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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Economy and Development Select Committee held
at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK - County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk on
Wednesday, 10th April, 2019 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: County Councillor P. Pavia (Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Dovey, M. Feakins, R. Roden and B. Strong

Also in attendance: County Councillors: S. Jones, J. Pratt and
V. Smith

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Frances Williams	Chief Officer, Enterprise
Cath Fallon	Head of Economy and Enterprise
Mark Hand	Head of Planning, Housing and Place-Shaping
Mike Powell	Rural Programmes Officer
David Wong	Senior Development Management Officer
Nicola Edwards	Strategic Food and Tourism Manager
Richard Williams	Democratic Services Officer

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Ms. V. Collins – Welsh Government

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor A. Davies

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest raised by Members.

2. Public Open Forum

There were no issues raised by members of the public.

3. Draft Digital Deprivation Action Plan

Context:

To scrutinise the Draft Digital Deprivation Action Plan in light of the recent question to Council on the 7th March 2019, regarding what the Council itself is doing to address the issue of digital deprivation.

Key Issues:

The Select Committee received an overview of the Superfast Cymru Project from Ms. V. Collins, representing Welsh Government. In doing so, the following points were noted:

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- The Superfast Cymru Project was let to BT Openreach in 2012.
- The deployment phase of that project was completed in February 2018 which resulted in over 733,000 premises being provided with fibre to the Cabinet / fibre to the premises technology.
- Within Monmouthshire, that provided around 80% of premises with either of these two technologies.
- On completion of the deployment, an open market review was undertaken, which consolidated the data from all of the suppliers. That commenced in February 2017 with the results being published in July 2017.
- This allowed for the setup of the intervention area for the next procurement. This went live in July 2017 and has been completed.
- Three contract have been let with BT Openreach which were awarded towards the end of 2018 / beginning of 2019.
- Welsh Government was disappointed with the response to the procurement. It established three lots and a budget in the region of £80M. On two of the lots only one supplier came back, on lot 2 there were two suppliers and this was the lot that Monmouthshire came under. BT Openreach was awarded the contract having won the bid.
- BT Openreach had indicated that it could deliver using £26M of the £80M.
- The original intervention area was in excess of 90,000 premises and BT Openreach is providing access to a further 26,000 premises.
- The procurement will result in an additional 1000 premises in the Monmouthshire area.
- Further key issues are outlined in the report.

Member Scrutiny:

- With regard to a question raised - For every 1% increase in the connectivity in the 12.5% that are not currently connected what impact will that have on the Welsh economy? The Welsh Government representative stated that she would take this matter back to Welsh Government for an answer.
- There is a need for Welsh Government to support South East Wales with a view to encouraging and supporting businesses in the region. The Welsh Government representative stated that she would take this matter back to Welsh Government.
- The Welsh Government representative informed the Committee that BT Open reach has considerable city fibre projects currently underway. Therefore, its

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focus is not necessarily on the rural regions of the Country. Therefore, it is difficult for Welsh Government to get BT Openreach to deploy in the very rural areas of the Country.

