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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Lower Wye Area Committee held
at Chepstow Leisure Centre, Welsh Street, Chepstow on Wednesday, 25th April, 2018 at
10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor D. Dovey (Chair)

County Councillors: L.Brown, J.Becker, R.J.W. Greenland and
P. Murphy

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Paul Keeble	Group Engineer (Highways and Flood Management)
Cath Fallon	Head of Economy and Enterprise
Mark Hand	Head of Planning, Housing and Place-Shaping
Judith Langdon	Communities and Partnership Development Lead
Joe Skidmore	Communities and Partnership Development Lead
James Woodcock	Business Insights Manager

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor P.Pavia

1. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

2. Public Open Forum

No matters were raised by members of the public at this point.

3. To receive the notes of the previous meeting held on 20th September 2017.

The notes of the last meeting were received.

4. Community Partnership Team Update: Community & Partnership Development Leads, Judith Langdon and Joe Skidmore.

The Committee received a presentation from Judith Langdon and Joe Skidmore, Communities & Partnership Team. They explained that their role is to engage with communities and create the conditions to progress wellbeing priorities. The Team strives to work effectively in partnership with town and community councils, interested individuals, third sector etc. by connecting, stimulating, catalysing, inspiring and building on existing strengths and capacities. It was explained that the work is based on geographical areas (Judith and Joe cover the Lower Wye/ Chepstow area, and also have thematic areas of responsibility e.g. Joe leads on children and young people). It was emphasised that needs differ in each of the areas.

The Team welcomed any information and connections, offering to meet with individuals and community groups to identify areas that would benefit from e.g. partnering with others in the County and an offer to help navigate public services. A flyer with course dates for the

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Community Leadership Programme was made available noting that the information is constantly updated. A Toolkit is available electronically.

The news that St. Arvans has a vibrant community with good monthly newsletters and an open forum was welcomed. It was suggested that the Team can help spread the word and share ideas.

A question was asked about how the work links in with other council work e.g. Social Justice especially in terms of loneliness and isolation. It was responded that efforts are being made to proactively resolve identified issues through the use of strategic partnerships. It was commented that good practice in areas such as Monmouth, Abergavenny and Caldicot is being replicated in other areas where possible, but it is fundamental that it is understood that one-size doesn't fit all and different solutions will be necessary for different places.

5. Social Justice Report: Chief Officer, Social Care, Health and Safeguarding - Claire Marchant

The Area Committee received an update from Cath Fallon, Head of Enterprise and Community Development, who explained that her role is to bring strands together e.g. Rural Development Programme work with the Community Partnership Team's work, and to find funding. The Social Justice Policy describes Monmouthshire County Council's commitment to building sustainable and resilient communities, to move forward to address inequality and to remove barriers to enable all citizens to realise their full potential.

The Committee was advised that this is the first iteration of the policy and so it will be subject to review. The aim is to keep the community at the heart of services for children, economic prosperity and to tackle loneliness and isolation. Examples of evidence obtained from the Wellbeing and Population Needs Assessments were provided such as high levels of childhood obesity, in-work poverty and high property prices. The Community Leadership Programme will help to remove barriers, and a volunteers programme is in place to maximise opportunities.

Committee Members were invited to review the paper and to make comments.

A Member queried if the Rural Development Fund was less than normal. It was responded that 50% is committed through programme spend so opportunities remain. An innovative approach is welcomed including things that have worked well elsewhere. A Member provided the example of the success of local newsletters and the benefits of engaging with social media e.g. a Facebook page.

6. Aneurin Bevan University Hospital board: Chepstow Hospital - dementia ward (Claire Marchant)

The Chair provided an overview to date of the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board's (ABUHB) decision to close the dementia ward at Chepstow Hospital (as per the minutes of the previous meeting). It was added that a meeting was held at St. Cadoc's Hospital at which the public were invited to attend but no questions or comments were allowed. The decision had already been made as it was reported in the press the following day.

It was reported that Cabinet Member Councillor P. Jones responded to a question at County Council with deep disappointment that the decision is not in the best interests of the most vulnerable people in Monmouthshire adding that the Health Board had declined a request to attend Council to explain its position but will attend a Select Committee. She also announced that the Health Board has passed an investment of £200,000 pa for work in partnership with

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Monmouthshire County Council and other partners to develop an integrated model of support for older people with mental health needs. A meeting is scheduled soon to explore areas that would benefit from additional funding. It was questioned if there are restrictions on what the money can be spent on.

A member of the public commented that she was disgusted with ABUHB recalling the removal of the Minor Injuries Unit and stating that the cost of transforming the normal ward to a dementia ward would have been considerable. She accused the Health Board of not listening.

