SUBJECT:	**Community Governance –Review Findings & Recommendations**
MEETING:	**Cabinet**
DATE:	**7th October 2015**
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	**All**

1. PURPOSE:

To update Members on the findings of the Community Governance Review and the proposed recommendations to develop a more coherent and partnership approach with communities.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That Cabinet agrees to recommend the actions and recommendations proposed within the Community Governance Review to Full Council to adopt and implement.

3. KEY ISSUES:

3.1 As members will be aware Community governance within Monmouthshire has been delivered through four Area Committees which were designed as an opportunity for communities to be involved in local democracy. No decision making is delegated to the Area Committees but it does provide an opportunity for issues of local concern to be raised and debated. In addition each area committee has been allocated a capital sum of £5,000 to allocate within its geographical boundary. This was previously managed on behalf of the Area Committees by the Area Managers, however these posts were deleted and currently no agreed process exists for the allocation, distribution and management of these grants.

3.2 The implementation of Whole Place has resulted in another tier of local governance which sits outside the Area Committee process. Programme Boards have been established in Severnside and Bryn y Cwm and they manage the delivery of the local plan. They are made up of elected county, community and Town councillors and representatives from community organisations.

3.3 The overlapping and complicated structures have led to dissatisfaction amongst community stakeholders .In addition the loss of the Area Manager roles and the implementation of the Whole Place team has resulted in a disconnect between the process and delivery frameworks set up to support community governance.

3.4 Recognising these concerns a Community Governance Review was commissioned. Following a tender exercise Keith Edwards was appointed to undertake this review in March of this year. The purpose of the review was to reflect on the experience of the dual processes to date and identify opportunities for a more streamlined and effective approach to delivery. The conclusions of this review have now been documented in a report entitled *Whole Place and Community Governance in Monmouthshire* (see appendix 1). The report outlines twelve recommendations around reducing complexity, having more clearly defined roles and responsibilities and streamlining local governance structures. There is also an associated action plan entitled *Key Challenges and Potential Responses* (see appendix 2).

3.5 The twelve recommendations are summarised as follows:

- Monmouthshire County Council will implement the recommendations of the report to enable a simpler local governance framework with clear lines of accountability and responsibility and provide access to funds to support local priorities.

- Terms of reference for each group integral to Whole Place will be developed in partnership and outlined in a single document.

- Monmouthshire re-align Whole Place internally, developing streamlined decision processes, inter department working and embedding corporate responsibility for the delivery of this agenda.

- Elected Members to undertake a local leadership role in engaging communities to deliver Whole Place. This involves replacing Area Committees with an annual joint Member/Programme Board summit, surgeries and the appointment of an Elected Member as a Whole Place Champion in each area who will sit on the Programme Board and updating Council.

- Review of Programme Boards, their memberships, remits and how they relate to the Council and their community.

- Re-inforce the importance of Town and Community Councils in the delivery of Whole Place through Programme Board membership.

- Town and Community Councils should build on existing networks and share resources.

- Re-inforce the independence of Community Forums and help build self-reliance.

- Programme Boards need to audit the engagement with excluded groups and produce an action plan to address deficits.

- Process for identifying new initiative and fast tracking their consideration and approval should be considered, whilst ensuring that it still meets all the legal and financial accountability tests.

- The Council should review Whole Place support and resources and ensure it aligns with community hubs and developing more area based services.

- The Whole Place team should work with communities to co-design the service.

4. REASONS:

4.1 The report followed a series of interviews and workshops with Elected Members (County, Town and Community), representatives of the Community Forum, Town Teams, Community Leaders and Officers. The key issues raised were then used to determine the actions and recommendations contained with the report.

4.2 The key areas of concerns were outlined as follows:

- Improving communication and dialogue at all levels within the Council.
- Speeding up decision making
- Ensuring buy in across all service departments
- Providing adequate resources to enable effective transition, e.g. investing in capital assets before transfer
- Not enough engagement in Whole Place with Community Councils and their populations.
- Area Committees, mixed responses as some support them and others suggest that they are anachronistic and create confusion.

- Capacity within local communities, Town Teams and Town / Community Councils.
- The need to extend the range and quantity of activists
- The Council needs to allocate resources to the Programme Board.
- Better flow of appropriate information.

4.3 The implementation of the Localism Act, impending changes to Local Government, the Councils vision to create sustainable and resilient communities and the increasing constrained financial position require the Council to develop stronger, robust and viable partnerships with local communities to help deliver local priorities. The Whole Place agenda has set this direction within Monmouthshire, however there is significantly more work to do to embed this as evidenced by the findings in the report.

4.4 It is inevitable that the restrictions imposed on local government as regards decision making and accountability will impact on our ability to respond to proposals put forward by Programme Boards and local communities. It is essential therefore to develop a decision framework that is as streamlined as possible but still meets all the threshold tests.

4.5 The proposed removal of Area Committees will undoubtedly be met with some opposition. The Programme Boards represent a new way of interacting with our local communities, broadening the membership beyond Elected Members and using the priorities as determined by the local communities in their Whole Place Plan to shape action plans and deliver outcomes.

4.6 It is recognised that Whole Place has not yet been implemented in Central Monmouthshire and has only recently been commenced in Lower Wye. There will therefore be a transition period if the recommendations are approved, where the processes are developed and agreed prior to commencing a new governance framework.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 The Area Committees are allocated an annual sum of £5,000 from the Councils Capital Programme to distribute as grants to local communities. It is proposed that this funding is transferred to the Programme Boards to support the delivery of the Whole Place Plans and provide seed funding for local initiatives.

6. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS:

6.1 The significant equality impacts identified in the assessment (Appendix B) are summarised below for members' consideration:

7. SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

There are no safeguarding or corporate parenting implications arising from this report.

8. CONSULTEES:

All Cabinet Members
Leadership team
Head of Legal Services
Raglan County Councillor

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Whole Place and Community Governance Review (Appendix 1 & 2)

