

# MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Thursday, 10th September, 2015 at 10.00 am

**PRESENT:** County Councillors: S. Howarth, D. Dovey, A. Easson and S. White

### **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Annette Evans	Customer Relations Manager
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Paul Keeble	Traffic and Network Manager
Kellie Beirne	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Ben Winstanley	Estates Manager
Rob O'Dwyer	Head of Property Services and Facilities Management
Will McLean	Head of Policy & Engagement
Rob Nancarrow	Support Service Manager
Gareth Sage	SWTRA /Street Lighting Manager
Sarah King	Senior Democratic Services Officer
Paula Harris	Democratic Services Officer

#### **1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jones, Jordan, Webb and Williams.

#### **2. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest.

#### **3. Open Public Forum**

There were no questions raised from members of the public present.

#### **4. To confirm minutes of the previous meetings**

##### **4.1. Joint meeting of Adult Select Committee & Strong Communities Select Committee 8th July 2015**

##### **Joint meeting of Adult Select and Strong Communities Select Committees 8th July 2015**

The minutes of the Joint Adult and Strong Communities Select Committees meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2015 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

During discussion we requested that an update was provided regarding the number of Food Banks (**Action W.M.**) and the lack of elected member representation on the Genesis housing group (**Action I.B.**).

##### **4.2. Strong Communities Select Committee 16th July 2015 Strong Communities Select Committee 16<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

The minutes of the Strong Communities Select Committee meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2015 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

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During discussion we requested that cutting verges policy was reviewed and required confirmation that the pollination policy is on the work programme. **(Action H.I.)**

An officer confirmed that the Highways Working Group and Speed Working group to be reconvened. **(ACTION R.H.)**

#### **5. Scrutiny of a Progress report on Public Conveniences**

##### Context:

To update members on the provision of public conveniences at various sites within the County and seek feedback from members on options for the future provision of public conveniences.

##### Key Issues:

In 2010 the Strong Communities Select Committee undertook a detailed review of the provision of public conveniences. This informed a strategy for the future provision of public conveniences and as a result new arrangements were implemented including some closures but also transfer of responsibility to other providers (community and town councils).

Since then some further adjustments to service provision have been arrived at through greater collaboration with town councils and mandated in the MCC budgets for 14/15 and 15/16.

This has resulted in the majority of public conveniences remaining open to the public but the method of management and provision varying between towns and villages.

Appendix 1 lists those toilets where MCC retains an 'interest' and approved proposals for their future provision, including details of current revenue and capital costs associated with possible transfer as well as a commentary on capital receipts opportunities.

Those toilets that remain the responsibility and cost to MCC after the proposals already approved are:

Abergavenny: Whitehorse Lane, Castle Street, Brewery Yard and Bus station

Monmouth: Blestium Street (Cattle market)

Usk: Maryport Street car park and Usk Island

Tintern: Beaufort Cottage

##### Member Scrutiny:

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- A Member asked how many people took up the £1200 grant offered by MCC to support Community and Town Councils that provide public conveniences. It was answered that 2 enquired, but none were taken up.
- It was also clarified that the grant of £1200 was per Community Council (irrespective of number of toilets).
- A Member questioned the suitability of using Leisure Centre toilets. An Officer pointed out that this was not a viable solution if this was the only provision. The suggestion was that a number of public building would be made available.
- A Member questioned if retail units in Abergavenny Town Centre had been asked to provide facilities. An Officer mentioned that potentially discussions could be made with Weatherspoons if White Horse Lane toilets were closed,
- A question was asked that if public buildings such as Shire Hall, museums, one stop shops were opened up, would these building be an option or would they need to be upgraded. An Officer answered that due to capital and revenue funding any improvements would need to be done at no cost, otherwise this would not be a viable solution. Ideally private businesses would come on board.
- The Committee asked if Abergavenny Town Council had paid MCC any funds toward the toilets in the last 5 years. It was confirmed that Abergavenny Town Council paid 50% of revenue, cleaning and maintenance costs for White Horse Lane.
- A Member asked if Abergavenny Town Council was being engaged positively. It was advised that several meetings at taken place regarding local services and MCC were optimistic about the transfer of services.
- A Member felt that it was imperative that Abergavenny had toilet provision at all points of arrival into the town. Discussed also was potentially charging for provision.
- A member commented that the toilets in Shire Hall were often over capacity, due to events taking place at the venue, it was felt that it was not in the volunteer staff's remit to maintain the toilets and all efforts should be made to direct members pf the public to use the toilets at Agincourt Street.
- A member asked that Caldicot Castle Toilets managed by Enterprise, were properly audited.
- In regard to the sale and disposal of assets (Raglan toilets) which were sold for £7000. A member asked if more than one person was approached regarding the sale and why the decision was made not to take the toilets to public auction without notifying Members. The Officer the decision was made by the Estates and Legal Department.
- A Member questioned the £20, 000 limit Chief Officers had to sign off disposal of assets. An Officer replied that under the Scheme of Delegation the limits at which Chief Officers, Chief Executive and Cabinet could make decisions was clearly set out.
- A Member requested that if Council assets were being disposed of Ward members should be made aware.