Members of the Committee expressed their concern that the Committee, at its last meeting, had been advised by the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) that there would be no closure of the dementia ward only to hear a few days later that closure was proposed which would result in no in-patient care in this area. The replacement provision is in hospitals that are too distant from the Chepstow area. Members were sceptical that the proposed care within the community would be of a good enough standard.

It was suggested, regarding the future of Chepstow Hospital more generally, if an assessment of need would provide evidence to argue the position with the Health Board. It was also queried if the legality of the decision had been questioned.

The Chair concurred that the terms and conditions of the funding need to be explicit, and legally checked. A Member observed that every councillor was against the proposed closure when discussed at Select Committee and Council adding that the response from the Health Board was disappointing. It was commented that it was probably a legal decision.

It was noted that it is a matter for the Chair of the appropriate Select Committee to decide if the meeting at which the ABUHB attend should be made open to all councillors and members of the public.

****11.00am - Meeting adjourned for One Minute's Silence to commemorate ANZAC Day****

It was remarked that the strength of public feeling about this matter will make a difference and that there must be a campaign to fight for more inpatient and outpatient services based at Chepstow Hospital. It was questioned how this issue fits into the Social Justice Strategy.

Councillor P. Molyneux (representing Forest of Dean Council and Gloucestershire County Council) expressed concern about cross border issues citing similar issues with Dilke Memorial and Lydney Hospitals. He suggested that contact was made to share ideas and combine efforts with the campaign group to save these hospitals (HOLD).

A member of the public recommended a very careful look at the whole situation including finances, commenting that the dementia ward staff have been very stressed and registrars have left. It was, however, suggested that an out patients drop in facility would be useful.

The following statement was provided for the Committee by ABUHB:

“Chepstow Hospital – Dementia Ward

Following the end of the three month public consultation on the redesign of Older Adult Mental Health Services, the Health Board considered a report on the outcome of the consultation at its meeting on 21 March 2018.

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The report recommended that there should be additional investment in community services to support older adults with mental health problems and also recommended the consolidation in the number of inpatient units to three dementia units and one functional mental health unit across the Health Board.

The Board supported the recommendations and also agreed an additional investment of £200,000 to improve Older Adult Mental Health Community services in Monmouthshire. It was confirmed that the dementia ward (St Pierre) at Chepstow Community Hospital would close as a result of the agreed changes due to serious staffing shortages and on the advice of senior clinicians, and the ward closed on 9 April 2018."

7. Updates on Roads: Group Engineer (Highway & Flood Management), Paul Keeble and Head of Operations, Roger Hoggins

8. Progress with Gloucestershire/Forest of Dean (Chepstow traffic and by-pass)

The Area Committee welcomed Paul Keeble, Group Engineer (Highways and Flood Management) and Roger Hoggins, Head of Operations to the meeting.

A meeting had been held with Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) and Forest of Dean District Council (FOD) to discuss transport issues and agree arrangements for a transport study to be carried out by Capita.

A workshop with Officers from Gloucestershire County Council (GCC), MCC and FOD highlighted issues such as air quality, congestion, A48/A466 link, a train service to Bristol and more frequent bus services to Cardiff and Bristol. Capita will assess these points plus other information e.g. from Welsh Government traffic surveys and previous plans and will prepare a Stage One report highlighting and narrowing options to address identified issues. The next stage will be an outline business case with preferred options that will include engagement with the community and consideration of feasibility. If feasible, a full business case will be developed.

It is planned to set up a steering group chaired by a member of the community to include representation from the transport authority, County Councils, Town Council and Community Councils. Officers will report back to the group on progress. Stage one is likely to be concluded in June and the outcomes will be reported back to MCC, GCC and FOD to see if there is support for an outline business case.

A member of the public recalled a suggestion to reduce the size of High Beech Roundabout to alleviate blocking of traffic from Hardwick Hill going to Bristol with two lanes to the bottom roundabout. In response, it was explained that possible solutions are to make the roundabout larger would create larger gyratory or alternatively traffic signals could be implemented.

A Committee Member commented on the importance of looking at traffic in all directions into and out of Chepstow especially where they meet at High Beech, referring to the level of congestion, poor air quality at Hardwick Hill etc., and was concerned at the limited scope of the study.

It was reported that air quality is monitored closely on all routes and an announcement is due to confirm that Chepstow is one of five sites in Wales that are at or exceed the World Health Organisation limit of 10 micrograms per cubic metre pollution. Speed limits have been imposed to improve air quality.

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A Committee Member reported that the action group for a Chepstow by pass has raised a petition for consideration by Welsh Government. Additionally, arrangements are in hand for the Secretary of State to visit.

