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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held on Thursday, 13th September, 2018 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor J.Pratt (Chairman)
County Councillor A. Webb (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: L.Dymock, A. Easson and R. Harris

Also in attendance County Councillor(s): S. Jones and S.B. Jones

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Paula Harris	Acting Scrutiny Officer
Tracey Harry	Head of People Services and Information Governance
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Mark Howcroft	Assistant Head of Finance
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
David Bartlett	HR Support Team Manager
Graham Kinsella	TRaffic and Road Safety Manager
Kate Stinchcombe	Biodiversity & Ecology Officer
Sally Thomas	HR Manager
Dave Loder	Finance Manager

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors R.Roden, L. Guppy and V. Smith

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Open Public Forum

The Chair welcomed Mr. Candler, Clerk to Llanover, who wished to address the Committee regarding the speeding of heavy goods vehicles. He referred to a fatal accident which had occurred in July 2018 on the R64. Complaints had been forwarded to the Chief Constable about the speed and noise, particularly of motorcycles. A public response had been received from the Chief Constable which stated the stretch of B4598 between Raglan and the Steel Horse Café has been made a 50mph zone. Therefore MCC have responded to historical concerns raised by the community, but this is not supported by physical engineering works and speeding continues.

The Head of Operations acknowledged the statements read by Mr. Candler and advised that a Member/Officer working group has been established to look at road safety and speeding in particular. This includes representatives from Gwent Police and the Road Safety Partnership, and has put together a road safety strategy and is also putting together a process and procedure for dealing with enquiries around road safety and speeding. Following an upcoming Member workshop, a wider consultation will take place to allow interested groups to look at the new policy and procedure.

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The Officer requested that he receives the documents highlighted by Mr. Candler, and, working with the Cabinet Member, will follow up with the Chief Constable.

The Committee welcomed Mr. Rogers to speak at the public open forum with regards to heavy goods vehicles passing through the narrow lanes in the Llangeview area. Mr. Rogers evidenced the problems through a presentation to Members. Alltybella Road was highlighted as a narrow lane, flanked either side by gardens, verges and hedgerows, and serves 6 houses and Coed Cwmwr Farm, and how the wheels of HGVs are gouging out the verges and destroying the ancient hedgerows.

The Head of Operations agreed to issue a full response at the next meeting.

3. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 12th July 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th July 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. To confirm the minutes of the special meeting held on 30th July 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 30th July 2018 we confirmed and signed by the Chair.

5. Discussion item to consider the implications of restricting HGVs with a view to developing a future policy

The Head of Operations presented Members with a verbal report, considered useful given the HGV issues across the County. He referred to the development of a Heavy Goods Vehicle Strategy, and the broad subject this will cover. The strategy will also look at alternative routes, times of access and advisory signs versus statutory notices. The strategy would also have to address the authority's responsibility in relation to the Future Generations and Wellbeing Act and the Environmental Act as referred to in the Public Open Forum. This must be balanced against the responsibility as a Highway Authority.

Heavy goods matters are currently dealt with on a case by case basis but an overarching strategy, policy and procedure would be preferable. However staff resources are currently unavailable, but should Members wish this could be programmed for future commitment.

Members offered comments of support for the implementation of the strategy, when time permits.

In response to a question regarding the B4245 the Officer agreed to seek clarification to whether letters had been issued to the local hauliers using that route.

A Member suggested implementation of width and weight restrictions, and questioned how enforceable this would be. The Officer agreed to look further into this.

6. People Services Information Update

Context:

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The Committee were presented with a report to provide requested HR data and information.

Key Issues:

Members at the Strong Communities select committee of 14th June 2018, where they considered the latest iteration of the People Strategy, sought reassurance and comfort regarding a number of People Services issues including:

- The availability of HR data
- Our approach to colleague engagement
- The availability of HR advice and guidance on the hub
- The cost of sickness absence to the authority
- Numbers of referrals to Occupational Health
- The need for an employee handbook
- An update on the CICO recording system
- The potential requirement for training in implementing collaborative and other service models
- The requirement to include an executive summary in the new “People to Purpose Strategy”

Member Scrutiny:

Following demonstration of the HR Dashboard Members were invited to comment.

Members expressed disappointment that the dashboard was not accessible by Councillors, this would be forwarded to the Digital Team to address.

We were advised that the appendix to the report provided a detailed analysis of 2017/18 data. It was recommended this is received on an annual basis. The Chair suggested a briefing session would be useful.

