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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held
at on Thursday, 10th November, 2016 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor S. Howarth (Chairman)
County Councillor A. Easson (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Dovey, S. Jones, V. Smith, S. White and
P. Watts

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Rachel Jowitt	Head of Waste & Street Services
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Mark Howcroft	Assistant Head of Finance
Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Carl Touhig	Recycling Strategy and Business Manager
Paula Harris	Democratic Services Officer

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Nick Tandy	Suez UK
Nik Hughes Roberts	Suez UK

1. Apologies for absence

We received apologies County Councillor A. Webb.

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 response to the speeding and road safety item on the previous meeting agenda 15th September 2016.

A Member of the public, Nick Vincent and his wife attended to share their experience of successfully campaigning for lower speed limit in their community. During their campaign they had encountered issues of enforcement and felt that they had been passed around by various bodies including MCC, the Police and Go Safe.

Mr Vincent commented that from a resident's point of view it appeared that obstacles are placed on the way of progress and that communities deserved to have their voices heard. Mr Vincent also felt that when decisions were made he was not made aware of the reasoning behind them and that the process lacked honest and open debate.

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The Chair thanked Mr Vincent for his input and commented that residents like Mr Vincent would be useful as witnesses at the new Task and Finish Group.

Mr Sutherland, a member of the public, asked if an offer to fund speed cameras made by a member of the public at the 15th September 2016 meeting had been taken up. In response we were told by the Head of Operations that the Usk/Woodside design is being discussed next week and as prices of speed cameras come down it becomes more feasible, at present the average speed camera cost is 100K per mile.

4. To confirm minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the committee meeting dated 15th September 2016 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

5. Action list

- Speeding and Road Safety ~ to consider the policy and speeding enforcement and arrange a Members Seminar on the subject.

The seminar took place on the 8th November 2016 with actions to follow.

- Revenue & Capital Monitoring 2016/17 Period 1 outturn forecast statement - update on Raglan market.

This issue has been passed to the Audit Committee who will discuss on the 17th November 2016.

- Revenue & Capital Monitoring 2016/17 Period 1 outturn forecast statement - organisational structure/sickness/wellbeing report.

A report is going to the Audit Committee 17th November 2016, we will look to bring to SC at a later date.

- Street Lighting ~ to scrutinise a progress report on street lighting (policy and costs), a press release to update residents.

Done on the 18th October 2016 via Dewi Jones Press Officer.

6. Public Toilets - A progress report on implementation of the review's recommendations.

Context:

Provide members with an update on the provision of public toilets within the county.

Key Issues:

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The Strong Communities Select Committee initially investigated the provision of public conveniences in 2010 and Cabinet subsequently adopted various recommendations of the Select Committee.

Since the review the provision of public toilets has been gradually transferred to community and town councils, the funding implications being reflected in the various budgets approved.

The provision of public toilets has gradually been transferred to local councils since the review. Three toilets were closed (Bulwark, Raglan, Tintern) but otherwise they have remained open being funded and managed by the local council or county council.

The initiative has demonstrated the capacity for the local councils to work collaboratively with the County Council to maintain local service provision during difficult financial circumstances.

Budget mandates have supported further transfer of services to local councils, including public toilet provision where this has not happened so far.

Member Scrutiny:

Members spoke of their support of collaborative working.

A Member brought up the Public Health Bill, now back at stage one and hoped that as statutory consultees we would be invited to comment.

It was stressed that members of the public should be made aware of the contribution made by Town Councils towards the upkeep of the public toilets, in the case of Abergavenny 58k is being put into the scheme by the Town Council.

The Chair referred Members back to the original Public Toilet consultation where town councils were told to take them on or lose them with Cabinet agreeing some funding for towns who take them on.

A Member spoke of the toilets being an asset to the town, the issue being the age of the toilets. It was asked should old facilities be knocked down to make way for 'super toilet' or should councils keep paying into the maintenance of old buildings.

It was asked how much engagement has taken place with shops and pubs in the towns and if there was money available for them to participate by offering their facilities to the public.

A Member expressed their frustration and said that if this issue had been addressed years ago that provision would not have been lost.

A question was raised regarding the sale of a public toilet in Raglan and we were told that the Coordinating Board had asked the Audit Committee to look at this and they had referred it back to the Estates department.

A Member asked if a charge should be levied for use of the public toilets.

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Committee's Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the Officers for the report and looked forward to receiving regular updates on the subject.

7. Prosiect Gwyrdd - An update report on the residual waste partnership.

Context:

Members to receive an update on the implementation of the Prosiect Gwyrdd Energy from Waste Contract.

Key Issues:

Members will recall that MCC is and will remain a partner of Prosiect Gwyrdd (PG) until 2048. Between 2007-13 the SE Wales LAs of MCC, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Newport and Vale of Glamorgan worked together and with Welsh Government to structure a procurement to replace landfill as the main form of disposal for residual waste. The need to replace landfill was driven by:

- Landfill Directive (1999) requirements which placed a statutory limit on the amount of biodegradable municipal waste (BMW) that Councils could send to landfill
- Landfill tax escalator and the increasing costs of landfill
- Landfill being the least environmentally sustainable method to dispose of waste
- Increasing recycling performance and the need to have complimentary infrastructure in place for waste that cannot be recycled
- Lack of landfill provision across the UK

Following a robust and well-structured procurement, in December 2013 Viridor were awarded the contract from Cardiff as the Lead Authority. The Partnership which is formalised by a Contract between the LAs to allow Cardiff to contract with Viridor is called Prosiect Gwyrdd and is governed by a Joint Working Agreement 2.

