

SUBJECT: Evaluation of the Pilot

MEETING: North Monmouthshire Area Committee

DATE: 28th November 2018

DIVISIONS/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide members with an evaluation of the pilot arrangements that have been operating at North Monmouthshire (formerly Bryn y Cwm) Area Committee whereby the Area Committee has acted as the sole political structure to support joint working at a community level.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That members use this evaluation to inform a discussion about the future of the committee.
- 2.2 That the outcome of the discussion be shared with the Council's Democratic Services Committee to inform a wider debate about the future of the area committee model across the county and the extent to which is able to contribute to increasing participation and involvement in local decision-making.

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Across Wales only 20% of people feel they are able to influence local decision-making. In Monmouthshire the figure is marginally higher at 23% but that still means that more than three quarters of people do not feel engaged¹. The role of Area Committees is to provide a clear link between cluster areas and local authority decision making. It provides an opportunity for communities to have a voice and participate in local democracy. In March 2017, the local authority approved the piloting of a new model in what was then called Bryn y Cwm, whereby Area Committees were to be retained as the sole structure to support joint working.
- 3.2 Area Committees should be citizen focussed and able to influence at the interface between strategic and local decision-making ensuring that resources are directed to local priorities. The terms of reference include championing the area by raising issues of concern to residents, organisations and businesses with the county council and other organisations, and influencing how services are delivered as well as spending plans for the area. It should also support the co-development of area-based plans and respond to the issues and need of Monmouthshire's Well-being Assessment and other key legislation and policies.
- 3.3 The criteria agreed at the outset of the pilot were:
- The number of issues raised by the public appearing as an agenda item, and
 - The resulting outcome from these
 - The number of recommendations reported to the local authority by a County Councillor on behalf of the Committee; and
 - The number of representatives attending regularly from other Area Committees.
- 3.4 This has been supplemented feedback committee members and those who have attended regularly to highlight any benefits or disadvantages that were not foreseen when the criteria were established. A copy of the questionnaire used is included as appendix 2.
- 3.5 The evaluation also needs to be considered against a backdrop of work being done by the county Council's Democratic Services Committee which has been exploring involvement in local democracy and creating opportunities to engage with the authority in new ways, working

collaboratively and involving people in building sustainable and resilient communities. This includes that committee taking ownership of a forward plan of topics that will be discussed in medium term which are likely to be of interest to the public and establishing a set of criteria to inform which issues are prioritised for public engagement. This could include policy issues or key decisions being scheduled for public meetings, with local issues being directed to the area committees.

- 3.6 The evaluation is contained as appendix one. It concludes that the pilot has not succeeded when measured against the criteria established at the outset. It is not making any measurable contribution at the interface between local and strategic decision-making. However attendees welcome it as a forum for information exchange.

4 OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 4.1 This report does not make a recommendation to adopt one particular option. However the options below are presented to inform debate will be subject to decision at a future meeting of the county council.

- 4.2 The broad options are:

- I. Continue with the committee in its current form and extend this model to the other area committees
- II. Decommission the Area Committee model across the county
- III. Re-purpose area committees as a local information-sharing forum rather than a council committee or
- IV. Extended the pilot for a further three months to allow democratic services committee to conclude its work on increasing involvement in local democracy.

5. EVALUATION

The criteria for the evaluation were set at the outset of the pilot are shown in paragraph 3.3 above.

6. REASONS:

- 6.1 To ensure effective and efficient governance and engagement at a community level and an effective interface between local issues and strategic decision-making.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None

8. FUTURE GENERATIONS (EQUALITY, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CORPORATE PARENTING) IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no specific implications identified as a result of this report. However the committee is focused on ensuring effective involvement in local decision-making which makes a positive contribution to the ways of working outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations Act

9. AUTHOR:

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The number of issues raised by the public appearing as an agenda item, and (if there are any) the resulting outcome from these:

1 issue

At the Area Committee meeting on 25th July 2018 the Clerk to Llanelly Community Council raised an item under the Public Open Forum for the Committee to discuss littering of Trunk Road Laybys. The Committee agreed to put this item on the agenda for the September 2018 meeting.

The number and a list of any recommendations reported to Council or Cabinet following a meeting or the committee or on behalf of the committee.

1 recommendation

The Area Committee meeting held on 14th March 2018 requested approval for the change of name of the Area Committee to North Monmouthshire Area Committee.

The number of representatives attending from other Area Committees.

1 representative

Cllr. Feakins attended the BYC Area Committee meeting on 13th September 2017.

How effective is the committee at helping people influence local decisions?

Members of the committee and regular attendees were asked to rate how effective they think committee has been at helping people influence decisions about their local area on a score of 1 – 10 where 1 is not at all effective and 10 is extremely effective.

Four people answered this question. The scores ranged from 2 to 8 with an average of 4.75.

