

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee held on Thursday, 14th July, 2016 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor S. Jones (Chairman)
County Councillor (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Dovey, D. Edwards, D. Evans, J. Prosser,
A. Watts and A. Wintle

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Kellie Beirne	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Cath Fallon	Head of Economy and Enterprise
Nicola Edwards	Strategic Food and Tourism Manager
Mark Hand	Head of Planning, Housing and Place-Shaping
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors S. White and B. Hayward

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

2. Public Open Forum

There were no members of the public in attendance.

3. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 9th June 2016

Due to an administrative error, it was agreed to defer confirmation of the minutes of the meeting held on 9th June 2016 to the next meeting.

4. To scrutinise Year-end Performance Reporting together with Outcome Agreements and Improvement Plan.

The Chief Officer for Enterprise presented the end of year data for the Improvement Objectives which fall under the remit of the Economy & Development Select Committee:

- Improvement Objective 3: We want to enable our county to thrive.
- Improvement Objective 4: Maintaining locally accessible services.

The report presented an evaluation of the progress and impact made over the three years of the Outcome Agreement 2013 -16, for themes which are under the committee's remit:

- Outcome agreement Theme 3: Poverty and material deprivation

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We also received the latest performance against wider key national performance indicators that are under the committee's remit.

Recommendations:

It was recommended that:

- Members scrutinise the performance achieved and impact made, particularly in areas fall under the committee's remit, to assess progress and performance against the improvement objectives.
- Members scrutinise the performance achieved and impact made, over the three years (2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16) of the Outcome Agreement.
- Members identify 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.
- Members confirm the evaluation scores based on the evidence provided.

Members Scrutiny

A Member questioned the reasons for declining performance in housing and what plans there were to improve future performance. The Officer explained that the period under consideration reflected the very end of the previous Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and that completions from the Local Development Plan (LDP) haven't yet taken effect and that a time lag in sites coming forward is reflected in the confirmed 4.1 year housing land supply. This matter will be reported upon at the next meeting as part of the annual monitoring report for LDP. The Officer further explained that the low number of completions can be attributed to the external economy, housing completions and the end of the recession.

The Officer explained that lower performance against the targets for affordable housing units is a feature of the current economy and challenges related to the viability of schemes. The Officer added that it would be beneficial to discuss the availability of sites at Planning Committee. He referred to development approvals and more recent completions noting in larger sites of five plus units in 2015/16, 150 affordable units were approved of 465 units (32%).

A Member commented that the Planning Act 2015 puts new emphasis to create Place Plans that are sympathetic to the LDP and involve Town and Community Councils, and queried if the plans would have much effect as residents want to protect their locale. The Officer responded that this should not cause an impact because the plan has to reflect the LDP. The Chief Officer for Enterprise, added that policy drivers would have to take account of other factors for example, the planned M4 Relief Road and the projected increase in the aging population combined with a decline in the younger population which will have serious implications for the housing market. The Officer reminded Members that the Council must have a five year housing land supply. The current 4.1 year land supply may lead to developers suggesting sites outside the LDP.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that neighbouring authorities are in a similar position; Newport, however, has over 6.3 years housing land supply mainly due to a successful growth strategy.

A Member queried the potential impact of not proceeding with the Fairfield Mabey site and what the authority can do to support changes to affect our own ability to invest in social housing. The

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Officer responded that there was confidence that the Fairfield Mabey site would proceed to Planning Committee this year and officers are working with the applicants accordingly. It was explained that there had been an 18 month delay whilst the Welsh Government considered concerns relating to air quality and traffic capacity; these points now resolved. It was added that there was an element of policy compromise to consider when allocating desirable, sustainable brown field sites in the LDP such as this site, which is near a railway station and the town centre, balanced against significant associated costs.

In terms of affordable housing, the Officer commented that Registered Social Landlords (RSL) are now able to build affordable housing on their own and other sites (e.g. consent given to Melin to build 58 units on the Coed Glas site which will have a mix of markets with a proportion of affordable housing) and are capable of innovative projects.

