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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held
at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Thursday, 21st July, 2016 at 10.00 am

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

County Councillors: D. Dovey, A. Easson, S. Jones and S. White

Also in attendance County Councillor(s): D. Blakebrough

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Paula Harris	Democratic Services Officer
Peter Davies	Chief Officer, Resources
David Jones	Head of Regulatory Services
Richard Jones	Improvement Support Officer
Huw Owen	Specialist Environment Health Officer
Hazel Illett	Scrutiny Manager

1. Apologies for absence

We received apologies from County Councillor A. Webb.

2. Declarations of Interest

None received.

3. Public Forum

County Councillor V. Smith introduced a member of her ward, John Nixon, a member of the public who raised concerns regarding the traffic speed outside his home near the Glan Yr Afon Hotel and hope that the speed limit could be lowered from 30mph to 20mph.

County Councillor V. Smith applauded the Usk initiative to pursue a 20mph speed limit stating towns are places for people to in live, not for drivers to drive through.

The Councillor has previously asked that the request for the 20 mph limit is extended over the bridge to Woodside which was dismissed out of hand by Highways.

Various suggestions and solutions have been suggested to officers with no success.

A Member suggested that an officer attend a Committee Meeting in future to address road safety in Monmouthshire with an all member invitation.

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4. Public Protection 2015/16 Performance Report

Context:

To undertake scrutiny of service delivery and performance across Public Protection in 2015/16. The Public Protection division comprises of Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Licensing. The recommendations are for the Committee to consider and comment on the contents of the report entitled 'Public Protection Performance' report for the year 2015/16.

Key Issues:

Cabinet approved a report in March 2014 recommending budget reductions to Public Protection services for 2014/15 and the coming years. The reduction amounted to £140,000, representing a 7.2% staff decrease. The impact of this reduction was scrutinised by this Committee in November 2014, prior to a report going to Cabinet on 7th January 2015. At this time, Cabinet requested regular six month reports to Strong Communities committee to monitor performance and assess any negative impacts. The intention was to review progress and take any action deemed necessary.

The last performance report was submitted to this Committee on 14th September 2015.

The attached report summarises performance over the last financial year, 2015/16, and highlights the following –

- the four service teams, for the vast majority of the services they deliver, meet the Authority's legal obligations in relation to Public Protection services.
- there has been some decline in closing complaints within Public Health, for example concerning noise and other statutory nuisance cases.
- six monthly reports will continue to be made to this Committee to assess 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 asked how many staff the Environmental Health team had and we were told 6.5 plus a student.

We were told that the Student role was integral to the team. All of the student's visits were supervised for the first few months until it was felt the student was able to work independently. The student's duties included visiting fly tipping sites, collecting water samples, visiting dog fouling sites.

The Officers told the Committee about current projects such as the Eisteddfod, where their responsibilities spanned many areas include noise nuisance and food hygiene.

A Member asked how the team deal with air pollution and we were told that Environmental Health monitor air quality regularly, Currently Usk and Chepstow have air quality issues.

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Members discussed enforcement in regard to dog fouling and littering with a Member telling the Committee of a local Council who publish pictures of members of the public littering as a deterrent.

Members congratulated the Environmental Team on their vital work and asked officers what their concerns were. In response we were told that the team was working at full capacity and there concerns that increased workloads would create difficulty as it was felt that the team was already at saturation point and they were being as creative with their time as possible already.

Members feared that if the service was stretched further it would impact on public health which is paramount.

Committee's Conclusion:

The Chair asked Officers to pass their thanks back to the entire team for the work they do.

There were concerns for public health and aspects of the report. The Committee are keen to review matters in 6 months' time.

During the budget setting process, we would like this dealt with separately due the concerns raised.

5. 2015/16 Performance Report: Improvement Objectives and Outcome Agreement

Context:

To undertake scrutiny of service delivery and performance across Public Protection in 2015/16. The Public Protection division comprises of Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Licensing. The recommendations are that the Committee consider and comment on the contents of the report 'Public Protection Performance report for the year 2015/16.

Key Issues:

The Outcome Agreement and the Improvement Objectives have a different focus:

Improvement Objectives

Improvement Objectives are set annually by the Council to deliver on priorities. Despite objectives being focused on the long term the specific activities that support them are particularly focussed for the year ahead.