- Welsh Government has capital funds equating to £80M. Only £26M of the £80M has been used. Via the Superfast Cymru Project, the Welsh Government obtains clawback based on the take up of the broadband. Welsh Government is anticipating £50M back from the Superfast Cymru Project.
- However, there are concerns regarding revenue funding. In particular regarding lack of internal resources available.
- With regard to the Rural Community Development Fund (RCDF), it was noted that one grant had been approved which has now been completed. 400 premises have been connected at a cost of £90,000. Therefore, premises, compared with fibre is a cost effective way of providing connectivity. However, it is acknowledged that there is a requirement to get fibre to all, over time. A further application has been submitted to Welsh Government before the RCDF programme is closed. Further details will be available in May 2016 with regard to whether the application has been successful or not. This is valued at £160,000 but it is intended to lever at least 30% - 40% from whoever is selected as the partner. There is potential for a further 600 properties, via the rural element of Welsh Government.
- It was identified that capital funding could be considered to fund research and development with a view to Welsh Government and Monmouthshire County Council working together in respect of this matter.
- There are areas within Llanelly Community that have no broadband connectivity. BT Openreach has benefited significantly from the works that have been undertaken along the dualling of the A465 at this location. However, there are 40 residents in this location who have been quoted £90,000 to connect these properties via BT Openreach, which equated to £2000 per household. This matter had been raised with Welsh Government in January 2019. The Welsh Government representative informed the Committee that the first Superfast Cymru project had a target of reaching at least 90% of the intervention area. BT Openreach succeeded in achieving this figure but it was not told to go to particular areas within that project due the size of the project. Within the second procurement, Welsh Government incentivised BT Openreach to go to more rural areas. Unfortunately, the area in question was not chosen as a site for BT Openreach. Welsh Government's grant scheme can help in this situation whereby, residents could apply for a grant up to a maximum of £5000 per dwelling.
- The Rural Programmes Manager informed the Committee that he had met with the community council and residents. It was noted that the residents had not been put into the target premises for the new roll out as it had been assumed that there was already a provider in the area. However, that provider was no longer in

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service. This is why some residents in that area had not been included in the next roll out. However, Welsh Government will be undertaking an open market review that should bring all of those properties back into consideration. Connections could be available in this area within the next three years.

- In response to a question raised regarding the use of other suppliers, it was noted that Welsh Government has held a number of supplier engagement days. Only one bidder on two of the lots came forward with two bidders coming forward for lot 2.
- With regard to funding, for the original project, there was European, UK Government and domestic funding provided. For the new procurement, there is a small UK Government input with the remainder of the funding coming via European and domestic sources. This equates to in the region of £26M European funding. Domestic funding plus clawback from the original project equates to a figure of around £50M - £60M.
- In response to a question raised regarding Brexit, it was noted that funding is currently guaranteed and Welsh Government has secured an additional £30M of European funding.
- The original contract was large scale. The most recent contract involved supplier engagement and their preferences were asked for. In response to feedback, the procurement had been split into the three lots. The response across the UK has been similar to the responses received by Welsh Government.
- Welsh Government is working with smaller suppliers via the grant schemes encouraging them to roll out infrastructure.
- With regard to the funding shortfall, Welsh Government is looking at exploring options both within Welsh Government and with local authorities with a view to spending this money. However, this process is still in its early stages.
- With regard to the procurement, there has been a delay in the process which is mainly due to the clarification process with bidders.
- Superfast Cymru 2 list of premises – Targeted premises 1581, all of these will be fibre to the premises. The Welsh Government representative will investigate whether this data can be made available to the Select Committee.
- The Universal Service Obligation (USO) will cover Wales as a whole as broadband is not devolved to Wales. However, this will be on a request basis via a premises or community.
- The UK Government has a policy that by 2033 the UK will be covered by full fibre broadband. Welsh Government's aspiration is to work with the UK Government and local authorities to ensure that this target is met.

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- In response to a question raised regarding resources, it was noted that this is an issue across Wales. Investigations could be looked into regarding capitalising some of the funding to address this matter.
- The Access Broadband Cymru grant is currently being reviewed and the process for delivering this is becoming more automated. In the near future Welsh Government anticipates that it will be able to cope with the increased number of applications coming through the system.
- Welsh Government has a very good working relationship with Monmouthshire County Council. However, it was noted that both authorities would benefit from having additional revenue funding but it is acknowledged that this is difficult to obtain.
- In response to a question raised, the Welsh Government representative stated that she would make enquires regarding whether the Authority might be able to borrow from the loan boards which could then be recouped when the deployment has taken place.
- In response to a question raised by a Member regarding lack of broadband provision for a resident within his ward, it was noted that there was potential for the resident to investigate a 4G solution to his broadband issue. This solution could be used by other residents who are not on the current fibre roll out.
- A dedicated staff resource will be required to take forward and manage the current strategic opportunities. Any job specification will be subject to job evaluation.
- Discussions were being undertaken with Welsh Government with regard to taking a regional approach, as this could be a mechanism for unlocking the required revenue.
- The bid for local full fibre network will take some time to deploy where there is funding in the sum of £10M available between the local authorities involved. This will support capital assets such as schools and other public buildings.
- There is a further bid coming forward, specifically regarding rural areas, known as Inside Out, whereby, a further £200M from Central Government will be available to access.