10. AUTHORS:

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11. CONTACT DETAILS

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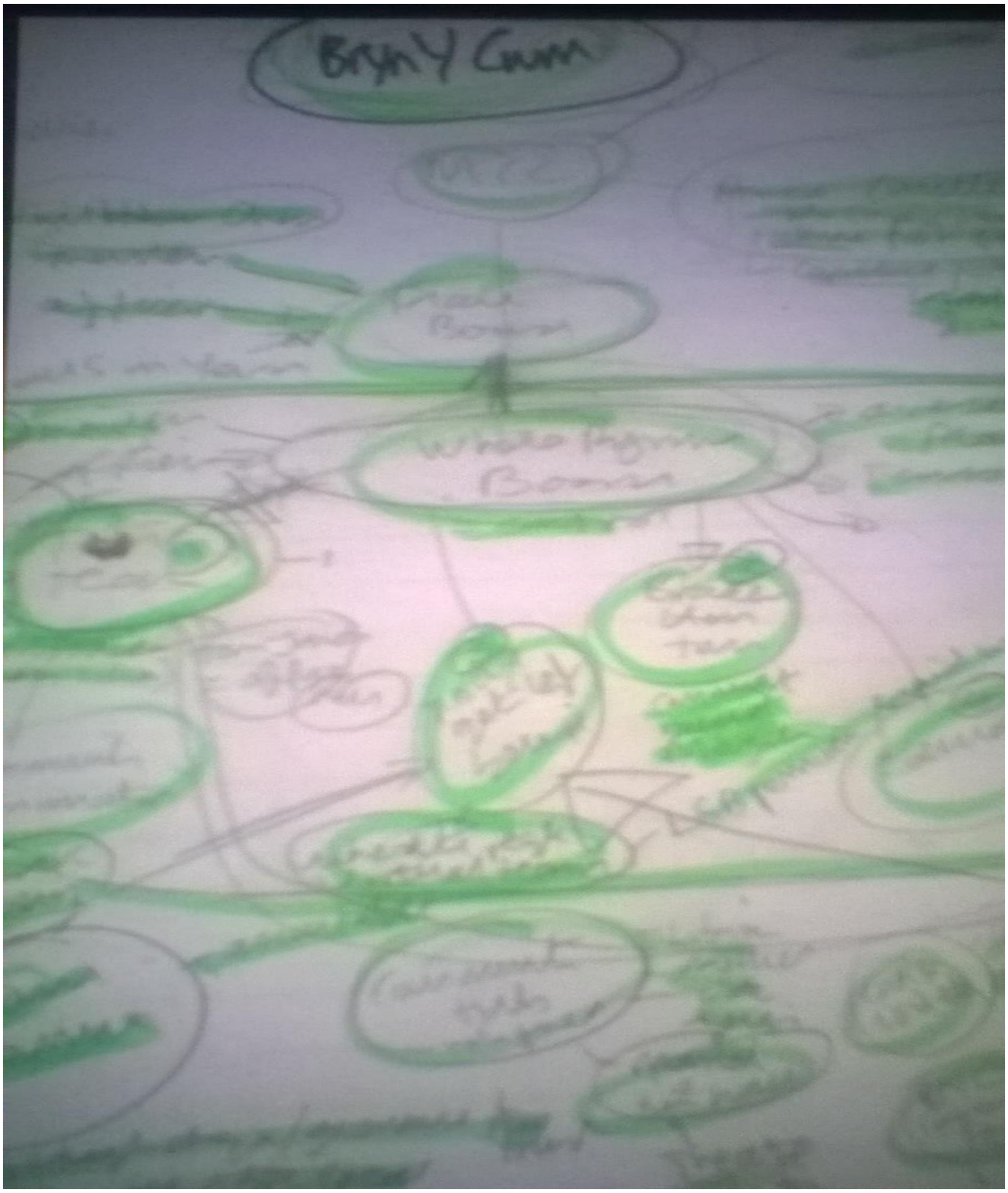
Appendix 1

Whole Place and Community Governance in Monmouthshire



A Review by Keith Edwards

Contents

1. Introduction

This project and report were commissioned in March 2015 by Monmouthshire County Council (MCC). The focus was a review of current community governance arrangements centred on the key settlements as part of the councils Whole Place programme. It included the two settlement areas that have pioneered the approach:

> **Bryn Y Cwm** centered on Abergavenny and including the rural communities of north Monmouthshire; and
>
> **Severnside** centered on Caldicot and also including Magor and other surrounding communities;

and two which are scheduled to implement Whole Place over the next three to twelve months:

> **Central Monmouthshire** centered on Monmouth Town and including Raglan and Usk and the surrounding areas: and
>
> **Lower Wye** centred on Chepstow and its hinterland.

The twin aims were to take stock of the experience to date and identify opportunities to enable a more streamlined approach to delivery. From the councils perspective this will help its wider long term strategy to support resilient communities and ensure more efficient, effective and convenient delivery of local services. That said it is important to stress that a review of strategic priorities and activities - outlined in for example *Seven for Severnside* and *A Better Bryn Y Cwm* – although constantly referred to by stakeholders were outside of the remit of this project. Never the less a significant number of initiatives were flagged up and although not included in this report will be fed into MCC and Programme Boards.

Central to the project methodology was engaging with community leaders and stakeholder groups through a series of interviews and consultative workshops in Abergavenny and Caldicot with:

- County Councillors;
- Community Forum Representatives;
- Town and Community Councillors and Officers;
- Town Teams in Abergavenny and Caldicot;
- Community Leaders and their organisations; and
- Strategic and operational Officers of the Council.

This report is the result of that work. It considers the key issues that have arisen so far from the council's perspective and those of stakeholders' and poses a number of challenges and suggests potential responses. It is hoped this report will help those areas where Whole Place has been introduced, review the experience to date and

plan for the future as well as informing the introduction of this approach in areas where it is yet to be introduced.

A series of recommendations are included at section 7.

2. Executive Summary

> **‘**The pursuit of viable, sustainable models of delivery that put citizen power and democratic accountability at their heart are now the essential rather than optional way forward in Wales’

Background & Context

Whole Place is an approach developed by MCC that is essentially moving from a prescriptive *top down* model to a *bottom up* approach designed and driven by citizens and communities.

The impetus for change comes from within MCC and is proactive, predating other drivers such as the need to deal with unprecedented cuts to government support for local authorities.

The position of MCC at the cutting edge of this agenda is acknowledged by Ministers and other local authorities.

Devolution of power to communities needs to be complimented by robust means of accountability particularly as public funding is involved.

The Four Settlements

In each of the four main settlements devolution of responsibilities is at different stages and the social, economic and cultural drivers vary.

Bryn-y-Cwm is a construct of MCC with little association by local people with the term. Centred on Abergavenny, the area appears outwardly prosperous and vibrant.

Following an extensive community engagement exercise in 2012 / 2013 the Whole Place plan *Better Bryn-y-Cwm* was produced which identified four main priorities.

- Abergavenny Town Centre and the wider business environment;
- Making sure no one get left further behind;
- Strengthening education and business skills; and
- Creating a sustainable settlement.

Severnside is also a construct of MCC although there is more association with the term by local people than was evident in *Bryn-y-Cwm*.

A comprehensive community planning exercise in partnership with the local community resulted in 2013 in *Seven for Severnside: the Plan for a Better Severnside* which identified key areas for action focussing on:

- Severnside Community Campus;
- Caldicot Town regeneration;
- Capitalising on Severnside's 'gateway' location and assets;
- Better Homes;
- Enterprise;
- Strategic Opportunities; and
- Making it Happen.

Central Monmouthshire has a strong and active Community Forum. As well as Monmouth itself, the area also contains two other substantial communities at Raglan and Usk. The plan is to start work on Whole Place in September 2015

Lower Wye is also an administrative construct, centred on Chepstow. It is a unique community which also has a large Army based population and it is also seen as the central community for significant numbers of people living across the border in England. The plan is to commence Whole Place work in April 2016.

Key Issues

The principles underpinning Whole Place have been broadly embraced and there is widespread recognition that MCC and partners are in the early stages of a long transformational journey.

There is unanimity that a simpler governance model is needed for both 'active' areas and in the roll-out to the other two areas.

The Whole Place focus on 'nobody gets left behind' is welcome but needs constant monitoring.

MCC bears final responsibility for Whole Place and is accountable to Welsh Government, regulators and ultimately to local people through the ballot box.

