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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held
at on Thursday, 18th April, 2019 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor A. Webb (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: L.Dymock, A. Easson, L. Guppy and R.Roden

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Alan Burkitt	Policy Officer Equalities and Welsh Language
David Jones	Head of Public Protection
Jennifer Walton	Registration Service Manager

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors J.Pratt, R. Harris, L.Jones and V. Smith

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Public Open Forum

No members of the public were present.

3. Strategic Equality Report

Purpose:

The Select Committee has a responsibility to ensure that the Council complies with relevant legislation to ensure policy is embedded into practice. The Equality Act 2010 was introduced in April 2011. Within the Specific duties of the Equality Act is the requirement to publish an annual report on the progress made by the Council in its compliance with its Strategic Equality Plan, equality objectives and comprehensive action Plan. The Act's principles and processes ensure that the Council remains true to its corporate values of Openness, Fairness, Flexibility and Teamwork.

Key issues:

One of the specific duties of the Equality Act 2010 requires all listed Public Bodies to publish an annual report. The purpose of this report is as follows:

1. To evidence the progress made on the action plan that sits in the Strategic Equality Plan 2016 -2020.
2. It gives many examples of the good practice carried out by the directorates of the council as outlined in the report covering the period 1st April 2017 to the 31st March 2018.
3. It also records how the council complies with the Specific Duties as set out in the Equality Act 2010 namely:

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4. How and who we engage with, our process for the assessment of impact, the recording of equality information by protected characteristic, the recording of employment information also by protected characteristic, recording of pay differences and staff training data, the procurement process, and finally the requirement to report and publish.

Member scrutiny:

The Equalities and Welsh Language Policy Officer presented the Strategic Equality Report and invited questions from the Select Committee as follows:

- A Member referred to the proposed Monmouthshire Pride event in Caldicot following on from last year's successful event. It was noted that a two-day event is planned this year. Planning is being led by a working party and it was explained that £13,000 is required to fund the event of which some money has been pledged already.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the work of the LGBTQ support network started in Chepstow School and is being disseminated to other schools. It was added that next year's annual report will show further progress.

- A Member asked if the "Adopt a Granny" scheme, which promotes young people's association with older people, was known about in Monmouthshire to promote association with older people. It was responded that there is good engagement when young people visit dementia units e.g. Severn View Club.
- A Member asked if we are developing a better dementia friendly network across Council services. It was confirmed that there is a lot of work going on but there is no Equalities Group to formally gather the information. A question was asked about support for families of dementia patients and how this can be improved. This matter is regularly considered by Adult Select Committee and it was requested that the dementia friendly café in Chepstow is represented at a future meeting.
- In response to a question, it was responded that some specific groups are more difficult to communicate with in Monmouthshire e.g. Black Minority Ethnic is a hard to reach group. There is also limited diversity of religion and belief in the County. Reassurance was sought that there is a mechanism to report issues involving hard to reach groups to enable trends to be highlighted. Information was provided that for hate crimes identified in schools, there are specific policies and procedures to address and report issues. It was confirmed that there is also a Newport and Monmouthshire Hate Crime Group. Work being carried out by Children and Young People Select Committee currently and this will be shared in due course.
- The Chair asked if any elected members had taken up the opportunity to learn the Welsh language. It was confirmed that some councillors are learning Welsh and some are fluent Welsh speakers already.
- It was queried if there is increased engagement with the Gypsy and Traveller community.
- A Member explained about "I Need" which is a Caldicot-based charity helping Syrian refugees. Reassurance was provided that Children and Young People Select Committee has considered support for refugee children in detail.

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- It was queried if there is a pay gap between male and female workers in the Council. In response, it was explained that there remains a pay gap but this is not extensive. The authority is working towards closing the gap where it is identified that employees are carrying out similar functions.

Committee Conclusion:

The officer was thanked for his attendance and the report was noted. Members scrutinised examples of good practice carried out by staff of MCC and the progress made on the action plan in line with their role to ensure policy and practice delivers legislative requirements.

4. Registrars Service

Purpose:

Scrutiny of the Registration Service and its' performance during the 2018/19 year.

Key issues:

1. Civil registration has been mandatory in the UK since 1837. Initially Registration Officers were employed by the General Register Office (GRO) but that changed in 2007, and we are now employed by the Local Authority. Monmouthshire became the District that it is now for the purposes of registration in 1996, as part of the Local Government restructure. Prior to that it was Abergavenny, Monmouth and Chepstow and was occasionally partly in England. Boundaries historically have changed regularly which has often resulted in registers moving around between Offices, and Churches and Hospitals suddenly reporting to a different area. We are the custodians of the records of all Births, Deaths and Marriages which have taken place in Monmouthshire since 1837. They are all stored and safeguarded within our strong room.
2. The Registration Service sits in Public Protection, within the Social Care and Health Directorate. This fits well with our remit, which has expanded over the years to become more customer focussed, and to take on additional duties on behalf of the Home Office. For example the section reports on possible sham marriages, vulnerable persons within the community, fraudulent applications for the issue of certificates, and sends statistical information to the Office for National Statistics about births and mortality.
3. Each year we prepare an annual report to GRO and a Seasonal Variance Plan. Internally we are guided by our annual Business Improvement and Business Continuity Plans.
4. The purpose of the Registration Service is as follows:
 - The registration of all births, deaths and stillbirths occurring within the County
 - Taking notices of intended marriages and civil partnerships from persons resident within the County
 - Conducting and registering all civil marriages and civil partnerships, (including conversions from civil partnership to marriage), taking place in any venue registered or licensed for the purpose. This includes prisons and hospitals or private residences in certain circumstances
 - Registering religious marriages where required
 - Conducting citizenship ceremonies for Monmouthshire residents who make successful applications for British nationality
 - Safe custody of all historic records of births, deaths, civil partnerships and marriages dating back to 1837, and issue of certified copies of these records on demand
 - Inspection and registration of new venues for marriage and civil partnership
 - Giving assistance and advice to all customers on all aspects of registration, citizenship and nationality
 - Providing data for vital work on population statistics and medical research

