

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held
at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Thursday, 8th December, 2016 at 10.00
am**

PRESENT: County Councillor S. Howarth (Chairman)
County Councillor A.Easson (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Dovey, S. Jones, V. Smith and A. Webb

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Paula Harris	Democratic Services Officer
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Matthew Lewis (Countryside)	Countryside Manager
Ruth Rourke	Principal Officer - Countryside Access
Alan Burkitt	Policy Officer Equalities and Welsh Language
Richard Jones	Policy and Performance Officer

1. Apologies for absence

County Councillors P. Watts and S White.

2. Declarations of Interest

Item 9

County Councillor Easson declared an interest as a Governor at Ysgol Gymraeg Y Ffin School.

3. Open Public Forum

We were joined by a member of the public, Peter Sutherland who spoke in regard to the ongoing traffic and speeding issues with particular regard to Woodside.

He voiced his frustration at the lack of progress by the council addressing the speeding issues at Woodside. He asked what work will take place, when work will take place and who will be responsible for it.

The Chair asked if Mr Sutherland was concerned about a countywide strategy for road safety. Mr Sutherland replied that in his case the priority is Woodside and he is extremely frustrated by the lack of progress. The Chair clarified that the Select Committee does not pursue issues but to ensure that policy and strategy is in place and to scrutinise the processes.

The Head of Operations confirmed that since the last meeting a meeting had been convened with Usk Town Council, Llanbadoc Community Council, local County Councillors for the region and the Cabinet member along with an expert consultant and Gwent Police who spent half a day looking at options around design works to manage traffic in Usk and Woodside. He

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confirmed that they have not moved on the offer made by a member of the public to fund traffic cameras as long term the better option maybe the redesign of roads in and around Usk.

Mr Sutherland felt that this did not answer his questions of timescales and responsibility, he also asked about the Task and Finish group previously mentioned on road safety. The Chair informed Mr Sutherland that the group would be having their first meeting shortly, in which they will agree their terms of reference and will confirm their strategy going forward.

County Councillor V. Smith spoke as the local member of her frustration of Woodside's exclusion from road safety discussions over a number of years and her concern for the safety of the residents who live in that area.

The Head of Operations advised due to funding issues the change of road layout may be some years away. Speed limits are in place and can be enforced by the Police.

County Councillor A. Webb voiced that there are other areas of the county equally important, giving the example of Tintern on the A466, stressing it needs to be a countywide strategy.

County Councillor V. Smith spoke of an electronic speed sign in Usk which had recently been taken down with no explanation given. The Head of Operations advised this would have been done if the sign was faulty, he also confirmed that speed limits were in place and the issue was enforcement, he will take this up with Gwent Police.

County Councillor A. Eason spoke about the longevity of signs thorough the county and that there were signs in Caldicot that no longer worked. The Head of Operations noted this and confirmed he would speak to area engineers to ensure regular inspections and maintenance was taking place.

Mr Sutherland raised the issue of a number of shipping containers at Usk Island carpark and deemed it as a change of use. He confirmed that planning enforcement officers at MCC were aware and the Chair advised this would be a local member issue and advised County Councillor V. Smith to chase MCC planning department for clarification.

4. To confirm minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the 10th November 2016 Committee meeting were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

County Councillor A. Webb asked for road numbers to be included in the minutes in future.

5. Action list

Actions accepted and will be made part of future work programme.

6. Grant Funded Partnerships

Context:

To provide relevant partnership information to the Stronger Communities Select Committee in relation to the contribution of third sector organisations.

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To focus on the representation, activity and delivery of third sector partners across the partnership landscape within Monmouthshire, under the direction of the Monmouthshire Public Service Board (formally Local Service Board).

To have an oversight of the funding provided to third sector partners.

Key Issues:

In 2012 the Welsh Government Statutory Guidance “Shared Purpose, Shared Delivery” rationalised the partnership landscape, by reducing complexity and duplication, and freeing up resources, through the development of Local Service Boards and the Single Integrated Plan. In April 2016 the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act came into force and the Monmouthshire Local Service Board transitioned into a statutory Public Service Board with the responsibility of overseeing the remaining year of the Single Integrated Plan, which runs until March 2017.

Following the audit and review of the partnership landscape in 2014/15, the Strategic Partnership team concentrated on shaping the partnership landscape into a structure that was accessible to all partners. Strategic partnership groups were mapped and reviewed and this enabled us to understand the complexities of partnership arrangements, the robustness of partnership governance and how they were contributing to improving population outcomes identified in the SIP for Monmouthshire and reporting into the Public Service Board.

The Partnership landscape in Monmouthshire fully embraces multi-agency working, with representation from a wide range of partner organisations, including the third sector, who work collaboratively to improve the outcomes for Monmouthshire residents. Collaboration and partnership working forms a key part of the delivery mechanism across the county, and it is important that the Select Committee have a solid oversight of this work and the contribution of our third sector partners in this wide and varied landscape.

Member Scrutiny:

It was asked which County Councillor who is the representative for Monmouthshire County Council to GAVO and we were told County Councillor Alan Wintle.