We heard that each school commissions the HR advisory services that they wish to use, in most cases they buy into the Monmouthshire HR service level agreement. However Chepstow School and Monmouth Comprehensive Schools are the only 2 schools that don't buy in and the Chief Officer for CYP and the DMT will ensure they fulfil their statutory responsibilities in relation to people management at those schools.

Officers endeavoured to look other authorities, and identified stress and mental illness to be an increasing problem across wales.

A Member expressed concern that the figure of £2.6 million for sickness was not an actual cost, as this would be covered in salaries, but recognised the domino effect on other staff. The Head of People Services explained that officers were not able to estimate replacement costs so this was a nominal figure.

Members suggested that in terms of counselling, there should be a service available to staff that is completely independent and does not involve staff or managers within the organisation. The Head of People Services referred to budget restraints and highlighted options available such as a Go To Group and One to One Coaching sessions. The

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Chair added that the cost to the Council in not providing an adequate service resulted in large levels of sickness and non-attendance, and alternative models should be identified.

Recommendations:

That Members note the information provided.

That Members receive an annual attendance report to include information on sickness/turnover and occupational health matters.

Committee Conclusion:

The Chair thanked officers and welcomed the comprehensive update. The Committee requested a six monthly update going forward. And added this as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Members acknowledged the lack of access and would welcome a summary available to Councillor on the Hub.

The Committee added a recommendation to Cabinet to identify alternative models for self-referral counselling options.

7. Budget Monitoring Outturn Report for the Regeneration and Corporate Directorates

Context:

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information on the revenue and capital outturn position of the Authority at the end of reporting period 1 which represents the financial outturn position for the 2018/19 financial year based on May inclusive activities.

This report will also be considered by Select Committees as part of their responsibility to:

- Assess whether effective budget monitoring is taking place;
- Monitor the extent to which budgets are spent in accordance with agreed budget and policy framework;
- Challenge the reasonableness of projected over or underspends;
- Monitor the achievement of predicted efficiency gains or progress in relation to savings proposals.

Recommendations:

That Members consider a net revenue forecast of £471,000 overspend.

Members consider a capital outturn spend of £35.7m, which accords with budget provision for the year, after proposed slippage of £75,000. This describes a breakeven position not uncommon for this early in the year, although there is a potential for additional 21c schools

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costs in respect of additional asbestos removal and treatment costs not anticipated, which colleagues indicate could be the order of £350,000.

Considers the use of reserves proposed in para 3.8.1.

Members note that the low level of earmarked reserves will notably reduce the flexibility the Council has in meeting the challenges of scarce resources going forward.

Members note the extent of movements in individual budgeted draws on school balances, and acknowledge a reported net forecast deficit of £622k resulting, and support the amendments to MCC's Fairer Funding Regulations as described in para 3.8.13 for onward engagement with schools forum and governing bodies.

Members Scrutiny:

In response to a question regarding the asbestos problem in 21st Century Schools, given the age of the schools it was common for asbestos to be a useable building material. There is now an understanding that during a project review the building materials will be tested and an allowance made for the professional disposal of such materials.

The continuing trend of overspending in the Passenger Transport Unit was challenged. The Assistant Head of Finance explained we rely heavily on the PTU service in such a rural authority. The extent of PTU cost mean it is a significant area to identify if we could do things more economically or sustainably. It was recognised that capacity wise, in terms of both PTU and the officer support, it would be a phased approach rather than all achieved in April. The Officer noted that they should have been more prudent in estimation of progress.

It was explained that during the budget process the financial planning assumption on a 1% pay award had increased to a financial agreement of a 2% pay award, equating to just over £1million, which meant we had to find the resources to afford that. A proposal to sell the effect of our recycling credits to improve another authority's performance had been put forward. By the time Blaenau Gwent decided to not invest the budget had been settled, so needed to be managed through the budget monitoring process.

Clarity was sought around the ongoing position of the ADM. The Assistant Head of Finance explained that the optimism of some of the forecast figures in the monitoring report was reflected in Members being asked to consider the sustainability of the Tourism, Leisure and Culture Services

Committee Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the team for the report and congratulated staff on the incredible job they do. Looking forward, there are challenging times ahead and councillors are under increasing pressure to provide residents with a high standard of services.

The Council need to continue to lobby Welsh Government for a fairer settlement in order to continue to provide the core services and look at other ways of delivering as far as leisure and tourism are concerned.

8. Strong Communities forward work programme

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The Committee noted the forward work programme.

9. Cabinet & Council forward work programme

Noted.

10. To note the date and time of next meeting as 15th November 2018 at 10am

Noted.

The meeting ended at 12.30 pm