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Brecknockshire 19th September 2016

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BRECKNOCKSHIRE HELD AT COMMITTEE ROOM - NEUADD BRYCHEINIOG, BRECON, POWYS ON MONDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 2016

PRESENT: County Councillor G.W. Ratcliffe (Chairman)

County Councillors PJ Ashton S C Davies, M J Dorrance, M R Harris, G Hopkins,
S McNicholas, DW Meredith, D R Price, K S Silk, D A Thomas, D H Williams and E A York

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors S Davies, M J B Davies,
J C Holmes, ET Morgan, JG Morris, WD Powell, A G Thomas, D G Thomas and T J Van-Rees

In attendance:

Councillor Wynne Jones, Deputy Leader/Cabinet Portfolio Holder: Finance
Councillor John Brunt, Cabinet Portfolio Holder: Highways and Transport

Jeremy Patterson – Chief Executive, Tony Caine –Traffic and Travel Manager and Shane
Thomas – Clerk.

Members stood in silence to remember County Councillor Ann Holloway, the local member for
Welshpool Llanerchdydol who had recently passed away. Councillor Holloway had been a
member of Powys County Council since its inception in 1996.

1.	APOLOGIES	BS35-2016
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Apologies for absence were accepted from County Councillor S. Davies, M.J.B. Davies, J.C
Homles, J.G. Morris, W.D. Powell, D.G. Thomas and T.J. Van-Rees.

2.	MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING	BS36-2016
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The Chairman was authorised to sign the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee
held on Monday 20th June 2016.

3.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	BS37-2016
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There were no declarations of interest from members relating to items to be discussed on the
agenda.

4.	CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS	BS38-2016
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The Chairman reported:

- a. **Community Responders (Llanwrtyd)** - having visited community responders in
Llanwrtyd
- b. **Battle of The Somme** – having attended an event in Hay-on-Wye to commemorate the
Battle of the Somme
- c. **Citizenships** – preparing to officiate at four citizenship ceremonies

5.	BUSINESS SERVICES / CASHLESS SYSTEMS FOR SCHOOLS (9.45 - 10.30)	BS39-2016
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Members welcomed Mark Evans, Head of Business Services and Nicola Williams, Cashless Schools Project Manager to the meeting to update on matters as part of an agreement to provide bi-annual updates. During discussion particular reference was made to:

5a. Business Service Functions

- a. **Budget Reductions** – Business Services functions (income and awards, business support, employment services, customer services and Powys pensions) had been subject to significant budget reductions. Vacancy management, process/service improvements, redesign and moving to a commercial approach are ways in which the service had, and would continue to, meet its saving requirements
- b. **Statutory Requirements** – activities support statutory requirements i.e. to bill and recover business rates/council tax and operate a payroll system. The focus across all business services must be to protect the Council in delivering such functions
- c. **Project Management/Spend to Save** – in order to drive improvement/change funding had been secured against a business case to recruit to project management positions
- d. **Payments for Goods/Services** – billing and payment arrangements use significant resource. There's scope to improve systems that would deliver savings and make best use of resource i.e. by working with suppliers we could reduce the number of invoices that need to be processed or could introduce purchase cards that would remove costly paper/electronic processes
- e. **Income and Awards (Council Tax)** – in response to demand and customer preference the unit had focused on resolving issues at the point of contact. The length of individual contacts would be longer, however, the outcome would, overall, be better for the Council and customer in terms of resolving issues without lengthy repeat contacts/exchanges
- f. **Customer Services** – the function had not been within Business Services for long, however, there would be a review of functions to ensure that contacts to the Authority are responded to in the best way for the resident
- g. **Commercial Approach** – DBS checks have been very successful and the way in which Powys approaches them has been held in very high regard. Seven local authorities have bought into Powys for processing its checks and there's potential for Powys to provide a service across Wales. Links are being made with the Welsh Government. There are also options to provide fraud and payroll services to others that could generate income for the Council (the Powys payroll includes processing and paying over 6,500 staff and processing 4,000 pension payments)