A member asked about sustainable funding and we were told that GAVO thinks about the wider sector and are interested in the programme for government and what opportunities might come from that. Increasingly the private sector will become more important, recently companies such as Go Compare and British Airways supported volunteer awards.

It was asked what resources are put into communicating to the public the amazing work GAVO does. We were told that they have a communications officer, however they concentrate their resources on delivering services rather than publicity. GAVO have developed their website recently, constantly reviewing their social media strategy, recognising how various community groups communicate to allow them to build new audiences and build their profile.

In answer to a Member’s question in terms of funding we were told that Monmouthshire County Council was below average.

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Committee's Conclusion:

GAVO's remit is huge and what they are delivering is significant. We need to understand how the resource is best used and help GAVO to deliver key objectives with the targeted funding.

We need to urge the Cabinet member to consider how proportionate our funding is compared to other councils, but also what more could be delivered by GAVO if we were able to invest more. We want to ensure that what GAVO delivers is in line with what we are trying to deliver as a council.

We look forward to welcoming GAVO back at a future meeting for further updates.

7. Rights of Way Improvement plan

Context:

We received a report to seek the Committee's views on the scope of and progress on the Review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Recommendations:

That the Committee note and provide comments on:

- i. The scope of and progress on the review;
- ii. The proposed timescales for further reporting to the Committee on the outcome of the initial assessments

Key Issues:

1 The Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) is a statutory plan required by the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 to cover the management, development, integration and promotion of local rights of way networks. Welsh Government published Guidance on the Review of RoWIPs in July 2016.

2. The Monmouthshire RoWIP was approved in 2007 (and can be viewed at <http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/app/uploads/2013/09/ROWIP-final-doc.pdf>). We are now required to carry out a new assessment; review the existing plan and decide whether or not to amend it; and if required to publish a new plan within 12 months of that decision.

3. The review requirements and the proposed timetable are set out in the appended paper. The formal review has to take place within 10 years of the plan's original approval (i.e. before Oct 2017) and our proposal is to complete that stage by July 2017 and to publish a final plan by March 2018.

4. The existing RoWIP took a "benefits driven" approach to countryside access management based on the following vision:

- *To recognise the economic, social and heritage value of our public rights of way network as an important investment in the future for the residents and visitors of Monmouthshire.*

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- *To maintain and improve local rights of way in order to promote and encourage their use and enjoyment for the physical and mental well-being of all of Monmouthshire's residents and visitors.*
- *To sustain the quality and diversity of Monmouthshire's countryside and to promote responsible countryside access for all.*

Our assessment is that the existing RoWIP has been very successful in guiding this approach to countryside access management and has helped secure external investment over the last decade. So the proposed approach is to review and refine and set the RoWIP into the new wellbeing / natural resource management policy context but aim not lose the essence of the original plan.

5. As required by statute the Local Access Forum has been consulted on the proposed scope and timetable and the intention is that the new Local Access Forum will be consulted throughout; the RoWIP being its main focus of work over the coming months. The guidance suggests the involvement of the LAF should cover:

Assisting with dialogue through contacts with national, regional and local organisations;

Informing the data gathering exercise including the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public;

Advising on how the network could be improved for the public and where there are particular land management concerns;

Advising on the related issue of access to open countryside especially where new linear routes may be desirable;

Providing advice on prioritising implementation;

Commenting on published draft plans; and

Assisting in the resolution of conflicts between different representations when plans are issued for consultation.

Member Scrutiny:

A question was raised regarding the footpath around the Nevern in Caldicot and if there had been any progress. We were answered that we were looking at that Welsh coast path development and it still ongoing. One of the landowners wasn't prepared to dedicate part of the land there and this is still the situation, hopefully this will change in the future.

In respect of the Wye Valley walk it was asked if there were any plans to move extend. We were told there no plans to extend at this time. The that the main issues with the Wye Valley walk related to the large infrastructure items, Redbrook bridge and Lydbrook bridge given in example.

The Chair advised officers that when presenting the improvement plan that all major structures which are perceived to become a problem are listed in the plan because they may be an asset, but if they have to be made safe in view of pathways the cost may make plans virtually impossible.

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A members asked if volunteers were welcome to help and officers advised that MCC are currently looking at a piece of work to clarify what volunteers can and cannot do.

A question was asked in respect of pavements, cycle tracks and pedestrians as there was an ambition to have a cycle route from Pontypool to County Hall in Usk. Officers answered there was an overlap with highways in terms of footways and cycle ways that run alongside roads they generally would not be rights of way.

A member asked about a previously presentation regarding rights of way issues and asked if these had been resolved, we were told that there is still a significant backlog of issues.

A Member commented on the closure of footpaths being a huge problem and asked for an explanation of the procedure. It was explained that the procedure was under the Highways Act 1980 and the only reason we can close a footpath is if it not needed for public use and that they would look at extinguishing or closing a path at the same time as a diversion or creation of a path, then they are more acceptable.

Footpaths can be closed as a safety issue but only for 6 months before seeking Welsh Government approval.

