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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, 15th September, 2016 at 10.00
am

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

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

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

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Roger Hoggins
Mark Howcroft
Roger Joy
Gareth Sage
Paula Harris

Head of Operations
Assistant Head of Finance
Street Lighting Engineer
SWTRA /Street Lighting Manager
Democratic Services Officer

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Glen Walker
Nicola Rosser

Go Safe Wales
Go Safe Wales

1. Apologies for absence

We received apologies from County Councillors D. Dovey, P. Watts, A. Webb and Scrutiny Manager H. Ilett.

2. Declarations of Interest

None received.

3. Open Public Forum

We were joined in the Chamber by members of the public who wished to speak in regard of the speeding and road safety item on the agenda. During discussion we noted:

- Llanover Community Councillor Ron Adam read a statement regarding issues in his ward.
- Go Safe Wales responded outlining their approach to complaints they have received, including the use of covert analysers which uses an average speed. In answer several members of the public complained that the average speed was useless as it is not the average speeder that kills.
- The Chair spoke about all the Members having issues with speed and safety in their wards and the importance of further discussion.
- A Member of the public spoke about Section 59A of the Road Traffic Act on the B4598 and the lack of police prosecution, due to the lack of police presence.

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- It was asked if measures such as chicanes or sleeping policemen could be implemented in certain areas.
- The Cabinet Member assured Go Safe that he would create space for their van in areas partially affected by speeding.
- Without the correct signage the police have no powers to enforce speed limits and Councillor Blakebrough commented on Newport Council's strategy.
- It was also commented that if signs are covered with foliage and cannot be seen it is impossible to enforce them, MCC Highways department have been contacted regarding this matter.
- Members of the public commented on a 'disconnect' between police, public and MCC are stressed the importance of effective, regular monitoring and communication.
- When complaints are made to the police, members of the public have been told that there isn't enough manpower to investigate all complaints.
- The Committee was told by members of the public that due to the excessive noise from bikes on the roads their quality of life was grievously affected.
- The Chair asked if MCC provide funding for Go Safe and an officer answered that Go Safe is directly funded by Welsh Government.
- A local resident queried the cost and feasibility of number plate recognition and offered to fund the project until fines came into place and recovered his costs.
- It was asked if the hedgerows and signage blocked with foliage could be addressed on the A472.

4. To confirm minutes of the previous meeting

We confirm the minutes of the previous meeting 30th June 2016 as a true and accurate record.

We confirm the minutes of the previous meeting 21st July 2016 as a true and accurate record with one addition from County Councillor V. Smith. Under the Public Open Forum County Councillor V. Smith would like added that the public speaker Mr J. Nixon is a wheelchair user.

5. Revenue & Capital Monitoring 2016/17 Period 1 outturn forecast statement

Context:

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information on the forecast revenue outturn position of the Authority at the end of period 1 which represents month 2 financial information for the 2016/17 financial year. Revenue and Capital forecasting is being brought forward by a month against the usual timescale to provide members with relevant financial information before summer recess.

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This report will also be considered by Select Committees as part of their responsibility to;

- assess whether effective budget monitoring is taking place
- monitor the extent to which budgets are spent in accordance with agreed budget and policy framework
- challenge the reasonableness of projected over or underspends, and
- monitor the achievement of predicted efficiency gains or progress in relation to savings proposals.

Recommendations to Cabinet

- That Cabinet notes the extent of forecast revenue overspend at period 1 of £1.37 million.
- That Cabinet requires Chief Officers to provide information on how the overspend position will be brought back within budget, including alternative plans to deliver the £301,000 mandated savings reported as not achievable in the next monitoring report.
- That Cabinet requires Directors to review levels of over and underspends and reallocate budgets to reduce the extent of compensatory positions needing to be reported prior to month 6 reporting.
- That Cabinet appreciates the extent of predicted schools reserve usage and the anticipation that 13 schools will be in a deficit position by end of 2016-17.
- That Cabinet considers the capital monitoring which exhibits only a small variance to budget as a result of recent Cabinet and Council approval on Caerwent House.
- That Cabinet recognises the risk associated with having to rely on a use of capital receipts in the year anticipated and the potential for this to have significant revenue pressures should receipts be delayed and temporary borrowing be required.

Member Scrutiny:

We would told that the next budget review would provide more options for Members to consider with each department being asked to look for 5-10% savings.

The Chair asked for a report detailing the recent leadership restructure and information on senior salaries. In turn this led to a discussion regarding staff workloads. We were advised that the Audit Committee have already asked for a report from People Services regarding staff wellbeing and the Chair asked for this to be added to the Strong Communities work programme.

A Member questioned seeing members of staff who she had known to have been made redundant or retired back working for MCC. We were told that experienced staff who had left were valued and often useful to fill in short term roles within the Authority.

The Chair asked about The Borough theatre and we were told that this had been moved to a trust with a management agreement in place. Due to the infrastructure the market and theatre could not be dislocated, this will be the responsibility of the Estates department and then under Strong Communities remit.

The Committee also requested an update on Raglan Market from the Estates Department.

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Committee's Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the Officer for the comprehensive report and looked forward to the next update.

The Committee also requested an update on Raglan Market from the Estates Department.

A report from People Services updating on organisational structure, sickness absence and staff wellbeing be added to the work programme

6. Speeding and Road Safety ~ to consider the policy and speeding enforcement

Context:

Members will be aware of petitions occasionally presented to the authority calling for lower speed limits at various routes throughout the county. The wider issues of community concerns about speed limits and speeding generally have also regularly been raised by members of the public, local councils and MCC councillors.