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Committee's Conclusion:

Chair's Summary:

The Committee would like an update on Abergavenny toilets in 3 months.

The Committee would like an update on Usk toilets & carpark in Spring 2016.

The Committee would like an update on Caldicot toilets in 3 months.

Pursue Welsh Government in regard to Gibraltar Tunnel Toilets (**ACTION G.S.**)

#### **6. Pre-decision Scrutiny of the Adoption of Highways in New Developments**

##### Context:

To update members of on the current position with regard to adoption of highway infrastructure for new developments and consider the implications of where a legal agreement for the road to become formally adopted by the council is not agreed.

##### Key Issues:

To note the petition **but not to adopt** the highway and associated infrastructure at Crawshay Bailey Close Gilwern.

A petition has been received requesting that the county council adopts the roads and associated infrastructure at Crawshay Bailey Close, Gilwern. This development was approved by the Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP) without consideration to MCC Highways comments and therefore the site was built as a private estate without carrying out improvements to the existing access road to provide an adoptable width of carriageway, providing sustainable transport links and also residents agreeing as part of the purchase process to contribute towards the costs for a private management company to take on the future maintenance of the infrastructure.

##### Member Scrutiny:

- A member asked if it was the norm not to enter into Section 38 or 137 agreements. An Officer answered that it was uncommon and that modern estates are approx. 98% adopted.
- It was asked that if a developer does not want to enter into a Section 137 or 38, do talks need to take place, so that in the long term MCC are not left having to adopt roads. The Officer answered that most developments enter into a Section 38. At Crawshay Bailey the developer specifically wanted a private road.
- A Member commented that over 1000 properties were due to be built in the locality and hoped that Officers ensured that Section 38 agreements were entered into. The Officer

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replied that whilst developers were encouraged to enter into a Section 38, it was at their distraction not to do so.

- It was questioned by a Member, by not entering into a Section 38 agreement, what was the benefit to the developer. The Officer advised that often a planning application would be passed on the basis of upgraded materials. There is a new code of practice used in designing highway layouts which asks for block paving and other expensive materials. In negotiations at planning stage the Highway Authority would be looking to introduce commuted sums to cover additional costs above the basic maintenance costs. Similarly, sustainable urban drainage systems can be expensive and highways would be looking to take future commuted sums to maintain them. At Crawshay Bailey the developer is charging the residents a management fee for the upkeep of the highway.
- A Member asked if buyers were aware of the ownership of their road at time of purchase. An Officer answered that land searches were carried out by the purchaser's solicitor.

#### **Committee's Conclusion:**

Chair's Summary:

A proposal was made and duly seconded to support the Officer's report.

#### **7. Scrutiny of the Annual Complaints Report for the Regeneration Directorate**

A report was presented to provide Strong Communities Select committee with information on the number and types of complaints, comments and compliments received and dealt with from 1 April 2014 until 31 March 2015.

The report also summarises the number of Freedom of Information Act (FOI) requests received by the Council during this period.

Key Issues:

- 3.1 Our Whole Authority Complaints and Compliments policy and procedure follows the Model that the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales asked each local authority to adopt in 2011.
- 3.2 The procedure has two stages; the informal stage and the formal stage.  
  
The informal stage aims to resolve the complaint locally wherever possible by means of discussion and problem solving. If it is not possible to resolve the concern, the matter is escalated to the formal investigation stage.
- 3.3 Where initial discussions have not achieved a resolution, complainants have the right to make a formal complaint. Investigations are undertaken and the complainant receives a

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full response detailing findings, conclusions and any recommendations made. This is the end of the internal process.