5b. Cashless Systems for Schools Project

- a. **Roll Out** – members will be aware from previous updates that a contract had been awarded in two parts to introduce cashless systems into schools
- b. **Biometric/Photo Identification** – in secondary schools systems would be biometric via. use of thumb prints, in the primary sector photo recognition would be used
- c. **Pilot** – a 73 school day pilot had been undertaken in the south of the County (Crickhowell High School and its feeder primary schools) and had been very positive. The positives included greater take up of school meals (88 more meals had been

provided at the high school), reduced queuing time due to the speedy nature of payments in comparison to cash handling and there had been an increase in take up of Free School Meals, however, there would need to be further work undertaken to review whether the increase in FSM had been as a direct result of the cashless system. There were similar successes for the primary schools but to a lesser extent given there being fewer learners on roll

- d. **Roll Out** – due to the success of the pilot and in particular in relation to the benefits for the secondary sector it had been agreed to roll out to high schools first then to primary schools (it is hoped that roll out to high schools would be completed before the Christmas break 2016.. The provider had been working to develop a bi-lingual system for roll out to Welsh medium high
- e. **Debt** – there would be a facility to enable meals to be purchased up to a value of £5 where cards have no credit. There would be reminders sent to parents/carers when credit is getting low which would, hopefully, avoid such situations. Where credit remains in deficit parents would be asked to ensure that they provide meals for their children i.e. a packed lunch
- f. **Data** – the data collected could be used i.e. for providing information to the Welsh Government with regard to healthy eating

6.	REPORTS FROM AND QUESTIONS TO CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDERS (10.30 - 11.15)	BS40-2016
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Members welcomed the opportunity to receive reports from, and to put questions to, Cabinet Portfolio Holders.

a. Councillor John Brunt – Cabinet Portfolio Holder: Highways and Transport

- i. **Highways, Transport and Recycling Service** – the service operates from 12 main bases and there are 500 full time equivalent employees. At the current time most work is undertaken by operatives employed by Powys
- ii. **Services** – the service provides highway maintenance street lighting, grass cutting, cleansing and street cleaning (there is also a sign shop)
- iii. **Street Lighting** – the annual energy bill alone (including illuminated signs) is in the region of £330k per annum. An LED bulb replacement project which had recently been approved would reduce the energy bill over the longer term. A programme of bulb replacement would commence in November
- iv. **Highways Technical Services** – the service undertakes design work, traffic/highway development control, road safety, manages the highway network, supports utility companies, oversees car parking services, manages public transport and oversees flood risk management and alleviation schemes amongst other services
- v. **Highway Asset/Condition**– the Powys Highway Asset has been valued to be in the region of £4.4 billion. Due to the number of C roads and their condition the condition of the highway network had been ranked as poor overall, however, the condition of A and B routes is very good and they are well maintained
- vi. **Culverts** – there are areas where culverts remain hidden, it would be helpful for members with detail to provide them to the Council
- vii. **Road Safety** – the Welsh Government provide a number of grants to support targeted schemes
- viii. **Utility Works (Highways)** – the Authority operates a system of reviewing areas where utility companies have undertaken works and check on the finish of works after repair etc. The Authority could instruct work to be undertaken or carry out correction

works and charge for a period of up to two years after works/disturbance. There are monitoring systems operated by the Council