Committee's Conclusion:

- It is clear that Monmouthshire is lagging behind with regard to Superfast Cymru broadband provision.
- There is an issue of deprivation within the County.

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- It is critical for our economic future and the broadband provision gap needs to be closed as quickly as possible.
- Monmouthshire needs to be enabled. Superfast Cymru 2 is not going to realise remaining capacity. Therefore other options need to be investigated. Monmouthshire County Council needs to be an enabler to provide this service.
- A dedicated staff resource has been identified to bring this to fruition.

On behalf of the Select Committee, the Chair thanked the Welsh Government representative for attending the meeting and answering questions put to her by the Committee.

We resolved to support the draft Digital Deprivation Action Plan and recommended that the report be presented to Cabinet for adoption.

4. Abergavenny Tourist information Centre

We resolved to defer consideration of the report to a future meeting of the Select Committee regarding the potential move of Abergavenny Tourist Information Centre (TIC) from the Tithe Barn to Abergavenny Town Hall as part of the upcoming refurbishment programme.

The Select Committee considered that the Abergavenny Members needed to be invited to the Select Committee meeting when scrutinising this matter to aid the Select Committee in making a recommendation to Cabinet. Also, that the report should be presented to the North Monmouthshire Area Committee meeting on 15th May 2019 before being scrutinised by the Economy and Development Select Committee.

5. Monmouthshire Adopted Local Development Plan Draft Infill Development Supplementary Planning Guidance

Context:

To inform the Economy and Development Select Committee of the preparation of the Draft Infill Development Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) which is currently subject to public consultation, and to seek comments from the Committee.

Key Issues:

- The Monmouthshire Local Development Plan (LDP) (2011-2021) was adopted in February 2014 to become the adopted development plan for the County (excluding that part within the Brecon Beacons National Park). This statutory development plan contains a number of policies relating to new housing development in the County's settlements. The Draft SPG provides guidance on proposals for small scale infill development (i.e. fewer than 10 dwellings) within

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the County's designated settlements as defined under Policies S1, H1, H2 and H3 of the Monmouthshire LDP, namely, Main Towns, Severnside Settlements, Rural Secondary Settlements, Main Villages and Minor Villages.

- The requirement for the Draft SPG has arisen from the suggestion by Planning Committee that it would be useful to have additional guidance in place to help shape proposals for small scale infill development in the County's settlements.
- Selective use of SPG is a means of establishing more detailed thematic or site specific guidance in the way in which the policies of an LDP will be applied in particular circumstances or areas.
- SPG can be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications, provided that it is consistent with the development plan and appropriate consultation has been undertaken.
- The SPG is intended to provide certainty and clarity for applicants, officers, Members and communities in the interpretation and implementation of the LDP policy framework in relation to small scale infill development proposals within the settlements identified in Policies S1, H1, H2 and H3 of the Monmouthshire LDP.
- The Draft SPG sets out the detailed matters that need to be taken into account when considering proposals for small scale infill development in the County's settlements. Such matters include site context, design, privacy / amenity, access / parking, planting / trees and drainage. Once adopted, the SPG will have a key role in shaping proposals for small scale infill development.
- The options in relation to the Draft SPG are:
 1. Economy & Development Select Committee considers and comments, as appropriate, on the Draft Infill Development SPG.
 2. Economy & Development Select Committee does not comment on the Draft Infill Development SPG.