Devolution of Whole Place needs to be balanced with recognition of the democratic legitimacy of the council as a whole and of individual elected members.

Without exception all stakeholders recognise the dilemma facing MCC: it has significantly less resources yet demand for services continues to increase.

There is a perception that although new community governance arrangements have been established that MCC has not aligned internal processes and decision making to ensure delivery.

There are number of specific ‘asks’ of MCC including:

- improving communication and dialogue at all levels;
- speeding up decision making;
- ensuring corporate buy-in across all service departments; and
- providing adequate resources to enable effective transition by, for example, investing in capital assets before transfer.

A particular issue concerns the role of Area Committees. There is some support for the continuation of Area Committees but an alternative view that they are anachronistic and by standing alongside the new community governance structures are the source of potential confusion.

There is however a need to embed the role of members in Whole Place to strike the balance between legitimate democratic involvement and community control of setting priorities.

There is increasing expectation that Town and Community Councils (T&CCs) will have a greater role in setting local priorities and even delivering services going forward. However there is a mixed view of the capacity of them to ‘step up’ particularly in relation to smaller councils.

There are also concerns that there is not enough engagement in Whole Place with outlying Community Councils and their populations.

Programme Boards are at the centre of Whole Place and their structure and activities should be reviewed.

The ability of Town Teams in Caldicot and Abergavenny to marshal additional resources is seen as a positive but extending the base of volunteers is a key challenge.

Across the county there are hundreds of voluntary groups who play a critical role in community life – from representing views of particular groups to running facilities and services.

MCC has recently moved away from providing administrative and financial support to Community Forums. Whilst budget pressures undoubtedly played a role in this

decision there is also a desire by the council to empower forums to act independently and develop their own capacity.

Many stakeholders have highlighted the need to genuinely set local priorities and recognise that delivery will depend on aligning resources to deliver.

There are opportunities to streamline and simplify processes to generate savings that could then be invested elsewhere. For example replacing Area Committees with an annual Programme Board / Elected Member Summit.

Consideration should be given to centrally developed yet local adaptable resources including toolkits and step by step guides.

Social capital is unevenly spread and is more prevalent in prosperous areas.

It is imperative to extend the range and quantity of activists and MCC in partnership with Programme Boards need to adopt a proactive strategy including allocating resources to this.

Key to the success of Whole Place will be the regular flow of appropriate information between MCC and the Programme Board and between both and the wider community.

Consideration should be given to having relatively small pots of money available to carry out preliminary work pre full feasibility study to help projects gain initial momentum and get them on to MCC ‘radar’.

There are many examples of activities that have delivered on the ground – from small community focussed initiatives through to establishing companies to pursue specific, long term projects.

As well as being able to evidence impact to MCC, WG and regulators, a clear sense of what has been achieved will be essential in maintaining momentum and attracting wider support and involvement. There needs to be a range of outcome measures to help achieve this.

There are a number of apparent and potential tensions that arose during the project associated with the transition from traditional governance arrangements to Whole Place that need to be resolved.

The Way Forward

Whilst there are very many positive aspects of the Whole Place experience to date, this project has clearly identified areas that could be improved.

Many specific ideas on how to move forward have emerged during the course of this work and are contained in the *Key Challenges and Potential Responses* action plan that accompanies this report.

The biggest challenge of all is to ensure that Whole Place delivers modern and efficient services that meet the needs of all the citizens of Monmouthshire.

3. Background & Context

> ‘Standing still is not an option, indeed inaction could result in the worst outcome of all – disappearing services leading to large scale redundancies, citizens unable to meet their essential needs and increasing community frustration and anger’

Whole Place is an approach developed by MCC that is innovative, and recognised as such by government and peer authorities; and transformative, based on a fundamental shift in power and responsibility. This is essentially moving from a prescriptive *top down* model to a *bottom up* approach designed and driven by citizens and communities. It involves:

- developing mechanisms through which statutory and voluntary agencies, community groups and local people themselves are engaged, listened to and able to influence decisions that affect them;

- designing and delivering services that are based on what matters to local people and their communities; and

- establishing an effective and sustainable collaborative community governance framework connecting citizens, communities, MCC and other partners.

The impetus for change comes from within MCC and is proactive, predating other drivers such as the need to deal with unprecedented cuts to government support for local authorities (with Monmouthshire fairing worse relative to most other authorities in Wales) and the imperative for public service transformation outlined in the white paper *Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People.* The position of MCC at the cutting edge of this agenda is acknowledged by Ministers and other local authorities.

Whilst the direction of travel is clearly towards devolution of power to communities, the authority is mindful of the need to have in place a robust means of ensuring

accountability particularly as public funding is involved. Indeed following a Wales Audit Office report in 2014, MCC identified a number of issues to address including:

- balancing consistency with diversity;
- variations in social capital;
- targeting sufficient resources;
- avoiding duplication;
- balancing short term actions with a long term vision;
- aligning service delivery; and
- monitoring outcomes.

4. The Four Settlements

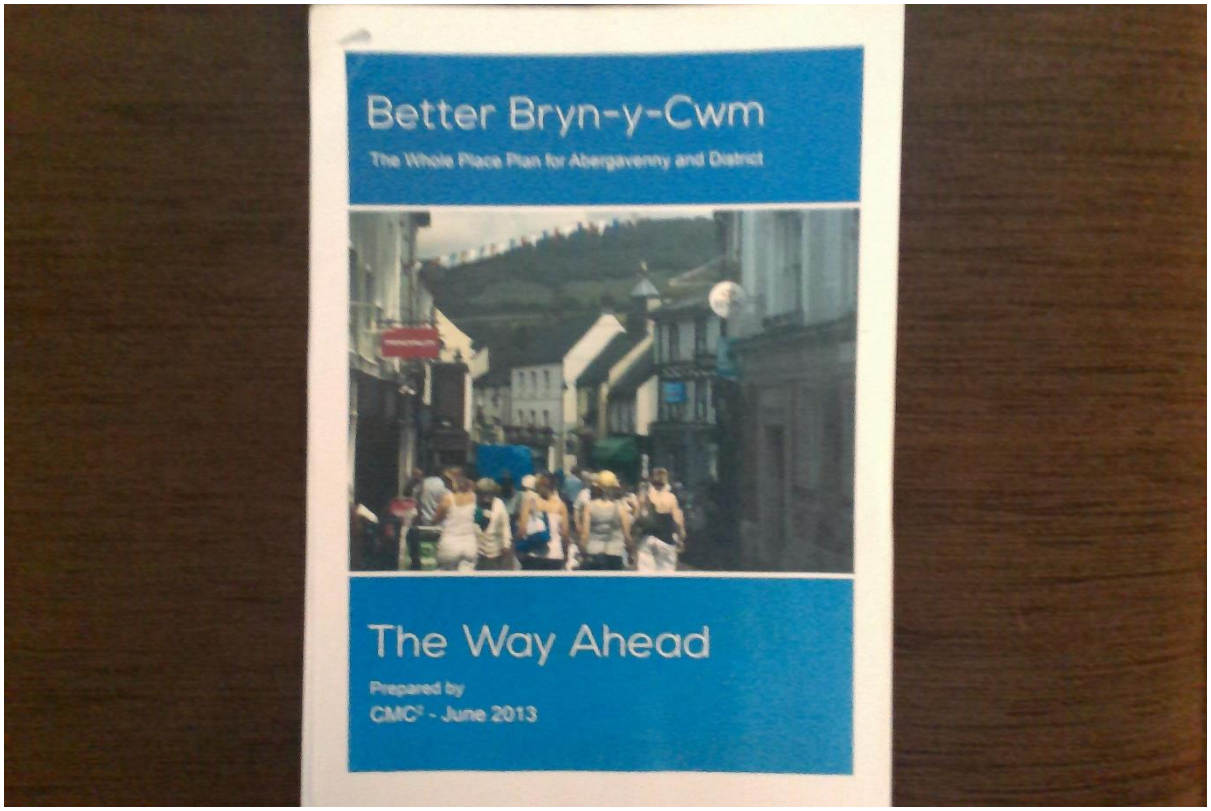
> ‘Whole Place is a way of reinvigorating our communities in tough times’