An Officer explained that it will be necessary to consider innovative solutions to accelerate availability of affordable housing to maintain a thriving county and economy. It is proposed to look differently at council owned sites to provide e.g. a higher proportion of affordable housing, flexible tenure or co-operative housing. It was noted that the Future Monmouthshire work will consider scenario planning and suggest policy tools to create conditions for job opportunities, business, enterprise and housing opportunities to create communities where people choose to live or can stay.

Members queried if there is anything that can be done to support affordable social housing for young people commenting that young people have already left the area in favour of less expensive areas. Members also commented on the need to attract more job opportunities to the county. It was suggested that Housing Associations are best placed due to economies of scale but that the Housing Associations can't afford to build in some areas. It was also commented that some larger sites are not creating lower cost housing. The Officer advised that there will be opportunity to address the issues in the LDP review and it will be possible to consider different, more innovative options such as new settlements or sensitive expansion of more rural areas. The Officer reported that MCC is unique in Wales in its 60/40 sites where there is 60% affordable housing and 40% market housing. The availability of and progress with employment land will be considered in the annual monitoring report.

The Chair commented that scrutiny of the annual report will take place at the September meeting and it might be appropriate to hold a members' seminar.

The Chief Officer for Enterprise agreed the need for appropriate infrastructure, and that the City Deal will be an opportunity to debate how best to protect and preserve the county with the need for growth for future generations.

A Member raised the issue of the Rural Development Plan (RDP) and questioned how long funds are secured for in view of Brexit and if it will be possible to replace the funding in future from the UK Government. The Officer clarified that the current programme runs to 2017, and on an N+2 basis funding will last until 2019/20 and anything that has been approved will continue. The Officer reported that Welsh Government are pushing for confirmation from the UK Government that funds will be replaced.

It was agreed to hold a members' seminar on outcomes post Brexit.

The Chair asked if the locations where AB Internet is provided are precluded from the roll out of BT Superfast Broadband and secondly, what percentage of premises have access. The Officer said that these areas were not precluded but there may be a delay if it is a 'Hard to Reach' area where fibre to premises instead of fibre to cabinet is required. The Officer reported that no data from BT had been received since December 2015 adding that the BT marketing contract ended

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in June 2016. Marketing has been taken over by the Welsh Government to encourage take up. The Officer added that roll out was nowhere near completion compared with other areas and direct contacts have been established to ensure regular provision of up to date information. It was agreed to request that Welsh Government attend this Committee and commented that it was important to complete Superfast Broadband to encourage technical industries, residents and workers to move to or remain in the county. Referring to statistics, the Chair confirmed the drive to sustain the increasing numbers of people who live and work in Monmouthshire.

The Chair asked if the target measure indicators are appropriate to monitor the Service Improvement Plan (SIP) to adequately identify support for those in isolated communities. The Officer agreed that the performance indicators only show part of the situation and informed Members that a comprehensive assessment of rural services' needs has been commissioned. The assessment will include demographics changes and projections forward, which will be combined with information collected on population and wellbeing to better inform more relevant targets.

A Member questioned the reasons for the decline in performance in waste recycling and for reusing. The Officer explained that there had been some changes to the bag system introduced but this was not a particular concern and that Strong Communities Select Committee is monitoring performance. The Member asked if the decline could be attributed to three vehicles following each other around estates and route changes. The Head of Operations explained that there had been a decline in performance specifically due to an issue relating to the disposal of glass, and also an increase in residual waste because we are not recycling bottom ash. The Head of Operations agreed to discuss the specific issues from his ward with Members concerned.

A Member queried when the work is being undertaken, and with whom regarding the Place Plan for the Lower Wye Area as he was not aware of any contact being made through various forums. The Chief Officer for Enterprise agreed to contact the Member separately to provide an update and to explain the arrangements for future plans. The Member welcomed contributions from the local community and businesses.