- ix. **Car Parks/Enforcement** – the Council operates 75 car parks, of which 35 are pay and display, there are plans to introduce charges at a further 10 parks and possibly others in due course
- x. **Fleet Management** – the Authority operates its own vehicle fleet which comprises of 536 vehicles which are maintained using three workshop sites. The annual fuel bill is in the region of £1.4 million. There are proposals to work with the Fire Authority to operate a workshop that will maintain vehicles for both organisations to reduce costs, provide a better facility and make best use of combined resource. A member expressed concern with regard to the proposed location of the facility in Llandrindod given the area covered by the Fire Authority
- xi. **Public/School Transport** – the service provides home to school transport under contract to the education service at a cost of in the region of £42k per day. Members were asked to encourage older residents that would qualify for free bus passes to apply because the Welsh Government use that information to provide some funding to Councils. Members were reminded that young people are able to use public transport and to travel anywhere in Powys for £1 per trip as part of a local scheme to encourage use of public transport
- xii. **Commissioning of Services** – most services would be considered for the commissioning approach and it is likely that works would be undertaken by firms working under contract with Powys to provide services
- xiii. **Flooding** – the impact of recent flooding in the Ystradgynlais area had given cause for concern and as a result the Authority would be reviewing its procedures for emergency planning. There were a number of culverts that were blocked which would be cleared
- xiv. **Grass Cutting** – there had been some teething issues with regard to the operation of the tender which had been awarded to a contractor for providing a grass cutting service. Quality would continue to be monitored. This year had been the first year of a two year contract, it is expected that next year there would be an improvement given the lessons learnt from year 1. In fairness to the Members welcomed the opportunity to receive reports from, and to put questions to, Cabinet Portfolio Holders.

b. Councillor Wynne Jones – Deputy Leader/Cabinet Portfolio Holder: Finance

- i. **Portfolio Responsibilities** - the Portfolio had been extended to include performance management, business, employment, legal, communications and democratic services
- ii. **Non Domestic Rate Relief** – an initiative supported by the Welsh Government to provide business rate relief to smaller business had been extended by a year through to 2016/17. It is likely that the Welsh Government would introduce a more permanent agreement to support smaller businesses. Members were encouraged to promote the fund
- iii. **2016/17 Budget Position** – as at the end of May the overspend against budget had been £3.753 million. The Portfolio Holder would report a budget overspend of £5.725 million to the next Cabinet meeting. It's normal at this point in the year for budgets to be overspent but there are normally sound reasons and an expectation that the budget would recover during the year to be brought back to balance at the financial year end. The main areas of overspend continue to be in social care and schools (as at July 2016 the Social Care budget had overspent by £5.016 million and the overspend was increasing and schools had overspent by £531k, however, the overspend was reducing)
- iv. **Tipping Point** – action would need to be taken to address spends and deliver within budgets. The next two years would be very important for the Council in terms of managing

- its budget and achieving savings. Without actions being taken to address spends the Council would be at its tipping point
- v. **Social Care /Schools Budgets** – the areas of most spend are social care and school budgets. To date the delegated schools budget has been protected as best it could be, however, actions to reduce spends may reduce funding provided to schools via. the delegated budget. Should Council agree to protect spends in the areas of social care and schools there would be a greater impact on all other areas of the Council. A member queried why year on year overspends in Adult Social Care had not be identified in risk assessments and actions to recover positions taken. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that appropriate risk assessments had been undertaken and that there areas under review in adult social care and schools that could deliver savings. Against the national trend the Powys school population would continue to reduce up until 2035
 - vi. **Forensic Accountant (Adult Social Care)** – in view of the importance of reviewing the adult social care budget and areas for saving a specialist accountant would be reviewing the budget against spend to identify areas for review. It is hoped that the work undertaken would bring the year end overspend down to £1.5 million
 - vii. **Adult Social Care** – the drive behind the Welsh Government to provide care at home would prove more costly in Powys for a number of reasons. In other areas providing care at home would be better and deliver savings
 - viii. **Residential Care (BUPA Contract)** – BUPA had agreed to extend its contact with the Council for providing residential care until the 2016/17 financial year end (BUPA had increased its costs for the financial year and officers had re-negotiated the contract). The costs for a contract beyond 2017 were not affordable for the Council so Cabinet had agreed to the setting up of a trading company which would deliver care and within the budget identified in the Medium Term Financial Plan
 - ix. **Adult Social Care (90 Day Forecast)** – actions taken by staff would be monitored via. 90 day forecasts and, where appropriate, inaction addressed
 - x. **Pension Fund** – the Portfolio Holder expects to be asked to undertake an evaluation of the Council's pension fund with a view to it being reviewed to ensure that the Council is investing the right levels of funding
 - xi. **Living Wage** – the Council remains committed to the living wage, however, there are options moving forward to re-consider. There are pressures due to meeting current levels. The matter would remain under consideration by Cabinet
 - xii. **Medium Term Financial Plan (Savings)** – a further £5 million of savings could be needed for 2017/18 in addition to savings already planned. Additional savings required for 2019/20 (year 3 of the plan) could be as much as another £10 million
 - xiii. **Welsh Government Formula Review (Rural Authorities)** – the Cabinet Secretary for Education (Kirsty Williams) had negotiated a floor which would benefit Powys and other rural authorities. The Welsh Government had recognised the rural position and the additional costs associated with service delivery and would be likely to review its funding formula. It is hoped that future budgets would deliver additional funding on a more permanent basis as opposed to operating the floor arrangement as in previous years
 - xiv. **Brexit/Institute of Fiscal Studies** – the long term forecast (for the next 11 years) is of reduced funding to support the operation of the public sector and services. The outcome of Brexit could also have a significant impact on the funding available
 - xv. **3 Year Plan** – Cabinet would be reviewing the budget with a particular focus on those services it operates contracts to deliver. There could be issues to address should the budget not allow for contractual obligations to be kept
 - xvi. **Iceland Investment** – the Authority had had its investment returned. The investment would recover interest at the same rate as other UK investments
 - xvii. **2017/18 Welsh Government Provisional Budget Settlement** – the Welsh Government would announce provisional settlement information on 19th October