Whole Place focuses on the four main settlements which, whilst similar, have different ‘speeds and needs’ – devolution of responsibilities will be at different stages and the social, economic and cultural drivers will vary.

Bryn-y-Cwm

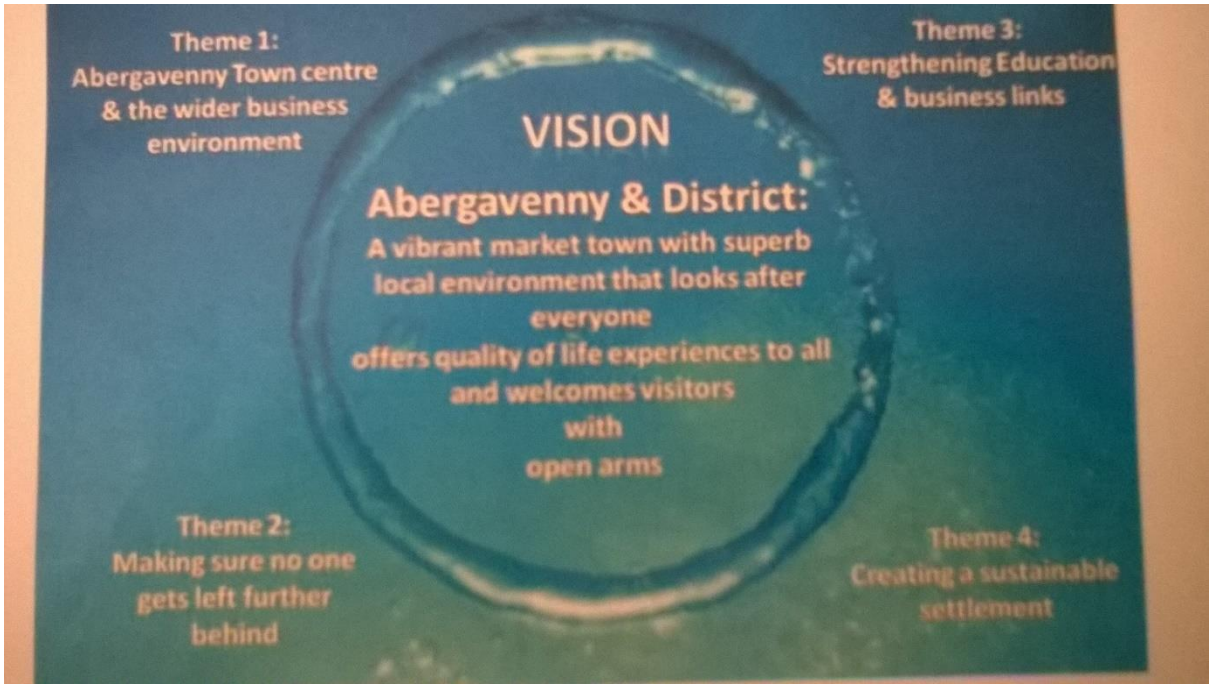
A number of respondents remarked that the idea of *Bryn-y-Cwm* is a construct of MCC with little association by local people with the term. Centred on Abergavenny, the area appears outwardly prosperous and vibrant. A previous community audit identified nearly 200 local groups and initiatives, and Whole Place activities have underlined it is ‘social capital’ rich.

Following an extensive community engagement exercise in 2012 / 2013 the Whole Place plan *Better Bryn-y-Cwm* was produced.



Four key themes were identified:

- Abergavenny Town Centre and the wider business environment;
- Making sure no one get left further behind;
- Strengthening education and business skills; and
- Creating a sustainable settlement.



In the past few years there have been tensions between MCC and the community over the Cattle Market site development. More recently a sense that community leaders want to move on has emerged and Area Committees are seen as an important forum by a number of community representatives.

Building a strong relationship between the Town Council and Team Abergavenny is essential. There is growing momentum around initiatives to develop income earning ideas e.g. around food and local produce with surpluses reinvested in the community.

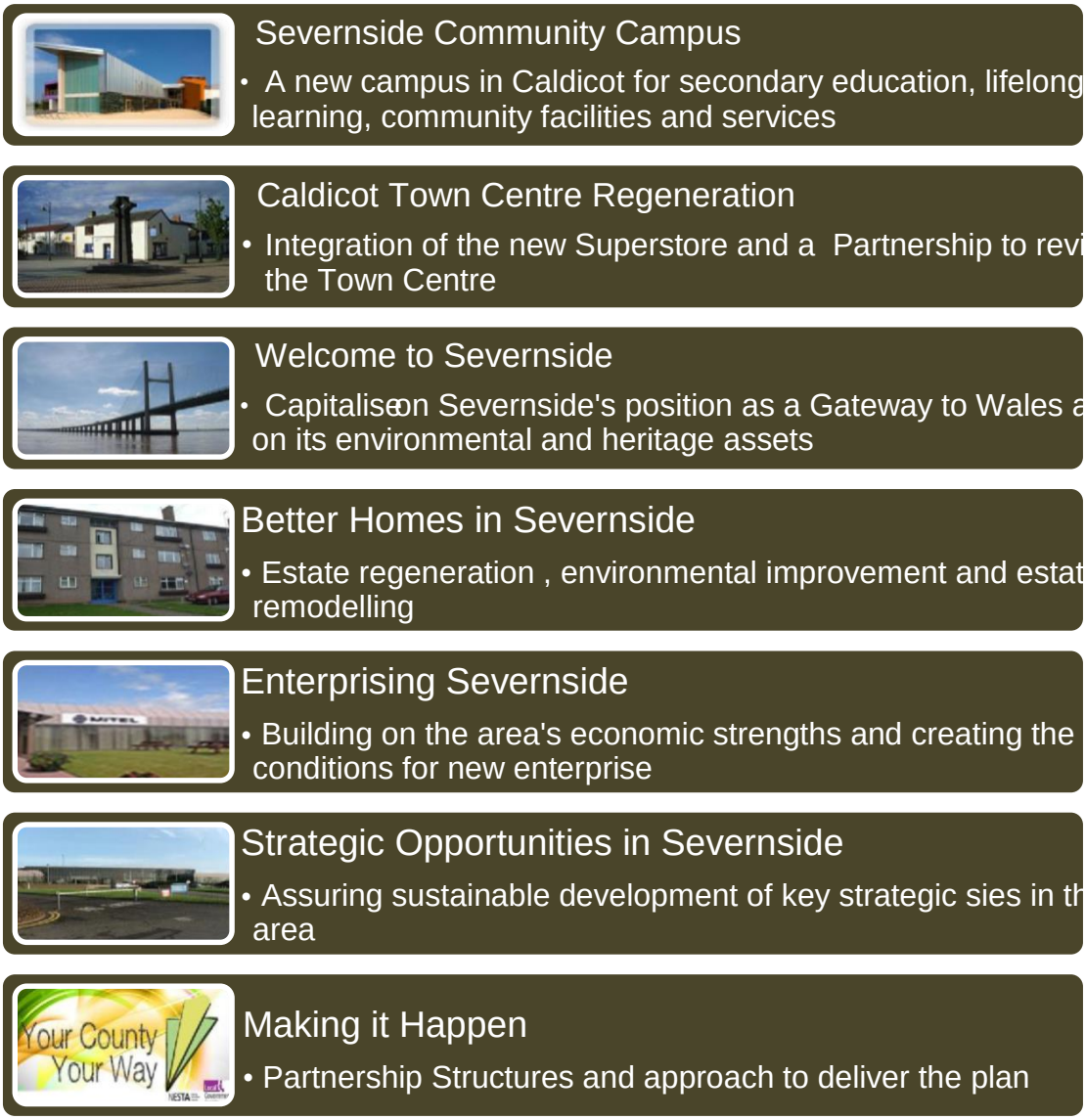
There is however concern that 'hard to reach' groups are not fully participating and a recognition that efforts have to be made to improve this. One respondent flagged up the fact that here are no disabled people on the Town Team Abergavenny Board.