A Member asked when there would be a Whole Place Plan in Monmouth. The Officer advised that a positive meeting had taken place to consider what existing information and data is available e.g. work has been commenced by Monmouth Town Council. It was queried when Members would be involved. The Chief Officer, Enterprise agreed to request an update for all Members on the work completed in each area and next steps.

A Member reported that Abergavenny Town Council has established a Place Plan using volunteers with groups of councillors. He advised that he is the Chair of the Agri Urban Project for Abergavenny and surrounding areas. This work can be added to the Place Plan.

Chairman's Summary:

The Chair summarised that affordable housing, whole place planning, recycling and Superfast Broadband had been discussed at the meeting. Actions were agreed as follows:

- An update on whole place planning across the county for all Members was requested;
- The Welsh Government to be invited to the meeting regarding scrutiny of the roll out of Superfast Broadband.
- A post-referendum outcomes seminar to be arranged to consider any impact on EU funded projects.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance.

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5. To discuss the outcomes of the Business Breakfast in respect of:

Following the Business Breakfast meeting held in May and discussed at the last meeting, we continued to review of the issues identified. Fiona Wilton from Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Tourism Association was welcomed to the meeting. The issues raised at the Business Breakfast were discussed, as follows:

- Superfast Broadband: The strong discussion on provision of Superfast Broadband throughout the county was welcomed. It was commented that action needs to be taken to support small tourism businesses that rely on digital marketing and have been constrained through lack of service.
- Business Engagement: The remit, structure of and area covered by the Association was explained. Members were informed that there are currently 300-400 members. The Association is very keen to engage with Monmouthshire. It was explained that the Association has an effective website which covers the three counties (Monmouthshire (as far as Abergavenny), Herefordshire and Gloucestershire) and commented that co-ordination and collaboration was welcomed with other digital platforms to maximise opportunities for PR, marketing and social media.
- Members' Only website: The Members' Only website provides resources for businesses and it was confirmed that Monmouthshire's information and events could be added to the resource.
- Policy: The need to ensure coordination of policy and strategic organisation was highlighted. It was commenting that the Association has a Destinations Strategy and is in consultation with the Head of Tourism in this respect.
- Business awareness: It was confirmed that many businesses work successfully in geographical cluster areas as this is the way visitors see the area.
- Communication: The Association is addressing lack of communication with small business members. It was explained that well-attended meetings have been held.
- Tourist Information Centres (TIC): It was advocated that TICs should be kept open as far as possible. Members were informed that, although Forest of Dean District Council closed TICs, Coleford Town Council has successfully opened one staffed by volunteers.

The Officer conveyed the willingness of MCC to engage with the work of the Association, especially actions that require no additional workload as capacity is limited. It was agreed that online content can be shared on a reciprocal basis, as happens with the other tourism associations operating in the area. It was recognised that some businesses may not be advertised on the website but are encouraged to submit their details for inclusion. The Officer welcomed opportunities for closer working together. It was noted, however, that funding received from Welsh Government is for Welsh businesses only, and that projects may not always align in this respect.

Members' Scrutiny

The Chair questioned plans to ensure engagement with the wider tourism community. The Officer advised that funding has been secured from Welsh Government to review the Destinations Plan that ended in 2015 and to review the partnership arrangements that underpin it. All stakeholders, including the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Tourism Association, will be consulted.

A Member challenged the Council's approach to local tourism and identified the need to understand the impact on the local economy and it was commented that every avenue should be explored to maximise opportunities for revenue from tourism.

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The Chief Officer for Enterprise responded that the economic value of tourism is understood adding that the Council has invested in events and attractions. It was added that Members were reminded that there had been a 15% budget reduction which has affected the Council's ability to operate and fund TICs but an innovative model could be explored. The importance of a joined up approach was also emphasised.

