

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Monday, 16th November, 2015 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor S. Jones (Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Dovey, D. Evans, B. Hayward, J. Prosser, A. Wintle, P. Clarke, R. Edwards, P. Murphy, B. Strong, A. Webb and R. Harris

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Kellie Beirne	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Mark Hand	Head of Planning
Sarah King	Senior Democratic Services Officer

APOLOGIES:

Councillors S. White and D. Edwards

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Scrutiny of the performance of the function via the Annual Performance Report (due for submission to Welsh Government on 20th November)

Context:

The Committee scrutinised performance of the function via the Annual Performance Report (due for submission to Welsh Government on 20th November).

The Council adopted its Local Development Plan in February 2014 and has recently submitted its first Annual Monitoring Report (October 2015) for the 2014-15 period.

The planning service's purpose links directly to Monmouthshire County Council's objective of building sustainable, resilient communities. The Council has identified four key priorities:

- 1) Education;
- 2) Protecting the most vulnerable in society;
- 3) Promotion of enterprise, economic development and job creation;
- 4) Maintaining locally accessible services.

The following Service Improvement Plan outcomes are directly relevant to the planning service:

- Older people are able to live their good life;
- People have access to appropriate and affordable housing;
- People have good access and mobility;
- People feel safe;
- Business and enterprise; and

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Monday, 16th November, 2015 at 2.00 pm

- People protect and enhance the environment.

The planning service is divided into two main areas: Development Control, which includes planning applications, enforcement and built conservation, and Development Plans, which deals with planning policy matters. For this reporting period, the Development Plans section reported to the Head of Planning and sat within the Enterprise directorate, while the Development Control section reported to the Head of Regulatory Services and sat within the Democracy and Regulatory Services directorate. However, professional planning guidance was provided by the Head of Planning. It is worth noting that the service has since been restructured, rebranded and co-located under a new Head of Service. This will be detailed in the 2016 APR.

Key Issues:

The Head of Planning provided a presentation and report, which introduced the first Annual Performance Report for Monmouthshire County Council's planning service. The report showed that Monmouthshire's planning service had performed well and consistently above the Welsh average for performance indicators and in terms of customer service feedback.

The Planning (Wales) Bill achieved Royal assent in the summer of 2015, this was identified as a landmark year for Planning in Wales and this Council had embraced the move towards 'positive planning' that the new legislation strives to achieve.

Member scrutiny:

- The committee thanked the officer for report and presentation.
- The Chair of Planning advised that the Planning Committee consisted of 16 members and reassured that attendance was good, which resulted in consistency in decision making.
- Concerns were expressed that affordable housing targets of 35% was not achieved in larger developments. Officers confirmed that the LDP set different targets for different parts of the county. 35% was a target and the policy allowed for variations on viability.
- Issues were currently being considered by Welsh Government, regarding a toolkit which could assess viability and affordability of a site development for affordable housing.
- Particular concern was raised by the Chair that there was difficulty meeting affordable housing targets as sites were not coming forward.
- A member requested clarification on whether community responses had been considered (archaeological and cultural sensitivity), and whether there had been sufficient consultation. In response, specialist work would be undertaken by a consultant and advice would be obtained accordingly.
- Following a query regarding why conservation did not form part of the application assessment, the committee were informed that the department had been restructured and rebranded, members were reassured that focus was on enabling and delivery, not regulatory control.
- Officers recognised and acknowledged recent instances with representations and speaking at Planning committee, these had been addressed. However, the committee were reminded that clear deadlines were in place to ensure fairness and consistency.
- Further clarification would be provided regarding decisions/recommendations that were contrary to those made at Town Council level, this was not currently an issue that was measured.
- An example was provided by a member, of an application where the level of affordable housing had been reduced, in order to enable the development to be viable for the

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Monday, 16th November, 2015 at 2.00 pm

applicant. The committee highlighted the need for the needs of people to be addressed, rather than meeting national needs. It was suggested that the new LDP to be produced by 2020, considered issues looking forward and whether the policy would be driven locally or nationally.

- Officers clarified that the difference in viability, in the specific example provided, had been due to design changes (reduced numbers improved layout). There was a need for the whole picture to be considered and some aspects of future housing needs would be decided at a regional level, imposed by Welsh Government. Legislation highlights what requires planning consent and what does not, the authority responsibility is to either grant or not grant the planning consent.
- The committee recognised that training was required by Town and Community Councils, this had been offered but not taken up by all. Officers reassured the committee that the training had been beneficial and follow up training had been offered, which would also include clarification on the public speaking protocol and role of officers.
- Information could be obtained from benchmarking data, in order for Monmouthshire County Council to be compared with other authorities, regarding the percentage of retrospective planning based on activities. The issue was continually raised and had to be considered appropriately by the authority, if developments were not acceptable then application would be refused and enforcement action would be taken.
- Officers recognised and would obtain reasons why Monmouthshire had been identified as comparatively low. However, members were reminded that the outcome was absolutely more important than speed and a condition had been introduced that fees would be refunded for applications not determined within a certain time period.
- The committee recognised that there was frustration and impact on the community, with retrospective planning.
- The LDP had an innovative approach which allowed for exceptions regarding affordable housing. Sites were beginning to be presented and officers were trying to achieve for sites to be included in the next LDP.
- The Chair confirmed that Strong Communities Select committee had already scrutinised the LDP, Economy and Development select committee would be invited if the issue was considered again.
- A member queried how social media could be used more effectively and utilised for the planning process. In addition to other methods of communication, Officers confirmed that the authority held a Planning Twitter account, the purpose of which was to raise awareness of guidance on supplementary planning, link to committee agenda and committee webcast. It's as well as other methods of communication,
- The Chief Officer reassured the committee that the Head of Planning had made significant development and contribution since being in post. There had been a change and new direction to work differently. The team were constrained with limited resources, that operated well.
- In addition, the committee were informed that there was a need for committees understand sequence of process and change, this could be achieved through joint scrutiny committee meeting.
- Officers recognised important points regarding local needs for affordable housing and views would be obtained for the next LDP.
- Officers acknowledged that Affordable Housing was subject of scrutiny at a number of separate scrutiny meetings.
- The Scrutiny Manager confirmed that Housing had been considered at a previous joint meeting of two select committees and subsequently a different select committee had considered a report which outlined recommendations of the Affordable Housing report. The issues crossed across the four select committees, therefore, would be an issue to be scrutinised by all select committees.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Monday, 16th November, 2015 at 2.00 pm

Committee's Conclusion:

Chair's Summary:

The Chair acknowledged that the presentation had been well articulated and the committee had contributed well.

The Chair highlighted the importance of opportunity for training to be offered to Town and Community Councils.

The committee highlighted, that in terms of monitoring issues, a planning seminar would be held on community infrastructure in early 2016, which could be linked with affordable housing.

The annual report would be received in one year.

We thanked officers for information presented.

3. To confirm the date and time of the next meeting

We noted that the next meeting would be held on 26th November 2015, information regarding the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) would be presented and timescales would be clarified by Planning Officers.

The meeting ended at 3.55 pm