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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held
at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Monday, 14th
September, 2015 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor S. Howarth (Chairman)
County Councillor V. Smith (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Dovey, A. Easson and A. Webb

APOLOGIES RECEIVED: Council Councillors S. Jones, S. White and K. Williams

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard Cope	Passenger Transport Unit Manager
Dave Harris	Head of Highways & Waste Management
David Jones	Head of Regulation and Community Protection
Linda O'Gorman	Principal Licensing Officer
Ross Price	Engineer
Gareth Walters	Trading Standards & Animal Health Team Leader
John Pearson	Local Democracy Manager

1 Declarations of Interest

None Received

2 Scrutiny of Flood Risk Management: Report on Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Risk Assessment.

Context:

To provide an update on the Local Flood Risk Management strategy and other matters relating to flooding in Monmouthshire

Key Issues:

Members were informed that it was a requirement for the Council to produce a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy by April 2013. This requirement was set out in the Flood & Water Management Act of 2010 (F&WMAAct) when Monmouthshire was also designated as an LLFA or Lead Local Flood Authority. It was also identified as a requirement in the Welsh Governments National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management in December of 2011. A draft strategy was considered by this Committee in the Autumn of 2012 and revised to take account of comments made. It was also subjected to a public consultation period in Jan to February of 2013 before being reported to Cabinet on 3 April 2013. Following Cabinet approval it was submitted to Welsh Government for Ministerial approval and that was received in late April 2014. The Strategy was then published, as required, on the Council's website.

As part of the F&WMAAct we also have to prepare a Flood Risk Management Plan which will incorporate Flood Hazard and Flood Risk maps. The timescale for this was to be published by December 2015. The first Guidance was provided in May 2014 and subsequently a Template for the Plan document being produced in Wales was provided through the regional Flood

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Groups, revised in December 2014. The mapping data required to do the analyses provided by the Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales was delayed due to its translation into the formats needed and that also arrived in December 2014

Member Scrutiny:

Members queried whether the areas of risk highlighted in the plans have been considered as part of the Local Development Plan (LDP). Members were informed that it was considered as part of the LDP process but the mapping has been updated since then and comparisons against the new information is yet to be undertaken.

Members received information from officers on the maintenance of culverts and flood defences and informed that cameras are being used at key locations to monitor activity and action taken where required. Members noted the success of the scheme and queried how this can be rolled out further.

Members questioned the impact of water being diverted to holding tanks rather than into water courses particularly at new residential development sites. Members requested further information relating to this around whose is responsible for the holding tanks and what restrictions are in place to ensure they don't overflow.

Members also queried the impact of hard standing driveways on residential properties and the impact these have floods. Members requested information from planning relating to the rules in converting residential property green spaces to driveways with particular reference to the porous nature of the materials to be used as well as statistics on the number of properties with hard standing driveways.

Committee's Conclusion:

Chair's Summary:

The Committee request information from the planning department relating to developments that use holding tanks for flood prevention in the last two years and whether there are rules within the planning process for details of this?

The Committee also request the planning process for converting green spaces to hard standing driveways on residential properties as well as statistics of properties with hard standing driveways.

3 Performance Monitoring of Public Protection: Performance Report with particular focus on Licensing and Trading Standards.

Context

The committee received an update on the performance of the public protection department and had opportunity to scrutinise the performance of the section.

Key Issues

Strong Communities Select Committee received a performance report covering Public Protection services in November 2014. This was in response to a Cabinet report in March 2014 that recommended budget reductions to these services. Those recommendations included a £140,000 budget reduction for 2014/15, representing a 7.2% staff decrease.

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The impact of this reduction was scrutinised by Strong Communities Select in November 2014 and reported to Cabinet on 7th January 2015. Cabinet requested regular six monthly reports to Strong Communities Committee to monitor performance over time. In this way, any negative impacts could be assessed and acted upon if necessary.