A Member reflected on the positive value of the Business Breakfasts and encouraged further engagement opportunities with small businesses and local business organisations. The Officer reported that a Visit Monmouthshire event is held annually which is well attended, in addition to many other meetings, exhibitions etc. A Member commented that more businesses should have attended the event and queried the contact database.

A Member questioned the business model of the TIC in Coleford and it was clarified that Coleford Town Council provides the premises and pays the overheads, it is staffed by volunteers and was set up with volunteer expertise. The Member suggested that the same model could be applied to provide a TIC in Chepstow in collaboration with local business organisations. It was concluded that the model suggested was worth further analysis. The Officer advised that a lot of volunteers were utilised already and provided the example of Abergavenny's successful TIC established in partnership with Abergavenny Town Council, Tythe Barn and St Mary's Priory Trust and the Abergavenny and District Tourist Association. It was added that a RDP Feasibility study has been commissioned to consider the development of sustainable visitor information for Monmouthshire and Newport. The importance of TICs was recognised and suggested that costs need to be shared fairly with those who benefit. It was commented that the entire community benefits.

A Member queried the footfall through the new TIC in Abergavenny compared with the old premises. The officer agreed to provide the requested information at the next meeting.

In response to a question, the Officer confirmed that the Council contribute funds to the Abergavenny TIC, small businesses in the town also contribute and that Brecon Beacons National Parks Authority contribute administrative support. Responding to a further query, the Officer confirmed that some St. Mary's Church guides provide assistance and have completed the Ambassador training. The Officer also agreed to bring details of any drop in income to the next meeting.

Members requested clarification regarding signs to TICs in various locations and were advised by the Head of Operations that, as a result of the Car Park review, some funding was allocated to improve signage. Work will be undertaken with businesses to explore improvements to make signage more up to date.

The Chair queried the team's approach to policy on advertising and was informed by the Head of Operations that the policy had been imaginatively interpreted to offer signage opportunities to businesses. There is greater commitment to creating income through advertising whilst promoting businesses through brown signage. The policy will be reviewed to reflect the funding available.

The Chair questioned timescales and the Head of Operations agreed to bring a timetable to a future meeting. This will be added to the work plan and updates requested accordingly.

Members expressed some concern that signage and policy should have been reviewed earlier for the convenience of this summer's visitors. The Officer reported that a large amount of work had been carried out, as part of the last RDP programme, to audit and review pedestrian and highways signage across eleven settlements in the county. Money had been secured to

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implement some of the review recommendations. Further funding is required to implement the remaining recommendations.

. This included consultation with communities and resulted in e.g. new town entry signage including reference to attractions. It was added that signage becomes out of date relatively quickly and that it remains in good condition compared with other areas. The Officer explained that avenues for funding are always being sought and there is a constant drive for improvement.

A Member commented that grants had previously been forthcoming from Welsh Government and questioned how such funding is distributed across Monmouthshire. The Officer confirmed that support was available from the RDP Project where funding was awarded against criteria but this is not now available. It was added that the cost is passed on to the business being promoted with a small administration charge.

A Member questioned if town attractions could be highlighted on the town maps printed by Chambers of Commerce to help visitors. The Officer responded that most town maps have been reviewed and include emphasis on key attractions – write to chamber of commerce in this request. The Chair requested that the Chambers of Commerce are written to drawing their attention to this point. A Member advised that Abergavenny Town Council has printed 100,000 maps for issue to visitors to the Eisteddfod. The Officer asked for a PDF version to forward to the National Eisteddfod organisers for inclusion in their distribution lists for visitors who are camping and caravanning.

The Chair requested that the STEAM (Scarborough Tourism and Economic Assessment Model) statistics are presented at the next meeting.

In response to a question about holding further Business Breakfasts, The Head of Economy and Enterprise, informed Members that the database contains over 2300 entries split into sectors and added that there are a plethora of networking activities for businesses and Members are able to attend these events. Dates are available on the Enterprise section of the website. It was added that due to constrained resources, there is no capacity to organise business breakfasts otherwise.

