on 31st May 2018. It places a duty on each local authority in Wales to prepare and publish a local toilet strategy for its area.

Local authorities in Wales now have the responsibility to –

- Assess the need for toilet provision for their communities
- Plan to meet those needs
- Produce a local toilets strategy, and
- Review, update and publicise revisions to the strategy.

Local authorities must prepare and publish their strategies by 31st May 2019. The duty to prepare a local toilets strategy does not require local authorities to provide and maintain public toilets directly. Indeed, further to the work of the 'Public Convenience Working Group' in 2009 (a sub-group of this committee), most public toilet blocks were successfully transferred to Town and Community Councils to manage. It is for the County Council to take a strategic view on how publicly accessible toilets can be provided and accessed across the county.

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Member Scrutiny:

The Chair checked that Members had received the report put together from a site visit last week, visiting 19 toilet facilities in the area and highlighted that the Committee needed to consider and comment on the Draft Local Toilets Strategy and discuss any issues raised. Copy report: [Toilet Survey](#)

The Head of Public Protection informed Members that a one off Welsh Government Grant of £17,200 was available for additional work to develop and publish the LT strategies which will need to be reviewed by May 2021.

Although it was reported that there was a low response from the survey, possibly due to the Christmas period, the following findings were recorded

80% too few facilities
52% locations not convenient
41% not feeling safe 50% safe
69% more info on location
31% lack of facilities
51% satisfied.
46% cleanliness
49% think should be free to use
Issues raised re baby changing facilities and disabled access.

A Town Council survey resulted in slightly more responses but with similar findings.

Gwent Police recommend that the facilities don't remain open too long because of drug taking and anti-social behaviour. Cleaning staff have a very difficult job and will start logging issues relating to syringe usage to support the Police within Health and Safety considerations.

Councillor A. Webb presented findings of the recent site visit undertaken by three Members of the Committee, highlighting the need to ring-fence the £17,200 grant.

Issues that were raised were not necessarily aimed at cleanliness but also outside maintenance, water pressure issues and building structural condition alongside issues of unsightly equipment in areas of tourism interest. Concerns regarding rodents, drug abuse, graffiti, baby changing facilities and disabled access were also considered.

The Rotary Club were endorsed for their input via Monmouth Town Council and should be encouraged elsewhere.

The Chair mentioned that it was important for Property Services to do an audit as soon as possible to see what needs attention.

It was noted that certain community councils have the funding available for dealing with such issues but it should be followed up with them that standards are met.

A contribution from the disabled community was reported in the form of a letter which highlighted issues regarding the emergency alarms, the size of the facilities being reduced by pipes in floor ducts, access for wheelchair users and support rails' colour and location. It was important to bear this in mind when thinking about provision for the next 10 years.

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The Chair formally thanked the Cleaning Manager for her contribution on the visits and raised the following points.

- It would be more beneficial if a pot of money could be available to deal with issues as and when they happen rather than trying to rectify problems after they have happened.
- We do not receive many complaints but more concerns from public about people not leaving the cubicles in a condition that one would like to find it.
- As Monmouthshire is a tourist area toilets are essential for visitors who could potentially spend their spare time elsewhere if these facilities were closed.
- The staff maintaining the facilities in Monmouthshire do an excellent job and thanks were recorded.

A question was raised regarding finding out the best practice for the blue light system and the disabled alarm system. It was confirmed that an answer to this was pending. Also communication with other authorities would be sought throughout Wales.

A Member commented that Abergavenny had a high response rate to the survey whereas Caldicot had only 5%. This could be due to Waitrose and cafés/restaurants in the area so are they needed or do we need to get further feedback. Response was that it could be that if public are happy or have no concerns, they don't tend to respond well to questionnaires.

Responding to a question regarding Health and Safety point of view, the Chair stated that none of the facilities ticked all the boxes due to no investment being put into the toilets and not maintaining them properly due to lack of money.

With regard to Abergavenny, it was considered that perhaps the Council had failed to encourage the Town Council to take on some responsibility which had resulted in the response to the survey for that area. It was noted that rather than close the toilet facilities in Monmouthshire, the vast majority had been transferred to the Town and Community Councils however we provide services on their behalf. All this information was contained in the Officer's report.

Taking into consideration that Monmouthshire is a tourist area, concern was raised regarding the condition of the facility in the Caldicot Countryside Park with reference also being made to access and the condition/surroundings and its location for sewerage reasons being a negative reflection on Monmouthshire. There is a need to put in place arrangements to improve this facility and clarify management.

With regard to a question of toilet numbers to the ratio of people in towns it was noted that this could not be set in stone because of variations depending on the day of the week i.e. market day in Abergavenny.

As an idea for where we should be targeting our resources, the question was asked regarding the benefit of introducing an internal star rating scheme for toilets? The Welsh Government are keen on ideas and looking at opportunities and this will feed that back through the process by the end of May. It was mentioned that If MCC were going to rate toilets provided by Town and Community Councils then there would be a need to work with them to ensure they know that the strategy we're adopting and the implications.

Members would like to be kept up to date with improvements to decor and signing.

Another health and safety issue was raised with regard to the cleaners working alone at these locations.

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Recommendations:

To consider and comment on the draft Local Toilets Strategy, as attached in Appendix One.

That the findings of the Member site visits on 7th February 2019 be added prior to the draft strategy going to public consultation.

After public consultation the strategy goes to Cabinet for adoption.

Committee Conclusion:

The Chair Summarised that the Committee had commented on problems with the infrastructure of the toilet buildings. Concerns were raised around the lack of investment. The Committee recognised the need to meet legal requirements and ensure the safety of staff.

The Committee commended staff involved.

The need to work closely with other agencies for aging population and tourists
Grading toilets was recognised.

The meeting ended at 11:45