The attached report summarises recent performance and highlights the following:-

- The four service teams, for the vast majority of services they deliver, meet the Authority's legal obligations in relation to Public Protection services.
- Some proactive work, for example animal health visits and housing inspections, has decreased as a consequence of prioritising reactive work. 3145 new requests for service were responded to in the 2014/15 year.
- Line managers will need to monitor workloads, prioritise and respond as necessary. Team performance is highly dependent upon the continued hard work, professionalism and good health of its staff.
- Six monthly reports will continue to be made to this Committee, to review the impact of budget reductions on Public Protection performance.
- Recent audits, by Wales Audit Office and Food Standards Agency Wales, indicate current performance is satisfactory within Environmental Health, but the service would struggle to take on any new statutory duties that protect the public and the environment.

Member Scrutiny

Members questioned the overall health of the team given the reduction in staff resources to meet the requirements of the service. The Head of Public Protection and Culture confirmed that generally staff morale is positive with a small level of sickness recorded in the previous 12 months.

Members queried the process involved with licensing functions relating to taxi licences and Temporary Event Notifications (TENs). Members were informed that taxi licence renewals are every three years rather than annually. The Principal Licensing Officer explained the process involved with a TEN application and the pressures that the service face when they receive and application however existing processes allow the service to manage these applications effectively.

Members noted the increase in Freedom of Information (Fol) requests and queried the nature of the requests. Members were informed that generally requests are from the press for data gathering and some requests for licensing are from sales companies selling insurance etc.

Committee's Conclusion:

Chair's Summary:

The Select Committee are satisfied with the report of the service and highlighted

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some potential issues. Service is still short on staff and visits minimised due to that but are still performing well but concerns around potential outbreaks or emergency issues and capacity of service to manage issues. Acknowledged that the service is reactive rather than pro-active due to reduction in budget of service.

4 Budget Monitoring: Discussion with the Passenger Transport Unit (background reading Service Improvement Plan) (copy attached).

Context:

The committee had the opportunity to scrutinise the Passenger Transport Unit (PTU) and the monitor the budget of the service.

Key Issues:

The committee received a presentation from the Passenger Transport Unit Manager detailing the services that the section provide and pressures that they face.

Member Scrutiny:

Members question the number of vehicles operated by other departments within the Council, specifically the social services department. Members were informed that there still are some vehicles run by other departments but this has been reduced from 29 to approximately 10.

The committee recommended a full inventory be undertaken of the PTU section, as well as other transport provided by sections of the Council independently, and to consider whether the PTU should be its own section separate to the authority allowing it to charge for the services it provides. The PTU manager informed the committee that new models of delivery are being considered and is visiting a social enterprise that provides public transport to assess how it operates. The committee request the PTU manager attends a meeting in early 2016 providing details of the options available. Members also queried the scale of operation that is required to make the section a viable unit given that much of the routes in Monmouthshire are subsidised with little commercially viable routes.

Members debated whether the PTU section would be better situated under the Children and Young People committee given that SEN transport is a particular pressure on the unit of which the department has very little control. It was identified that savings would not be made by moving to a different committee and members agreed to work closely with the Children and Young People committee to raise awareness of the issues.

Members identified the £5 lifetime subscription fee to residents who use grass routes transport and whether this should be raised to increase income of the PTU section.

Committee's Consultation:

Chair's Summary:

The committee established through the Passenger Transport Manager that the SEN transport provided to children should not be brought under the education umbrella as there could be no savings achieved. It was also noted that SEN

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transport is having a significant impact on balancing the budget of the PTU section.

The committee recommend sending information to the Children and Young People Select or holding a joint meeting of the two committees to highlight the issues to the education section of the Council.

The committee note the difficulty in balancing the budget of the PTU section going forward due to new schools being built and transport needing to be provided to these schools. It is also noted that the PTU manager is investigating new framework models for how the section can operate and invite the PTU manager to a meeting of the select in early 2016 to provide the committee with a picture at that time.

The committee will contact the Welsh Government requesting an explanation as to why funding for the PTU is provided on a variable quarterly basis rather than an annual basis which would allow the section to budget more effectively.

The meeting ended at 5.15 pm

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