Activity that contributes to the delivery of some objectives cross cuts Select Committee remits and these have also been reported to the other relevant committee(s). Therefore it is suggested members particularly focus their scrutiny on the activity relevant to the committee with consideration of its contribution to the objective as a whole.

Improvement Objectives are scored based on the Council's Self-evaluation framework, as set in the Improvement Plan 2015/17, Table 1, and performance against them is reported in the Stage 2 Improvement Plan published in October each year.

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Outcome Agreement

The Outcome Agreement is an agreement with the Welsh Government for a three year period, where the council needs to deliver on performance activity and associated targets that contribute to the Programme for Government. The agreement covered the period from 2013 to 2016.

In the summer of 2015 the Welsh Government announced the final year of funding for performance in 2015-16 would no longer be attached to performance in the Outcome Agreement and would be rolled directly into the Revenue Support Grant for 2016-17. This means that payment for performance against the targets in the agreement for 2015-16, is assured, the council was also awarded full payment in the previous two years. However given the importance placed on the agreement as part of the council's performance framework an evaluation of performance achieved over the three years of the agreement has been undertaken. The evaluation highlights progress made against the actions and performance indicators set in the Outcome Agreement.

Key National Indicators

Appendix 3 sets out further Key Performance Indicators that are in the National Performance indicator set used by Welsh Government and are under the committee's remit. The primary purpose is to highlight the performance achieved in 2015/16. In some cases this may result in duplication of indicators already included in other sections of the report. Where indicators relate to the performance of services that are under the remit of more than one committee these will also be reported to the other relevant committees.

Member Scrutiny:

During discussion Members asked about increased sickness levels and raised concerns regarding staff wellbeing.

It was asked why the percentage of appraisals had fallen, year on year. We were told there had been reporting issues with the 'Check in, Check out' function which were being addressed.

It was asked why the take up of the concessionary bus pass was only 76% and we were told that every person who had applied for it had received it.

Committee's Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the Officer for the detailed report and looked forward to the next 6 month update in November.

6. People Services

Context:

To present Strong Communities Select Committee with the first People Services Annual report for information and comment. We recommend that the Select Committee

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consider the contents of the first People Services annual Report and identify any issues that they would like the People Services Team to consider going forward.

Key Issues:

Our People are at the heart of everything we do. The collective purpose, passion and talents of our colleagues, on and off the payroll are the foundations to our success as a council and a county.

We believe that people join public service to make a difference and we have developed our people services in order to ensure that we are best placed to engage, support and develop our workforce , to ensure they are able to do just that, make a difference.

To provide clarity of purpose and direction we developed a People and Organisational Strategy, underpinned by an ambitious delivery work programme. We have reported progress against the strategy in 2015/16 and the attached People Services annual Report, June 2016, provides a summary of activity against our areas for improvement during the year.

We can be proud of what the service has achieved during the year and this will now form the base line for monitoring future activity. Bringing the different elements of People services together has delivered a more coherent, effective and efficient service organised around a common purpose.

Member Scrutiny:

Members questioned the relevance of the data given the date of the survey, The Committee were told that there were no plans to undertake the survey on an annual basis, it was felt that the quality of questions was paramount with staff being asked the questions they wanted to answer.

Members expressed that they felt that the results reassured them that the staff weren't being ignored.

A Member spoke about the Council building a similar structure as the Investors in People programme with importance being placed on speaking to staff, noting their interests, growing your own staff.

The Committee were told that new initiatives were taking place, with coded pathways and training already there, social media is now playing a large part in attracting people to the jobs within Council.

The Committee asked about staff appraisals and were told about the new service applying an emphasis on quality rather than quantity.

We were told that the leadership team had a duty of care for their staff.

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Committee's Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the Officer for the report and asked for a copy of the 2014/15 staff survey form.

The Committee will look at reviewing this regularly.

7. Strong Communities Select Forward Work Planner

Members discussed the Work Programme for the Strong Communities Select Committee. In doing so, the following points were noted:

- MRF contractor
- Public Toilets
- Street lighting
- Speed of Roads

Were added to the work programme.

GAVO will be asked to attend a later meeting.

8. Cabinet and Council Forward Work Planner

Members considered the Cabinet Forward Work Planner – no issues were identified as requiring pre-decision scrutiny.

9. Date and time of next meeting

15th September 2016 at 10am.

The meeting ended at 1.46 pm