Option 1 is the preferred option.

- Planning Committee has received the report and suggested changes had been made primarily with regard to the need for additional diagrams to clarify the difference around backland developments and infill plots, more reference to affordable housing and commuted sums, Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) and to clarify 'neighbours' and their location to the proposed site.
- The consultation process ends on 13th May 2019. The report will then be re-presented to Planning Committee with consultation comments and any suggested changes. The Cabinet Member for Enterprise will then receive the report for adoption.

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Member Scrutiny:

- In response to a question raised regarding whether there is a process to establish how much infill development may take place in an area, the Head of Planning, Housing and Place Shaping stated that there is no area based assessment undertaken. Each application is looked at on a case by case basis. The LDP relies on a number of these small scale developments coming forward and a significant number of dwellings are delivered in this way.
- National Planning Policy seeks for an efficient use of brownfield land. Gardens come under brownfield land development.
- It was considered that there needs to be a process whereby, certain areas have a limit to the amount of infill development that may be put into a particular area. It was noted that this matter could be looked at in the next LDP. However, it might be difficult to quantify a number. A comprehensive view of all of Monmouthshire's towns would need to be undertaken to identify which gardens could be built in.
- In response to a question raised regarding looking at the percentage of property on the plot size, the Head of Planning, Housing and Place Shaping informed the Committee that this is partly covered in Section 5.1 of the SPG. However, percentages are not covered so there would be a need to look at each application on its merits.
- The LDP target is 566 dwellings out of 4500 which are expected to come from small windfall sites. The SPG policy will put in place better ground rules.
- It was considered that not enough credence is given to public transport on new developments and road widths are insufficient. Kerbside design is important to reduce on street parking on new developments. Closer working is required with the Transport Department to reduce the number of vehicles entering Monmouthshire's towns.
- In response, it was noted that a Members' seminar will be held with regard to highways issues in relation to planning applications. In terms of accesses, the SPG policy covers sites that have fewer than 10 dwellings and National Planning policy is moving away from parking standards to encourage more people to access public transport. Roads are designed to be narrower to act as a means of traffic calming and to encourage a more pedestrian friendly environment.

Committee's Conclusion:

The Chair invited the Committee to formulate its views in respect of this matter with a view to a letter being written by the Chair, to the Head of Planning Housing and Place Shaping, on behalf of the Select Committee outlining the Committee's submission by the end of the consultation period on 13th May 2019 and for it to be finalised at the next

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Select Committee meeting on 9th May 2019.

6. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Economy and Development Select Committee meeting dated 14th February 2019 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

Democratic Services Officer note:

It had been identified after the meeting that the minutes required a slight amendment. The Chair had therefore agreed that the following amendment be noted:

Minute 3 - Economies of the Future Analysis, Member Scrutiny - Bullet point 17: remove reference to 15,000 houses.

7. Economy and Development Select Committee Forward Work Programme

We received the Economy and Development Select Committee Forward Work Programme.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- The report regarding Abergavenny Tourist Information Centre (deferred at today's meeting) to be scrutinised at a future meeting of the Select Committee.
- Undertake a review of the Alternative Delivery Model at a future meeting of the Select Committee to ensure that the correct process has been followed and adhered to, irrespective of the final decision that will be taken by Cabinet in respect of this matter.
- Various workshops were ongoing with a view to being progressed throughout the year.
- ICT in schools is an important piece of work that could be undertaken with the Children and Young People Select Committee as a Joint Select Committee.
- Further work is required with regard to engagement with businesses with a view to looking at the concerns and challenges being faced, particularly with the removal of the tolls on the Severn Bridges.
- There will be an examination of every town within Monmouthshire, going forward.

The Chair thanked the Select Committee for the support that he has received during his time as Chair of the Committee.

8. Council and Cabinet Forward Work Programme

We received the Council and Cabinet Business Forward Plan.

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9. Next Meeting

Thursday 9th May 2019 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 3.50 pm.