Severnside

> 'Severnside is a place that could potentially do very, very good things'

Severnside is also a construct of MCC although there is more association with the term by local people than was evident in *Bryn-y-Cwm*.

In 2012 MCC commissioned consultants to draw up a comprehensive community plan in partnership with the local community. The resultant report – *Seven for Severnside: the Plan for a Better Severnside* – identified key areas for action:



Caldicot is at the centre of Whole Place although one consultee said it was a ‘made up town’ and may be the aspiration should be ‘to be a great commuter town’. There is a strong feeling by community leaders in Magor that their town is a poor relation to Caldicot when it comes to services although it has roughly two thirds the population of its neighbour. There have been calls to ensure that Whole Place strategies recognise that facilities have to be developed and supported elsewhere and that there needs to be a ‘second wave’ of subsidiarity.

A number of business ideas are being actively developed including plans for community control of Caldicot Castle. Caldicot Town Council has stepped up in relation to taking on limited responsibility for community facilities and already has experience of running the local cemetery. There is a local perception that the Town Council and Town Team do not always work well together and that it may be time to

‘recalibrate’ the relationship. One councillor however cited a good example of the Town Council, MCC and local social landlords pooling resources and expertise to develop a local play area.

Central Monmouthshire and Lower Wye

The plan is to introduce Whole Place to the remaining two areas over the next 12 months. *Central Monmouthshire* has a strong and active Community forum that has a good relationship with MCC members and officers. As well as the county town of Monmouth, the area also contains two other substantial communities at Raglan and Usk. The plan is to start work on Whole Place in September 2015

There is also an excellent example of a community led initiative in the Two Rivers Meadow community orchard, driven by community activists and harnessing the support of the private sector and MCC.

Lower Wye is also an administrative construct, centred on Chepstow. It is a unique community which also has a large Army based population (include although located in England?) and it is also seen as the central community for significant numbers of people living across the border in England. The plan is to commence Whole Place work in April 2016.

5. Key Issues

‘Current arrangements are not fit for purpose –
not the right people, not the right agenda’

The principles underpinning Whole Place - variously referred to as community empowerment, devolution and subsidiarity – were very broadly embraced and everyone acknowledged that MCC and partners are in the early stages of a long transformational journey. Opinions on how things were working in practice varied and would often depend on ‘where the camera was’ e.g. the effectiveness of Town Teams to date elicited a range of views from very positive to mildly sceptical. However there were a number of issues of common concern even if ideas on how to address them varied.

Complexity

‘In an ideal world
we could do with a fresh start’

The current community governance infrastructure falls into four broad categories:

- *Democratic structures* including Area Committees, Scrutiny Committees, Town and Community Councils;

- *Whole Place structures* including Programme Boards, Town Teams, Nobody Left Behind groups;

- *Voluntary Structures* including Community Forums, Civic Societies, Church groups, Business Groups; and

- *Project specific and partnership Initiatives* including improvement programmes, community asset transfers, E Commerce initiatives;

Although the degree of complexity is greater in *Bryn-y-Cwm* than *Severnside*, there is unanimity that a simpler governance model for both 'active' areas and in the roll-out to *Central Monmouthshire* and *Lower Wye* was needed. There is also a view that too many committees and sub committees currently exist for Whole Place to be either efficient or effective.

Key concerns where the lack of clarity over powers, roles and responsibilities which could lead to duplication or, if no one took responsibility, inaction on important matters.

Inclusivity

'the interface between representative and participative democracy is critical'

Whole Place is predicated on equality of opportunity for everyone to participate and a recognition that certain individuals and groups will need additional support to do so. The focus on 'nobody gets left behind' is welcome but there needs constant monitoring to ensure no individuals and groups do not become marginalised.

This includes:

- *People with Disabilities:* Contact Action Inform Represent (CAIR) as well as being a voice for people with disabilities, has identified a number of issues that need to be ever present in designing and delivering local services including:

- access to public and commercial buildings and the public realm;

- disproportionate effect of cuts to welfare benefits on disabled people and the need to mitigate the impact wherever possible;

- disproportionate reliance on public transport by disabled people and susceptibility to cuts; and

- the need to make additional resources to empower people with disabilities to fully participate.

- *Secondary Settlements:* Whole Place structures focus on the four main settlements but there are other substantial communities within the county. In the case of *Severnside*, whilst Caldicot is at the centre, Magor has a population two thirds that of close neighbour. The Town of Monmouth is the centre of Whole Place in *Central Monmouthshire*, but Raglan and Usk also have sizeable populations. Perceptions that 'everything happens at the centre' certainly exist and all activities need to be proofed to ensure that this is not being reinforced even if subconsciously.

- *Rural Communities:* Similarly smaller rural communities can feel excluded if activities are solely centred on main settlements. Engagement strategies should be developed and the impact monitored;

- *Socially Excluded People and Communities:* In areas that are considered relatively prosperous, poverty can often be hidden and when linked to rural isolation, digital and financial exclusion can be even more severe than that encountered in towns and cities. Although far from exclusively applying to social and privately renting tenants these groups are more likely to suffer poverty and related deprivation. The role of partners such as registered social landlords who have track records of working with disadvantaged groups should be fully harnessed.

- *Young People:* The need to engage young people is paramount. The age profile of those currently engaged in Whole Place tends to be skewed towards people over 50 and there is almost a complete absence of under 25 year olds.