The Member had attended the GWR Customer Panel and queried if a connection has been made with Bristol Metro to support a service between Chepstow/Lydney and Bristol. Delays due to the franchise renewal were noted. The Head of Operations assured that there will be opportunity to contribute as the wider process for roads and public transport progresses.

9. M48 Slip Road

The Group Engineer (Highways and Flood Management) reported that the Welsh Government was petitioned about a potential slip road from the M48 with a dedicated lane to the A466 and reduced speed limits. Consultants have been commissioned to consider design work. It was also reported that pedestrians will be diverted via the cycle/walking route at Thornwell to provide a safer crossing point.

10. A466 St Arvans to Tintern: The present and the future

Regarding concerns, closures and diversions on the A466, it was reported that there are three specific sites where there has been significant expenditure to undertake basic emergency structural works, as follows:

1. Wyndcliff: This is a steep limestone cliff rising above the western bank of the River Wye which is in danger of falling onto the highway. Investigation into options is being undertaken such as cutting back the slope to 45°. Permission to complete the works is required as it is within an area of special scientific interest.
2. Livox (S): Consultants are completing a study to resolve loose rocks with netting.
3. Livox (N): A crack has developed in the highway and emergency strengthening works have been undertaken. The road is stabilised for the time being but a long term solution is sought such as a design to reroute the traffic.

Officers were thanked for the work done so far and assured that it was appreciated. It was agreed that the Cabinet Member should be asked to consult the Welsh Government to request more funding via a letter to a cabinet secretary.

11. Planning update: Head of Planning, Housing and Place-Shaping, Mark Hand

The Committee received an update on Planning from Mark Hand, Head of Planning, Housing and Place-Shaping who explained that a new Local Development Plan is required effective until 2033. The new plan will reflect the aging demography of the area, and issues such as housing affordability (outward migration by 20-40 year olds), population growth, removal of the Severn Bridge toll and economic development pressures.

The new plan will be evidence based to include vision and objectives for how the county will look in the future. It will identify what should change and the consequent requirements to address education and health needs. The Council, with other authorities in the region will seek engagement with the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board to involve them in any issues identified and on bigger housing developments within the county.

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One of the key consultation stages is March 2019. The timetable will be taken to Council on 10th May 2018.

Candidate sites for housing and business development will be included in the plan. Opportunities to carry forward or amend green wedges will be identified and it is aimed to engage with communities, area committees and neighbouring authorities including Forest of Dean to assess where people work and live.

A Committee Member drew attention to the interest being shown by housing developers in Chepstow and surrounding area because of the decision to remove the Severn Bridge tolls and the consequent pressure on the infrastructure. The air quality on Hardwick Hill is already below standard and there will be an increase in traffic on the A48. It was explained that there are no specific plans at the current time but the LDP process will identify significant pressures.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the latest demographic projections were based on the 2011 census and include other data such as a declining population in terms of deaths and increased inward migration. Young people are living with parents longer as they can't afford to get on the housing ladder. It was suggested that the data to be used is out of date.

The Chair expressed concern that developers cannot always deliver the proportion of affordable housing promised and that landowners are holding out for the best possible price in the current climate. It was commented that affordable housing allocation will be reviewed to find a proportionate approach that works whilst also taking into account the need to ensure that the proposals will remain viable when the new plan comes into operation.

12. To nominate a representative to sit on the Strategic Transport Group.

This matter was deferred until the next meeting.

13. Impact of removal of Severn Bridge tolls: Business Insights Manager, Monmouthshire Business & Enterprise, James Woodcock

The Business Insights Manager was welcomed to the meeting to address the impact of the removal of the tolls on the Severn Bridge in the near future. The accompanying report was noted.

A Committee Member commented that a survey suggests that use of the bridge will increase by 20% as commuting to Bristol by road will be cheaper than by rail adding that it is difficult to produce an accurate prediction so there is a need to closely monitor the situation as it develops.

It was commented that the increase in tourism results in less parking spaces in the town making it more difficult to use local businesses.

Feedback was provided from a member of the public that residents are concerned in terms of housing, transport, health, education etc.

A representative of Forest of Dean and Gloucestershire councils stated that the toll removal was unexpected and consequently there were no plans citing as an example that the change was not added into the franchise renewal information. He urged a joined up approach to e.g. the quality of stations, parking etc.

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In response to a request that the report is updated, it was confirmed that consultancy work is in progress to investigate how the economy could be developed in the future and this will include the impact of removal of the tolls.

14. To note the position regarding Chepstow Station Footbridge

This matter was deferred.

15. Future Direction of Area Committee

This matter was not discussed.

16. To confirm the date and time of the next meeting as Wednesday 18th July 2018 at 10.00 (venue to be arranged).

The meeting ended at 12.55 pm

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