Chairman's Summary:

The Chair thanked Fiona Wilton for attending and for her contribution to the meeting acknowledging the positive discussion and the identification of areas for closer working. The Chair welcomed her attendance at future meetings.

The Chair identified actions from the meeting referring to the Destinations Management Plan which will be available for consultation to Ward Members and Committee Members in the near future.

The Chair recognised the strong feelings expressed regarding Chepstow TIC and requested that options similar to the Coleford model are explored.

Regarding Brown and white signage, the Chair summarised that the policy should be reviewed and added to the forward work programme.

Looking to the future, the Chair stated that the Committee would review Supplementary Planning Guidance on Tourism in February prior to its adoption in April.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their contribution and attendance.

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6. To review the progress of the Cardiff City Region Board ~ presentation.

The Chief Officer for Enterprise provided a presentation on the Cardiff City Deal explaining that County Councillor P. Fox will report on progress with the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Transition Board in due course.

The Chief Officer introduced the City Deal explaining that it will provide investment for economic growth for the Cardiff Capital Region in partnership with the Welsh Government and 10 local authorities. It was explained that the City Deal comprises a £1.2 billion infrastructure investment fund for projects and programmes that are can provide an investment return within the region.

Following the presentation, a Member questioned plans to provide teachers with improved IT skills to complement the developments. The Chair reported that a Joint Economy and Development with Children and Young People's Select Committee meeting was held on 11th July 2016 focussing on IT provision and skills.

The Chief Officer for Enterprise responded that it was important that jobs created are for our young people and referred to the establishment of the Learning Skills and Innovation Partnership for South East Wales to inform the skills requirements from early years to higher education aligned to economic intelligence in the region.

A Member asked a question about the continuation of financial support for scientific research and the implications for the Metro project post Brexit. It was also queried how to assure accountability and benefits of the City Deal for our constituents.

The Chief Officer for Enterprise was unable to comment, as the implications of Brexit are unclear at this time. Members' attention was drawn to IQE, a company at the forefront of the development of advanced compound semi-conductors with a potential to realise significant numbers of job opportunities in the future. The Chief Officer for Enterprise advised of the importance of recognising the Unique Selling Point for Monmouthshire and the region.

In response to a query, it was clarified that once the agreement has been signed by the ten local authorities, each will have the opportunity to access funding for projects that are most relevant for its area. Proposed projects must have regional scale and significance, and be pertinent to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The Chair stated the need to work with communities, including the hard to reach areas, to support the creation of job opportunities of varying levels. It was queried, for example, if the apprenticeship scheme could be up scaled for the whole region to establish entry level opportunities that grow into fulltime well paid jobs.

A Member questioned opportunities for engagement outside Wales.

The Chief Officer for Enterprise agreed that a joined up approach with the West Country is to be encouraged and referred to the establishment of links with the Great Western Cities partnership and Business West.

It was suggested that small steps could include that employer organisations and employers being represented on school governing bodies.

Members discussed the importance of investment in infrastructure specifically in terms of transport and communications, and superfast broadband. It was commented that the proposed

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Metro won't help some areas of Monmouthshire noting that there is limited access to buses, and that the Valley areas and Cardiff are more likely to receive investment. It was commented that further education institutes should concentrate on more technological subjects.

The Chief Officer for Enterprise informed Members that Cardiff University in conjunction with the Alacrity Foundation is progressing well with the establishment of a national software academy to reduce the length of degree courses and to specialise in the software development required for technology industries.

The Chair agreed that an informal visit to a technical manufacturer would be arranged for Members' information.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their contributions to the meeting.

7. Economy and Development forward work programme

The Forward Work Programme was presented.

8. To confirm the date and time of the next meeting as Thursday 1st September 2016

The meeting scheduled for the 1st September 2016 was postponed until the 27th September 2016 at 1.00pm (pre-meeting at 12.30pm).

The meeting ended at 1.10 pm