Accountability

'There are two problems – decisions are slow in coming and when they are made they don't tell anyone'

MCC bears final responsibility for Whole Place and is accountable to Welsh Government, regulators and, most importantly, to local people through the ballot box.

There is widespread support for the direction of travel but there are concerns that the strategy needs to be clear, comprehensive and not done in a piecemeal way.

Without exception all stakeholders recognise the dilemma facing MCC: it has significantly less resources yet demand for services continues to increase. There is also acceptance that in tight times the council needs to concentrate on delivering 'core' statutory services such as education and social services. There is implicit backing for MCC to become an enabling authority in other service areas, commissioning rather than directly providing and where possible devolving powers and responsibilities to local communities. As one stakeholder expressed it, the message from MCC should be that, provided there are clear lines of accountability 'we will support you to get on with it'.

There is a perception that although new community governance arrangements have been established that MCC has not aligned internal processes and decision making to ensure delivery. There needs to be a consistent message from top to bottom to avoid the perception that the council no longer has resources but still wants to be in control. This has led to frustration that progress with Whole Place is being slowed down and impeded. This of course needs to be balanced with recognition of the democratic legitimacy of the council as a whole and of individual elected members.

There are number of specific 'asks' of MCC including:

- improving communication and dialogue at all levels;
- speeding up decision making;
- ensuring corporate buy-in across all service departments; and
- providing adequate resources to enable effective transition by, for example, investing in capital assets before transfer.

A particular issue concerns the role of Area Committees. There is some support for their continuation but an alternative view that they are anachronistic and by standing alongside the new community governance structures are the source of potential confusion. Running two systems side by side is reminiscent of the analogue and digital TV transition and it begs the question: when will the new way be fully adopted and the old way 'turned off'?

Yet the role of elected member is critical to the success of Whole Place. This reinforces the point that neither maintaining the status quo, nor removing an area dimension to member involvement is a viable and sustainable option and that a 'third way' needs to be found. One idea would be too embed the role of members in Whole Place by appointing one local member as a council *Champion* who would be a member of the Programme Board ex officio and report back to the appropriate MCC committee quarterly or six monthly. They would also lead for the council at the proposed Programme Board / Elected Member Annual Summit to review progress and inform new priorities. Changes to the governance of Whole Place (see below)

would help strike the balance between legitimate democratic involvement and community control of setting priorities.

> ‘community groups move on –
> town and community councils stay’

There is increasing expectation that Town and Community Councils (T&CCs) will have a greater role in setting local priorities and even delivering services going forward. It has been pointed out that a number of Town Councils in particular have access to modest but significant resources as well as direct experience of running services.

There are also concerns that although Town Councils are involved in Whole Place there is not enough engagement with outlying Community Councils and their populations. There is a mixed view of the capacity of them to ‘step up’ particularly in relation to smaller councils. Further development of council clusters has been suggested as a way forward as well as exploring opportunities to share resources such as when employing council clerks for example.

There is frustration that the Charter between MCC and T&CCs is not being adhered to with meetings cancelled at short notice, undermining confidence that the council is genuinely committed to engagement

The ‘analogue versus digital’ issue potentially arises also in relation to T&CCs and Whole Place structures. One good example of how both can work in harmony was cited in relation to Devauden where the Community Council and Village Hall Committee had worked very well together to the benefit of the community.

Whole Place Governance

Programme Boards are at the centre of Whole Place and a key issue is how to clarify their role and improve their effectiveness. They should be seen as the pivotal local body in determining community priorities, commissioning projects and overseeing service delivery. However Board members have expressed frustration with the speed with which decisions are endorsed and resources are made available by MCC.

The structure of Programme Boards should also be reviewed. One option is to embed but limit elected representation (MCC and T&Cs) to a third of the board and select the remaining two thirds from the wider community on the basis of transparent criteria (skills, experience, diversity)

There is support for moving towards a simpler model of board business. One suggestion is to limit administrative functions (minutes, project updates) to 45 minutes to an hour and use the remaining time for themed discussions which could

be opened out to the community and potentially broaden involvement and increase social capital. One stakeholder suggested that sessions might focus on issues such as Mental Health or Drug and Alcohol Abuse with a view to taking 'joined' up approach to finding sustainable solutions.

Town Teams currently operate in Caldicot and Abergavenny. In the eyes of some stakeholders they are 'doers' although the impact they have had is not universally recognised. Their ability to marshal additional resources is seen as a positive. However, extending the base of volunteers is seen as a key challenge.

The fact that there activities are concentrated by definition in the major settlements has led to concerns that they risk isolating more remote, often rural areas

Community and Voluntary Sector

It is important to recognise that Whole Place is not an attempt to subjugate existing voluntary activity to a central strategy but rather aims to harness energies in common endeavour for the good of the community. Across the county there are literally hundreds of groups bringing together thousands of volunteers who already play a critical role in community life – from representing views of particular groups to running facilities and services.

Community Forums exist in *Bryn-y-Cwm* and *Central Monmouthshire* and are valued by active members. Set up with MCC support under the *Making Connections* agenda MCC has recently moved away from providing limited administrative and financial support. Whilst budget pressures undoubtedly played a role in this decision there is also a desire by the council to empower forums to act independently and develop their own capacity. The potential to extend a Community Forum model as an umbrella for local groups into other areas exists although this will need to be driven by communities themselves rather than MCC.

Resources

'You can't just will the ends –
you have to will the means too'

In one sense Whole Place turned the accepted dictum 'form follows function' on its head in the two areas it has been introduced so far. Structures have been created arguably before there was a clear understanding by the community of local priorities.

Many stakeholders have highlighted the need to genuinely set local priorities and recognise that delivery will depend on aligning resources to deliver. There are a number of aspects to this:

- MCC needs to ensure that the entire organisation is on board with Whole Place. This requires not just a cultural change programme but continuous reinforcement of the values that underpin it and the fact that this is not a fad but a long term and fundamental change of direction;

- There is a case for reviewing area based service delivery and better aligning this with Whole Place in each settlement. Having access to local staff resources that would shorten the time between setting priorities and delivery can only enhance and validate the strategy and encourage wider buy in from the community;

- The specialist support provided by the Whole Place team needs augmenting and also needs to be fully integrated into the Community Hub programme. A review of the 'ask' and 'offer' of the team and the communities they work to support would be a useful starting point. The strategy could falter and possibly fail if insufficient support from MCC is secured particularly in the move from previous delivery models to the new approach;

- Supporting the transition from MCC to community service delivery by ensuring capital investment before Asset Transfer, tapering revenue funding and secondment of staff;

- There needs to be transparency around Community Infrastructure Levy monies and how they will be applied; and

- Supporting a community empowerment and ambassadorial training programme to build local capacity.

There are opportunities to streamline and simplify processes that could generate savings that could then be invested elsewhere. For example replacing Area Committees with an annual Programme Board / Elected Member Summit could cut costs and also allow redirection of some grant funding.

Building up other Whole Place resources should also be a priority that will have to be driven initially by MCC. Developing toolkits that can be adapted in each locality, collating easy to use information packs on how the council works and who to contact, as well as step by step guides on community asset transfers are examples of initiatives that once developed can be shared and enhanced through experience.