Monmouthshire currently uses the Setting Local Speed Limit guidance to assess speed limits throughout the county along with other national guidance to determine appropriate schemes and measures to address or seek to improve road safety throughout the county. Such schemes are prioritised and are either considered as part of a bid to Welsh Government or added to the Road Safety Strategy forward programme. In some circumstances, and where the costs are relatively low, schemes are delivered using the road safety revenue budget.

Key Issues:

The provision of appropriate speed limits on the highway network has a major bearing on road safety as well as the free flow and efficient movement of traffic throughout the county. Speed limits are assessed based upon national guidance and with speed featuring as a key concern of the local community throughout Monmouthshire it is important that proper consideration is given to how the guidance is applied to the local highway network and that any future changes to limits strikes an appropriate balance between those wishes of the local community with that of the wider travelling public and businesses with an overriding emphasis on improving or maintaining road safety.

The Task & Finish Group may wish to consider the following documents and guidelines when developing a Speed Management Policy for Monmouthshire:

- i. National Road Safety Policy: Welsh Government's "Road Safety Delivery Programme; Department for Transport "Tomorrow's Roads, Safer for everyone" and associated performance indicators and targets.
- ii. Monmouthshire CC Policy – Road Safety Strategy, Local Development Plan and Regional Transport Plan
- iii. Guidance: Welsh Government "Setting Local Speed Limit"; Department for

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Transport "New Manual for Streets" and various Transport Notes on subjects such as 20MPH Zones, Traffic Calming Guidance

iv. Monmouthshire CC's Community Strategy

In addition to the above, any future policy will need to seek the views of Gwent Police and other bodies such as the South Wales Trunk Road Authority (SWTRA) and neighbouring authorities. Furthermore, it is important that other factors in addition to speed limits are considered when developing a Speed Management Policy since influences such as Road Safety Education and Training also have a major part to play in delivering such a strategy.

The committee (possibly through a Task and Finish Group) may wish to make recommendations on the latitude and flexibility of how such a policy should be applied as well as to make suggestions on further consultation which may be beneficial before presenting to the Cabinet Member for approval and adoption as Monmouthshire Speed Management Policy.

Member Scrutiny:

After hearing from our partners at Go Safe that Monmouthshire registers the most complaints out of the 5 authorities they cover, it was asked why? We were told by Go Safe that Monmouthshire appears to be the most proactive county, with 11 community speed watch groups set up.

Members stressed the importance of setting up the Task and Finish working group which includes various partners in a formalised meeting occurring on a six weekly basis.

Members expressed their concerns over the average speed and stressed it is the minority they have concerns about.

Members asked for a seminar for all County Councillors on this issue. The Head of Operations will look at dates for this.

Committee's Conclusion:

The Chair thanked our partners at Go Safe for attending the meeting and due of the importance of the issue the Chair stressed the need for an all Members seminar in the near future.

7. Street Lighting ~ to scrutinise a progress report on street lighting (policy and costs)

Context:

Over several years various changes to the street lighting service have been introduced. In particular the remote control of lighting has been introduced along with the dimming and partial switch off of lights in various communities. More recently older lanterns are being replaced with LED lanterns to reduce energy consumption. This report provides members with an update on developments within the service.

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Key Issues:

MCC street lighting team presently manages 10,695 street lights plus traffic lights and VAS signs. 7026 street lights are on the remote monitoring system. Presently 1751 LED lanterns have been installed all of which are controlled on the monitoring system.

A capital budget has been allocated from the overall highway budget for many years to carry out upgrades to the street lighting furniture year on year. However in 2012 the Council took a SALIX loan (interest free) to purchase new lanterns using the reduction in the energy costs to repay the loan.

Last year a Welsh Government Invest to Save Loan (I2S) was received to install LED lanterns. Again the reduction in energy is funding the interest free loan. Officers are currently assessing the financial viability of a further I2S loan to purchase more LED lanterns (2500 lanterns contemplated).

The 2014/15 budget included a significant saving (£180k) by the introduction of partial switch off, dimming, reduction in maintenance costs and staff cost reduction. This initiative to introduce switch off and dimming commenced during 2014 and continues to be rolled out (a copy of the briefing note to members circulated at that time is provided for information – Appendix 1).

A member has raised specific questions about the service. These are replicated in Appendix 2 along with responses.

Member Scrutiny:

It was asked if we should have gone to LED lights initially and the costs involved in changing the lights retrospectively. It was explained that when the LED lights originally came out they were not up to the standard required in residential areas. In regard to costs, Western Power are now reading our monitoring system and once onto full board in the next month we will pay for the power actually used rather than the anticipated amount which will hopefully see a reduction in costs.

It was asked if a press release would be useful to keep residents up to date with progress of the work.

Members were advised that complaints should be sent via the Contacts Centre so that all issues are recorded.

A Member requested that all lights were kept clear from trees and foliage.

Committee's Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the Officers and spoke of the importance of the issue as Councillors receive complaints from members of their wards several times a week on this matter and stressed that the public need to be updated on the developments with the lights.

The Committee requests a press release on street lighting to reassure the public that work is progressing to resolve issues.

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8. Strong Communities forward Work Programme September 2016

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

- Burial charges
- People Services
- Raglan Market

9. Cabinet and Council forward work programme

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

10. Date and time of next meeting

10th November 2016 10am (pre-meeting 9.30am)

The meeting ended at 1.30 pm

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