- 3.4 Complainants can contact the Public Services Ombudsman if they still remain dissatisfied.

The Ombudsman provides an external independent service to consider complaints about all local authority services. The Ombudsman is concerned with maladministration causing injustice and will normally require complainants to have used their local council's procedures before accepting a complaint for investigation.

To ensure that Members are aware of the types of complaints, comments and compliments received and dealt with. Also, to note the FOI statistics and the continuing growth in FOI requests.

#### Member Scrutiny:

- In response to a Select Committee Member's question regarding complaints it was advised that email was the preferred medium for contacting the Council.

A Member asked if the Ombudsman is happy with the level of complaints. The officer answered that the Ombudsman had sent a letter advising that the number of complaints for this period had decreased.

It was asked how many Officers worked on complaints. It was advised that there was one full time and one part time member of staff. It was also advised that there is one full time member of staff dealing with FOI requests.

In regard to FOI's it was asked if the FOI resulted in a long time researching information, would a fee be charged to reimburse for time. It was answered that MCC would ask for the request to be refined. If the request was felt to take over 18 hours, the request was denied or chargeable.

#### **Committee's Conclusion:**

Chair's Summary:

The Chair thanked the Officer for the report and looked forward to receiving it annually.

#### **8. Changes to the team structure including job evaluation and regarding of posts within Policy and Engagement**

##### Context:

To seek agreement to a number of staffing changes within the Chief Executive's Policy and Engagement service area, including the re-grading of roles following job evaluation within the

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Policy and Performance Team and a small restructure within the Communications and Engagement Team to ensure that it is effectively focused to deliver its objectives in the next period.

That the post of 'Communications, Marketing and Engagement Manager' be regraded from Band I to Band K. This post was previously titled Communications and Engagement Manager.

That the post of Data Analyst (Education) be regraded from Band G to Band H. This post was previously titled School Management Information Officer.

That the post of Data Analyst (Education) be transferred to the Policy and Performance team within the Chief Executive's Department.

That the post of Equalities and Welsh Language Officer be regraded from Band H to Band I.

That the posts of 'Communications Officer' and 'Engagement Officer' be deleted.

That a new post of 'Communication and Engagement Officer' be created.

That one of the current Policy and Performance Officers is granted flexible retirement and the saving is used to secure additional resource.

#### Key Issues:

The authority has a job evaluation scheme that is used to assess the grade of new jobs and current jobs where there has been a significant change in duties. This requires the line manager prepare a new or revised job description with the grade being assessed by Employee Services. The revised role profiles are attached as appendices to this report.

The current role of 'Communication and Engagement Manager' has seen significant change since recruitment to the post in November 2014. The scope of activity within the role has seen significant growth driven by a heightened need to enhance our digital offer and to support a broader organisational drive to generate income (as identified in the 2015/16 budget and the emerging medium term financial plans) for MCC. There is consequently a greater responsibility for all services to market themselves and their services effectively where the opportunity allows.

The post holder is now responsible for the Web, Digital Media and internal intranet presence. The post holder is required to have significant digital skills and abilities, including the responsibility for the social media and digital engagement strategies. There is a greater emphasis on engagement and a requirement for the post holder to represent the authority at a very high level, across all services and disciplines. This includes being the representative and face of the organisation at major events as well as through the media. Examples of this include large scale events such as the Royal Welsh show which has acted as a springboard for the launch of a concerted campaign around the National Eisteddfod benefiting the whole county. The level of autonomy and prescribed guidelines has changed. The scope of the post covers more disciplines than previously and includes marketing, income generation, service re-design, engagement as well as the traditional communications role.

Furthermore, the team management responsibilities for this role have also expanded beyond the original remit and now includes the Digital Marketing Officer, the graphic designer (on contract with us until autumn 2015) and the Marketing Officer (appointed on a two year fixed term appointment).

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The role of Data Analyst (Education) was originally located in the Children and Young People Directorate. The role has seen an increase in the level of responsibility since the transfer of education support services to the Education Achievement Service (EAS). For the past nine-months the post has been collocated in the Policy and Performance Team and it is proposed to make the arrangement permanent. This will increase the resilience of support to the education directorate at a key time as the authority strives to move out of Special Measures, it will also continue the strengthening of the corporate centre by consolidating existing posts into a single team.