Respondents felt that the meeting was useful as an information sharing forum but was not influencing decision-making. Topics such as the town centre re-development and Heads of the Valley's roadworks were mentioned explicitly.

There were no examples where the committee can be seen to have directly informed a decision but there examples mentioned where the committee had a positive influence such as illegal parking, the well-being plan and the social justice strategy.

Respondents were asked to identify the biggest achievements or impact as a result of the committees work. These included:

- Securing input from local voluntary groups
- If it happens, the new pedestrian bridge at Abergavenny railway station
- Creating a space to discuss important local issues

How effective is the committee at achieving its aims?

Members of the committee and regular attendees were asked to rate how effective they think the committee has been at achieving its aims on a score of 1 – 10 where 1 is not at all effective and 10 is extremely effective.

Four people answered this question. The scores ranged from 3 to 7 with an average of 4.75

When asked to identify what isn't working well to inform areas of improvement the following were identified:

- More public engagement
- Involvement of town and community councils
- Too many town centre issues which could be influenced by a low representation from some community councils
- Wider notification of meetings
- The committee has seldom been addressed by residents and businesses on the issues important to them
- Town and Community Councils should be seen as partners and part of the solution and not just a group of people who need to be provided with information.

Comparison with other areas

No two area committees are the same, indeed no two communities are the same. North Monmouthshire Area Committee has a busy agenda and is seen by some as more vibrant than the other Area Committees. However, at least part of this is attributed to the social capital within the town centre and as a result the committee is felt to be biased towards town issues.

There are more attendees who are not elected officials and the allocation of voting rights to community and town council members has given those groups a stake in the community not present in other areas.

Conclusion

There is no evidence that the model in Abergavenny is providing benefits over and above that from other approaches such as cluster working. However, it does have some benefits in terms of officer time and is providing a space for information sharing and a focal point where local issues can be discussed and feedback provided to those running projects in a way that could not happen at scrutiny committees or other meetings of the county council.

The pilot has not succeeded when measured against the criteria established at the outset. It is not making any measurable contribution at the interface between local and strategic decision-making ensuring and there is no evidence of examples of resources being directed to local priorities as a result of the committee's work. Those who contributed to the evaluation, in the main, did not believe that the committee was achieving its aims of helping people to influence local decisions.

Copy of Evaluation Questionnaire



Evaluation of Area Committee Pilot

Monmouthshire County Council supports and facilitates a number of Area Committees. The role of these is to provide a clear link between cluster areas and local authority decision making. It provides an opportunity for communities to have a voice and participate in local democracy and should ensure that the committee is citizen focussed and able to influence at the interface between strategic and local decision-making ensuring that resources are directed to local priorities.

In March 2017 Monmouthshire County Council approved the piloting of a new model in Bryn y Cwm (now North Monmouthshire), whereby Area Committees were to be retained as the sole structure to support joint working and adopting a strategic approach to coordinated funding opportunities. The Committee subsequently agreed, with county council endorsement, to grant voting rights at the committee to community and town council representatives.

The terms of reference for the committee include:

- Championing the area by raising issues of concern to residents, organisations and businesses with the county council and other organisations.
- Influencing how services are delivered and spending plans for the area.
- Support the co-development of area-based plans.
- Respond to the issues and need of Monmouthshire’s Well-Being Assessment and other key legislation and policies.

The criteria set at the outset of the pilot to evaluate its success were:

- The number of issues raised by the public appearing as an agenda item, and
- The resulting outcome from these.
- The number of recommendations reported to the local authority by a County Councillor on behalf of the Committee; and
- The number of representatives attending regularly from other Area Committees.

These will not tell the whole story and we are interested in gathering views from members of the committee alongside partners who have attended the committee during the pilot to inform the evaluation.

Please respond to the following questions to inform the evaluation. You don’t have to answer every question and if you want to share a view that doesn’t fit neatly within the questions please use the box at the end to provide any other information.

Name (optional)

Role

On a score of 1 – 10 (where 1 is not at all effective and 10 is extremely effective) please rate how effective you think the committee has been at helping people influence decisions about their local area.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all Effective					Extremely Effective				

Please give some examples to illustrate why you have chosen that rating?

Are there any examples where the committee has been successful in influencing service delivery or spending plans for the area that you would like to highlight?

What have been the biggest achievements or impacts as a result of the committee’s work over the past eighteen months? What has gone well?

Are there things that aren’t working well?

On a score of 1 – 10 (where 1 is not at all effective and 10 is extremely effective) please rate how effective the committee has been at achieving its aims

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all Effective					Extremely Effective				

Please use the box below to provide any further information you would like to be taken account of as part of the evaluation.

¹ National Survey for Wales, 2016-17, available from <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/National-Survey-for-Wales/Local-Area-and-Environment/percentagewhofeelabletoinfluencedecisionsaffectingtheirlocalareas-by-localauthority-year>