Social Capital

Whole Place was not year zero for local community activism. Historically very many people have stepped up to lead or support a wide range of initiatives, giving freely of their time and expertise. Social Capital may vary between settlements but there are many examples of experience and skills being put to very effective use

There are however a number of concerns with the present situation:

- Social capital is unevenly spread i.e. it is more prevalent in prosperous areas;
- People can be put off participating if they feel they do not possess the same levels of skills and experience as current community animators; and
- Conversely, existing active participants are quite often themselves over stretched and in danger of 'burn out'

It is imperative therefore to extend the range and quantity of activists. MCC in partnership with Programme Boards need to adopt a proactive strategy including allocating resources to this. Lessons could be learned from the recent Waitrose 'Give and Gain' initiative in Caldicot which attracted a new layer of interest from people who had not previously been active in Whole Place.

Communication

'The council needs to join the dots up better'

Key to the success of Whole Place will be the regular flow of appropriate information between MCC and the Programme Board and between both and the wider community. Again simplicity is the watchword – there has been feedback that sometimes information is pitched too high and difficult even for people in the know to understand the jargon. Clear communication lines need to be nurtured and maintained.

Whilst there are some good examples of using social media, MCC should consider providing support to the Programme Board to 'skill up' in its use.

Supporting Innovation

A notable success has been the way in which Programme Boards have encouraged and supported new initiatives albeit that there is frustration with the speed of decision making in a number of instances. Consideration should be given to having relatively small pots of money available to carry out preliminary work pre full feasibility study. This would help projects gain initial momentum and get them on to MCC 'radar' in advance of firm proposals so that communication lines can be cleared to facilitate speedy decisions.

There are many examples of activities that have delivered on the ground – from small community focussed initiatives through to establishing companies to pursue specific, long term projects.

Measuring Outcomes

As well as being able to evidence impact to MCC, WG and regulators, a clear sense of what has been achieved will be essential in maintaining momentum and attracting wider support and involvement. It will also offer learning points across the county area and how information is shared between Programme Boards is a matter for further consideration.

There needs to be a range of outcome measures to help achieve this including:

- Community impact in terms of economic, social and environmental improvements;
- Individual progress e.g. a long term unemployed person gets work, a person with little confidence interacts with the community;
- Added value in terms of additional resources levered in;
- Customer satisfaction with services improvements; and
- MCC achieves greater efficiencies and is able to redirect funding to priority areas.

A Question of Balance

There are a number of apparent and potential tensions that rose during the project. These include:

- The transition from traditional governance arrangements to Whole Place systems;
- The desire to be enterprising and innovative against the need to have robust audit systems and formal accountability mechanisms;
- Integrating high level strategy with delivery at a community level;
- Determining what should be the core standards (anywhere in Monmouthshire) and the discretionary ones (locally determined and delivered); and
- Acknowledging the value of long standing community animators whilst encouraging new volunteers form diverse backgrounds to become involved.

6. The Way Forward

‘we look at this as something new – 100 years ago people didn’t have the national lottery – they built chapels, workers institutes, health societies and libraries – there’s no reason why it can’t happen again’

MCC has been at the forefront in understanding the scale and long term nature of the challenges to public services and concluded some time ago that ‘business as usual’ is not an option. Central to this has been the Whole Place approach to community governance. Community leaders across sectors have been very willing to embrace the concept and to engage with the council in exploring a new way of working together that captures the ideas, energy and enthusiasm of local people.

Whilst there are very many positive aspects of the experience to date, this project has clearly identified areas that could be improved. Some are universally accepted – the need to reduce complexity and more clearly define roles and responsibilities for example; others are potentially more controversial including resolving tensions between current and emerging governance structures.

Many specific ideas on how to move forward have emerged during the course of this work and are contained in the *Key Challenges and Potential Responses* action plan that accompanies this report. The biggest challenge of all is to ensure that the efforts of MCC and all partners delver through Whole Place modern and efficient services that meet the needs of all the citizens of Monmouthshire.

7. Recommendations

1. MCC will implement the recommendations within this report to enable a local governance framework that is simpler; roles; responsibilities and accountability are clearer and provide access to a small pot of funding to be allocated locally to support local priorities.

2. MCC in partnership with local Elected Members, Programme Boards and civic organisations will develop a simple set of terms of reference for each group integral to Whole Place collected in one document showing linkages and relationships and made bespoke to each area.

3. MCC lead a review of internal alignment with delivering Whole Place including:

    - appointing / reaffirming a senior officer Whole Place Champion with authority to speed up decision making;

    - streamlining internal processes;

- improving cross departmental connectivity and communication;

- embedding corporate responsibility from executive level to the front line and;

- maximising resources to deliver e.g. augmenting the Whole Place Team;

4. MCC and community leaders to reinforce the point that councillors are the legitimate democratic representatives of the community but that their role is evolving into a leadership role to facilitate the active engagement of citizens in delivering Whole Place. Quarterly Area Committees should be replaced by a combination of:

    - appointing an Elected Member Whole Place Champion in each area (and develop a job description) who sits on the Programme Board with responsibility for making quarterly / half yearly reports to Council;

    - encouraging local members to co-ordinate surgeries and constituency days to better link into Whole Place;

    - exploring opportunities for and identifying good practice examples of member interaction and involvement with initiatives and activities and;

    - remove area committee structure replacing it with a joint Elected Member / Programme Board annual summit to review progress and consult on priorities.

5. There needs to be clarification and review of Programme Board remits and how they relate to MCC and the community. This review should consider membership changes in particular changes e.g. a limited number of ex-officio members (an MCC local member 'Champion', plus two to three representatives of Town and Community Councils) with the remaining members being matched to a competency / expertise criteria with due regard for diversity. Assuming a Board of in the region of twelve members this would mean around a third reserved for democratically elected councillors and two thirds allocated to local animators and experts.

6. Re-enforce the importance of Town and Community Councils in Whole Place. One option might be to reserve ex officio on the Programme Board:

    - one place per Town Council and;

    - two to three places per Community Council 'cluster'.

7. Town and Community Councils should be encouraged to explore further opportunities to build on existing networks and share resources.

8. There is a need to reinforce the independence of Community Forums and help build self-reliance. MCC could develop guidance to support building relationships with wider community and civic organisations.

9. MCC should support Programme Boards to audit the engagement with excluded groups in Whole Place and produce an action plan to address any 'deficits'. Particular (but not exclusively) reference needs to be made to engaging with disability groups, youth clubs and tenant associations.

10. A process for identifying new initiatives and fast tracking their consideration and approval should be considered by MCC in partnership with Programme Boards, ensuring that all legal and financial audit and accountability tests can be met.

11. MCC should review Whole Place support and resources requirements as well as ensuring alignment with community hubs and developing more area based services. This could in part be funded through savings accrued through changes to the process e.g. replacing quarterly Area Committees with an annual summit and reallocating discretionary area funding to Programme Boards to administer.

12. The Whole Place team and the communities they work to support should engage in a process to define roles, responsibilities and expectations as part of a process to 'co-design' the service.

8. Acknowledgements

The project received the support of MCC members and staff, community leaders and Whole Place animators from the outset and throughout and I am extremely grateful for the time and energies committed by everyone. Special mention should be given to the Whole Place Team who were a constant support of knowledge and support from start to finish.