The role of Equalities and Welsh Language Officer was created in 2012. This had previously been two separate roles and combining them provided an efficient way to provide these core functions. There has since been considerable change in the role as a result of the Equalities Act 2010 and new Welsh Language Standards. In particular the ongoing focus around the quality of engagement with those groups and individuals with protected characteristics (as prescribed in the Act) has increased both the level and quantity of the work the officer undertakes.

The uplift in salaries in the two roles in the Policy and performance team will be minimal in the first year as the current post-holders are at the top or close to the top of their current pay bands: the differential in the case of the Communications, Marketing and Engagement Manager is greater.

Member Scrutiny:

A Member questioned the change in structure when it was perceived that services were suffering cutbacks. The Officer answered that it was difficult to demonstrate the link between roles based in the corporate centre and frontline services. And that keeping Members and the public informed was a priority.

Clarification was requested on the role of the Cardiff University students. It was advised that with the 40% saving made by an existing member of staff taking flexible retirement, MCC would be able to employ 2 students per annum. These students would undertake a 5 month placement looking at specific project work.

A Member questioned how many hours of additional support was received from colleagues in Torfaen. In response the Officer replied three day a week between two colleagues.

It was asked why more changes were taking place so quickly after the last job evaluation. It was explained that the process addressed the equal status, differential in pay between different jobs in the past.

A Member questioned the number of staff in the team. The Officer commented that the team was losing a head and historically there had been a Communications Officer in each Directorate, this was now being consolidated.

An example of income from marketing directly attributable to the communications department was requested. The Officer was not able to provide one at this time due to the new Officer only having been in place for 2 weeks at time of the meeting. It was advised that Cabinet used reserves to employ an Officer on a two year fixed term basis and that the Leader of the Opposition had requested that the achievement of income targets was reported back to Council.



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Reassurance was sought from the Committee regarding the amalgamation of roles. An Officer answered that the restructure would provide resilience within the team.

A Member queried why data collection was not handled by the E.A.S. In answer the Member was advised that an Officer was retained at CYP level due to local information collection and specific information being collected, tracking children with ALNs to ensure service levels.

As far as tracking the value of the Marketing team, the Officer advised that the Cabinet were updated quarterly regarding the process mandate via RAG status.

#### **Committee's Conclusion:**

Chair's Summary:

The committee welcomed the report, but found that there were some issues they felt needed addressing in more detail, with a schematic drawing to be added.

The Chair acknowledged that roles needed to change and evolve. The Chair thanked staff for their valued work.

#### **9. Strong Communities Work Programme**

Members discussed the Work Programme for the Strong Communities Select Committee. In doing so, the following points were noted:

##### **Special Meeting – 14<sup>th</sup> September 2015 at 2.00pm – Agenda Items**

- Flood Risk Management.
- Scrutiny of the finances of the Passenger Transport Unit.
- Public protection.

##### **Special Meeting – 12<sup>th</sup> October 2015 at 10.00am – Agenda Items**

- Crime and Disorder Training.
- Whole Place.
- Safer Monmouthshire Plan.

##### **Special Meeting – 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2015 at 10.00am – Agenda Items**

- Budget Scrutiny.

##### **5<sup>th</sup> November 2015 at 10.00am – Agenda Items**

- Grant Funded Partnerships
- Month 6 Budget Monitoring

##### **10<sup>th</sup> December 2015 at 10.00am – Agenda Items**

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- Waste Strategy
- Anaerobic Digestion
- Gypsy and Traveller Assessment

### **28<sup>th</sup> January 2016 at 10.00am – Agenda Items**

- TBC

### **10<sup>th</sup> March 2016 at 10.00am – Agenda Items**

- Month 9 Budget Monitoring

### **28<sup>th</sup> April 2016 at 10.00am – Agenda Items**

TBC

#### **10. Cabinet Forward Work Planner**

We resolved to receive the Cabinet Forward Work Planner and noted its content

#### **11. Cabinet & Council forward planner (copy attached)**

#### **12. To confirm the date and time of next meetings as:**

**The meeting ended at 2.02 pm**