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- Management of data, including protection of both physical and electronic data. This assists with public protection and counter fraud by reporting suspicious applications and sham marriages, as well as suspicions about immigration abuse and other crimes
 - Safeguarding secure stock and accounting for fees
 - Promote and contribute to the Home Office priorities
5. The Registration Service is based in the Old Parlour, Usk. There are 8 staff, 10 on a casual basis for ceremonies only. The staff are made up of the Superintendent Registrar, one Registrar and 6 Deputies who can all register births, deaths and marriages and also take notices of marriage.
6. We have just benefitted from an investment in new chairs and flowers within the ceremony room, and increased our maximum guest numbers to 45. We are hoping soon to improve the outside area with the re-surfacing of the car park and improved signage from the Highway.
7. As well as the Old Parlour there are 3 out-stations, at Nevill Hall and at the Hubs in Chepstow and Monmouth. This enables us to provide the best possible service to residents.
8. Approved Premises, meaning venues which have chosen to licence rooms for marriages and civil partnerships, cover the length and breadth of Monmouthshire. There are currently 36 and a very good relationship exists with them all.

Member Scrutiny:

The report was presented by the Head of Public Protection and the Registration Services Manager who answered questions from Select Committee Members as follows:

- In response to a question, it was confirmed that all records are kept in a separate purpose-built strong room in Usk that is compliant with Home Office guidelines. It is temperature controlled and as safe as possible.
- A Member asked how many marriages are for same sex couples as opposed to same sex civil partnerships rising, and the likelihood of numbers of opposite sex civil partnerships when the law changes and whether or not this is likely to impact on numbers of marriages. Information on same sex marriages/civil partnerships will be made available outside the meeting. It was speculated that there will be some opposite sex civil partnerships instead of marriages but it was uncertain yet what the trend will be.
- A Member asked about registration of birth and deaths in the Hubs and it was confirmed that if a birth or death takes place outside Monmouthshire, a declaration form can be completed and sent on to the relevant district. When partnership is established, full registration will be possible. It was confirmed that the aim is to have the system working smoothly for when the new hospital opens. It was confirmed that the service provided at Nevill Hall will be monitored. It is envisaged that it will continue for the foreseeable future. It was confirmed that generally appointments made are honoured.
- Regarding performance indicators, it was explained that the percentage of ceremonies within statutory timeframe is not applicable because the figures refer to people arranging a ceremony when they want it to take place.

Committee Conclusion:

The Select Committee considered and commented on the content of this report. The report served to outline the services provided by the Registration Service, described current performance and highlighted future challenges.

The Select Committee welcomed the update that an annual performance report will be expected in late April or May each year to allow performance to be assessed.

The Officers were thanked for their attendance.

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5. To confirm minutes of the meeting held on 21st March 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st March 2019 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

6. Action list

The Head of Public Protection responded by e mail to questions asked at the last meeting about fly-tipping and Toilet Strategy to all Select Committee Members.

- Regarding the Toilet Strategy, a Member asked about anti-social behaviour and reports of drug paraphernalia in toilet facilities and queried if any action had been taken. It was confirmed that Abergavenny Town Council and the Crime and Disorder Officer have expressed concerns. Cleaning staff have been asked to log information in this respect but nothing has been logged this year so far. Any evidence found will be acted upon accordingly.

Town councils are part funding renovation work and are proactive. A property survey is in hand and more information is available from the Councillors' group visit in February. A challenge is how to ensure non-Council facilities are well kept. A £1200 grant is made to community councils to assist with maintenance and an annual Environmental Health inspection is available.

As part of the consultation process a meeting with Access for All has been held regarding disabled facilities to consider solutions to issues.

Consultation responses will be collated and presented for scrutiny prior to proceeding to Cabinet. It was confirmed that Town and Community Councils have been consulted.

The Action List was accepted.

7. Strong Communities forward work programme

- A modern slavery workshop takes place this afternoon to which all members are invited. The aim is to produce an action plan and protocol through discussion of key issues and context.
- A Special Meeting is scheduled for 21st May 2019 at 2.00pm to consider consultation responses and complete pre-decision scrutiny on the Toilet Strategy. Additionally, the Public Protection Annual Report will be presented.
- Apprenticeship and graduate internship strategy will be considered on 6th June 2019.
- Traffic and Road Safety has been considered by area committees and public workshops are in progress with town and community councils. Feedback will be given to the task group then the matter will be brought back to the Select Committee.
- Regarding a report on Cremations and Burial services, it was noted that 3 elected members had agreed to investigate this matter. A reminder will be issued.

8. Cabinet & Council forward work programme

The Cabinet and Council Forward Work Programme was noted.

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9. Date and time of next meeting: Thursday 6th June 2019 at 10am

The meeting ended at 11.05 am