It was asked if National Parks are handing over all paths to MCC, the officer told the Committee that we may not be taking the paths on for the next financial year but would have to contribute to costs.

Committee's Conclusion:

The Committee endorse the recommendation and look forward to seeing the work progress.

The Chair asked that we revisit this in the Summer.

8. Improvement Objectives, Performance and Risk Assessment

Context:

The Committee received a report to present quarter 2 performance data for the Improvement Objectives which are under the remit of Strong Communities Select Committee.

Recommendations

1. That members scrutinise the performance achieved and impact made, particularly in areas that fall under the committee's remit, to assess progress and performance against the objectives.
2. That members identify and explore any areas of underperformance or concern, and to seek assurance from those responsible for future activity where they conclude that Performance needs to improve.

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Key Issues:

Improvement Objectives are set annually by the Council to deliver on priorities, these are set in the Council's Improvement Plan 2016/17. Despite objectives being focussed on the long term the specific activities that support them are particularly focussed for the year ahead.

Activity that contributes to the delivery of some objectives cross cuts Select Committee remits and these will also be reported to the other relevant committee(s).

Therefore it is suggested members particularly focus their scrutiny on the activity relevant to the committee with consideration of its contribution to the objective as a whole.

The Improvement Objectives will be evaluated at the end of the year (2016/17) based on the council's self-evaluation framework, as set in the Improvement Plan 2016-17. Performance against them will be reported to Select Committee and in the Stage 2 Improvement Plan published in October each year.

This is likely to be the final annual cycle of Improvement Planning in this format. The council is currently undertaking two substantial assessments of need and wellbeing within the county as a consequence of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and the Social Services and Wellbeing Act. This information will provide a much deeper evidence base of well-being in the County and will be used to review the council's current improvement objectives in preparation for the publication of the council's wellbeing objectives by 31st March 2017.

Appendix C sets out further Key Performance Indicators from the National Performance indicator set that are under the committee's remit. The primary purpose is to highlight the performance achieved so far in 2016/17. In some cases this may result in duplication of indicators already included in other sections of the report.

Where indicators relate to the performance of services that are under the remit of more than one committee these will also be reported to the other relevant committee(s).

Member Scrutiny:

In respect of objective 4 'maintaining locally accessible services' it was asked if public transport should be included in this due to the ongoing issues with services.

In regard to waste the Chair asked how the increase had been achieved, we were told that continued cooperation of residents was essential, the energy recovery of residual waste and the compostable waste figures going down.

A Member expressed hope that the recycling pilot was successful.

In regard to sickness days per employee we were told that we were told that last year the sickness rate had risen to 11.6 days a year per employee which was quite high compared to other councils in Wales, this has dropped to 10.06, however this may rise through the winter months.

It was asked what percentage of sickness was down to stress and we were told that from the 2015/16 figures 21% of absence was due to physiological reasons.

It was asked if the report could go back to being colour coded.

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Committee's Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the Officer for the comprehensive report and look forward to the next update.

9. Welsh Language Strategy

Context:

To present the Welsh Language Strategy for 2017 – 2022, which has been produced in line with the requirements of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and specifically Standards 145 and 146. This strategy is closely linked to our Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2016 which has been scrutinised by the Children and Young People's Select Committee. In order to ensure a consistency in approach and to ease performance monitoring, some of the performance measures have been shared. The strategy will be subject to formal consultation between the 21st November and the 16th December 2016.

Key Issues:

The 5 Year Welsh Language Strategy sets out a vision of how the Welsh Language will look in Monmouthshire in 5 years' time and targets have been set to achieve that vision accordingly. As previously stated the timing of the statutory requirement to produce a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) has been fortuitous as is the Welsh Assembly Government's ambitious Strategy to have a million Welsh Speakers in Wales by 2050. These two has given added impetus to the vision and its targets. This strategy is challenging but achievable with the appropriate level of planning and support from our partners in the Council's Welsh Language Forum.

Member Scrutiny:

Members asked in respect of consultees, public consultation exercise, it was asked who was consulted. In response we were told that consultations took place bilingually via the council website, via social media and speaking to people who helped with the Eisteddfod. The Member asked that town councils were involved.

A Member expressed surprise that the percentage of welsh speakers was higher in the south than the north and we were told that the biggest concentration of welsh speakers were based around welsh speaking schools.

It was asked if the welsh schools have capacity and we were told that in the long term that demand may be a concern.

A Member asked when this was going to Cabinet as she was interested in attending, we were told this would be going to Cabinet 11th January 2017.

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Committee's Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the officer for the report and stressed the importance of thinking ahead, beyond the five years in the WESP.

10. Strong Communities forward work programme

Members noted the Work Programme for the Strong Communities Select Committee.

11. Cabinet & Council forward work programme

Members considered the Cabinet Forward Work Planner and no issues were identified as requiring pre-decision scrutiny.

12. Date and time of next meeting

Special Meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee with all members invited

16th January 2017 2pm (pre-meeting 1.30pm)

The meeting ended at 1.29 pm