Keith Edwards

August 2015

Appendix B

Community Governance Review: Key Challenges and Potential Responses

A key objective of the project was to focus on practical actions to improve community governance as an integral part of the Whole Place strategy. This paper focusses on a series of 'how to' challenges and potential responses to achieve this.

The suggested prioritisation captured in the final column is:

Green – within 3 months

Amber – between 3 to 6 months

challenge	context and response	lead	priority
How to **reduce complexity**	Although the degree of complexity is greater in *Bryn-y-Cwm* than *Severnside,* there is unanimity that we need a simpler governance model for both 'active' areas and in the roll-out to *Central Monmouthshire* and *Lower Wye*. **Response:** MCC sends clear message that structures, roles and responsibilities will be clarified, simplified and better integrated. This includes addressing the suggested responses in the Whole Place community governance review carried out by KE	MCC Enterprise	Green
How to clarify **functions**	The current community governance infrastructure falls into four broad categories: • Existing democratic structures – Area Committees, Scrutiny Committees, Town and Community Councils etc		

	• Whole Place structures – Programme Boards, Town Teams, Nobody Left Behind groups etc • Civic Structures – Community Forums, Civic Societies, Church groups, Business Groups etc • Project specific and partnership Initiatives – eg Business Improvement Districts, E Commerce initiatives etc **Response**: MCC in partnership with local elected members, Programme Boards and civic organisations develop a simple set of terms of reference for each group collected in one document showing linkages and relationships and made bespoke to each area.	MCC Whole Place	Green
How to strengthen **MCC corporate buy in** to whole place	There is a perception that although new structures have been established that MCC has not aligned internal processes and decision making to support subsidiarity and devolution. This has led to frustration and perceptions that the delivery of Whole Place is being slowed down and impeded. **Response:** MCC Leader and CEO lead and sponsor a review of internal alignment with delivering whole place including: • appointing / reaffirming a senior officer 'Champion' with authority to speed up decision making • streamlining internal processes • improving cross departmental connectivity and communication • embedding corporate responsibility from executive level to the front line and • maximising resources to deliver eg augmenting the Whole Place Team.	MCC Leader & CEO	Green

How do we redefine the roles of **Area Committees?**	Area Committees appear anachronistic within the new community governance structures yet the role of elected member is critical to the success of Whole Place. There is some support for them beyond members and a suspicion that their abolition is the end destination. This reinforces the point that neither the status quo nor complete negation of an area dimension to member involvement is a viable and sustainable option and a 'third way' needs to be found. **Response:** MCC and community leaders need to reinforce the point that councillors are the legitimate democratic representatives of the community but that their role is developing to lead and facilitate the active engagement of citizens in delivering Whole Place. Quarterly Area Committees could be replaced by a combination of: • Appointing an elected member 'Champion' in each area (and develop a job description) who sits on the Programme Board with responsibility for making quarterly / half yearly reports to Council • Encouraging local members to co-ordinate surgeries and constituency days to better link into Whole Place • Exploring opportunities for and identifying good practice examples of member interaction and involvement with initiatives and activities • Doing away with quarterly meetings and instead holding a joint elected member / Programme Board annual summit to review progress and consult on priorities	MCC Cabinet	Amber
How do we improve the effectiveness of **Programme Boards?**	There is disagreement over the role of Programme Boards – are they there to give direction or ensure delivery? There is also concern that they become dominated by interests and repeat the same discussions taken elsewhere. That said they are the central hub of Whole Place and the issue is how to clarify their central role and improve their effectiveness **Response:** there needs to be clarification of Board remits and how they relate to MCC and the community. There should be consideration of constitutional changes eg a	MCC Whole	Amber

	limited number of ex-officio members (an MCC local member 'Champion', one representative per Town Council, two or three Community Council 'cluster' representatives?) with the remaining members are matched to a competency / expertise criteria with due regard for diversity.	Place	
How do we ensure **Town and Community Councils** are fully engaged?	There is increasing expectation that Town and Community Councils will have a greater role in setting local priorities and even delivering services going forward. There is however a mixed view of the capacity of T&CCs to step up. There are also concerns that although Town Councils are involved in Whole Place there is not enough engagement with outlying Community Councils and their communities. **Response:** It is important to embed Town and Community Council engagement in Whole Place. One option might be to reserve ex officio on the Programme Board: • One place per Town Council • Two to three places per Community Council 'cluster' Town and Community Councils should be encouraged to explore further opportunities to build on existing networks and share resources.	MCC Enterprise	Amber
How do we improve engagement with **Community Partners?**	Community Forums are valued by active members but seen as a hangover from the past when Area Working Teams existed and the Making Connections agenda was in place. There is concern about viability and sustainability now that some resource support has been withdrawn by MCC. **Response:** There is a need to reinforce the independence of Forums and help build self-reliance. MCC could give help and guidance to support building relationships with wider community and civic organisations.	MCC Whole Place	Amber

How do we improve **inclusivity?**	Young people, people with disabilities, socially excluded communities have all been cited as parts of the community that are either under-represented or have not been fully engaged in general and not just in Whole Place. The focus on 'nobody gets left behind' offers opportunities to improve inclusivity. **Response:** MCC should support Programme Boards to audit the engagement with excluded groups in Whole Place and produce an action plan to address any 'deficits'. Particular (but not exclusive) reference needs to be made to engaging with disability groups, youth clubs and tenant associations.	MCC Whole Place	Amber
How do we empower and resource the **Whole Place Team?**	The Whole Place Team is central to delivering transformation and need to be at the heart of the overarching MCC strategy. Although there are immense challenges in terms of budgets and bringing the community along, the strategy could falter and possibly fail if insufficient support form MCC is secured particularly in the move from previous models to the new approach. **Response:** MCC to determine specialist support requirements, alignment with community hubs and developing more area based services. This could in part be funded through Identify savings e.g. replacing quarterly Area Committees with annual summit, reallocating discretionary area funding reduction in Area committee meetings etc. A review of the 'ask' and 'offer' of the team and the communities they work to support would be a useful starting point.	MCC Enterprise	Green
How do we capture an support **innovation**	A notable success has been the way in which Programme Boards have encouraged and supported new initiatives albeit that there is frustration with the speed of decision making in a number of instances.		

	Response: A process for identifying new initiatives and fast tracking their consideration and where appropriate approval should be developed by MCC in partnership with Programme Boards.	MCC Enterprise	Green
Other **Key Questions**	There are a number of other questions that need to be considered in details and effective responses developed. These include: • How to ensure there are adequate checks and balances in place? • How to ensure robust audit trails? • How does MCC (and regulator) know that community governance is strong and will be sustained? • How far can this go – what are the limits? • How to ensure a shared vision? • How to make sure all work is evidenced based and able to show where a difference has been made? • How to determine what should be the core standards (anywhere in Monmouthshire) and the discretionary ones (locally determined and delivered)? • How far should subsidiarity go and what is the role of the community in determining this? • How to ensure resilience and sustainability?	MCC	Green

	Response: MCC to review all *Key Challenges and Potential Responses* and the outstanding issues above.	Enterprise	