Through the procurement process a scrutiny panel was established made up of Councillors from the relevant Scrutiny Committees. MCC's representatives were Cllr. S. Howarth and Cllr. V. Smith. The purpose of the panel was to:

- Scrutinise the procurement process for robustness, clarity and programme management (e.g. meeting timescales)

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- Ensure the process took account of a wide range of views. One of the biggest successes of the panel was their Call for Evidence which engaged a wide range of stakeholders and interested parties and produced a final report which gave clear recommendations to the Prosiect Gwyrdd Joint Committee to help inform the final contract
- Provide local input and a link to internal Council scrutiny processes

The use of a scrutiny panel through a partnership procurement was held up as best practice and added significant value to the partnership.

Member Scrutiny:

Members were informed that increasing capacity meant that Viridor were increasing tonnage not the size of their building.

We were told of the scrutiny taking place of Cardiff and their scrutiny of Viridor with MCC Cabinet Members Jones and Murphy being involved in the process.

Members expressed interest in the offer of a site visit. (ACTION R.J.)

The Chair commented on the LDP bringing extra properties to the area and the subsequent strain on facilities.

Committee's Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the Officers for the report and asked that the next update includes information on the long term plan.

8. Revenue & Capital Monitoring 2016/17 - Period 2 Outturn Forecast Statement

Context:

A report was presented to the Committee to provide Members with information on the forecast revenue outturn position of the Authority at the end of period 2 which represents month 6 financial information for the 2016/17 financial year.

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

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- monitor the achievement of predicted efficiency gains or progress in relation to savings proposals.

Key Issues & recommendations to Cabinet:

That Cabinet notes the extent of forecast revenue overspend at period 2 of £839,000, an improvement of £529,000 on previous reported position at period 1.

That Cabinet expects Chief Officers to continue to review the levels of over and underspends and reallocate budgets to reduce the extent of compensatory positions needing to be reported from month 6 onwards.

That Cabinet appreciates the extent of predicted schools reserve usage and an anticipation that a further 4 schools will be in a deficit position by end of 2016-17.

That Cabinet approves a caveated use of reserves to finance £318,000 employment tribunal costs if the Council's budget is not able to absorb the effect of this extraordinary expenditure over the remaining 6 months of financial year.

That Cabinet considers the capital monitoring, specific over and underspends, and importantly that Cabinet recognises the risk associated with having to rely on a use of capital receipts in the year of sale and the potential for this to have significant revenue pressures should receipts be delayed and temporary borrowing be required.

Member Scrutiny:

A Member asked about tribunal costs and was told that periodically MCC's employment policies were found wanting. And an amount was awarded to an ex-employee of the council.

It was asked why we made fewer council tax benefit payments and were told that we are having less call to, it was not a statutory issue. It was asked if this benefit was not being publicised or are we budgeting too much for this.

It was asked why we are not achieving targets with Community Hubs.

A Member commented that Members are looking to meet with the Borough Theatre, with Officer Ian Saunders to clarify issues. This meeting will be opened up to all members.

A member requested the remit of Strong Communities clarified.

The Chair asked about an overspend in markets. We were answered that staff from Markets are now asked to stay later due to shared access with the Borough Theatre and other related issues. The Chair raised this as concern as markets have always previously been a valuable asset to the council and asked the Chair of Economy and Development to look at this.

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The position of the community asset transfer in Chepstow was asked about and if we were on track to achieve this mandate. In answer the officer replied he was not familiar with this but will facilitate a reply. (ACTION M.H.)

The Members commented that they felt on the periphery of the process and feel that there is potential for MCC to do much better. Members were concerned that they were not asked for ideas/input and they could add value to the process if they got involved.

Members asked for an update on Raglan cattle market and the Head of Operations said he would speak to the Estates department and return to committee with an answer. (ACTION R.H.)

Committee's Conclusion:

The Chair spoke of the hard work of the Select Committee and the large scope of the Strong Communities. It was stressed the importance of quality of scrutiny rather than the quantity.

9. Recycling Contract - Discussion on the background to the procurement and the contract for kerbside recycling.

Context:

A report was presented to update Members on the kerbside dry recycling reprocessing contract. We were joined in the Chamber by Nick Tandy and Nick Hughes-Roberts from Suez UK.

Key Issues:

In light of the Recycling Review Committee has asked for an update and overview of the contract with Suez for the reprocessing and onward management of the dry recycling currently collected at kerbside by MCC.

Member Scrutiny:

When asked questions on tonnage calculations we were told by the Head of Waste and Street Services that MCC is looking for 2-3 month data and will update the committee in January 2017.

The visitors from Suez UK praised MCC for the quality of the recycling materials collected.

When asked about contaminated waste the Head of Waste and Street Services replied that she would rather a resident puts the wrong item in the wrong recycling bag rather than not recycle at all. At present there only 2 education officers available and we have to ensure that the message to recycle is heard by the residents.

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A Member asked how the pilot scheme was progressing and we were told that officers were pleased with the results.

Committee's Conclusion:

The Chair thanked the visitors from Suez UK and looks forward to hearing the results of the pilot scheme.

10. Strong Communities forward Work Programme November 2016

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

- The task and finish group for road safety needs to be established and terms of reference set.
- Street lights still an issue, an update required (ACTION R.H.).
- People Services/wellbeing review.

11. Cabinet and Council forward work programme

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

12. Date and time of next meeting

8th December 2016 10am (pre meeting at 9.30am)

The meeting ended at 13:45