- xviii. **Retention of Young People / Promoting Powys** – members would welcome all efforts to support businesses, retain young people and promoting Powys as a place to live in. Members would welcome detail in relation to activities to support growing Powys in this regard and requested that the relevant Portfolio Holder provide an update to the next meeting. The Portfolio Holder (Councillor Avril York) referred to the success of the annual Powys Business Awards and the hosting of high profile events i.e. Tour of Britain. The Local Development Plan would also allow for businesses to grow/thrive
- xix. **South Powys** – members from the Ystradgynlais area are receiving views from residents regarding their feelings of not being part of Powys. It's the general feeling in the area that services placed elsewhere would be retained over the Ystrad area
- xx. **Performance Management** – it would be important for Cabinet to have systems that allow for performance review. Challenge and scrutiny are viewed by Cabinet as very important
- xxi. **Corporate Assessment** – a financial assessment would be held shortly, there would be a governance assessment in October/November and towards the end of the year/early 2017 the focus would be on transformation
- xxii. **Communications** – there had been post reductions to achieve savings. Use of technology would be progressed i.e. social media platforms (twitter, Facebook). Use of videos/short films had been positive to get messages across
- xxiii. **Member Support** – a member urged focusing on member support and in particular in relation to assisting members in contacting Council services in relation to matters that impact on the electorate (casework). The Portfolio Holder would review support in this area contractor they were provided with details of areas to maintain, some of the areas previous maintained might not have been passed to the contractor. Members with concerns or issues were encouraged to raise them with the service
- xxiv. **Depot Review** – the Authority was undertaking a depot review and it was noted that there are rumours locally about the Ystrad facility. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that we are in a period of review and considering options, no decisions had been taken to date. It is appreciated that it's an unsettling time for communities

7.	REPORTS FROM AND QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS SERVING ON OUTSIDE BODIES	BS41-2016
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Members welcomed the opportunity to receive reports from, and to put questions to, members serving on outside bodies. Having reviewed the details provided regarding member representation on groups it was agreed that members should review the list and contact the clerk in relation to updating the content if memberships/groups had changed. The clerk agreed to link with Councillor Melanie Davies regarding her membership on the Management Board of Theatr Brycheiniog and whether she wished to continue her membership. It was agreed that if Councillor Davies stood down that Councillor David Meredith should take that position.

8.	SHIRE REVIEW	BS42-2016
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Members were reminded that the pilot arrangement which had been agreed by Council to move to a bi-monthly arrangement for shire meetings was due for review by the Council in January 2017. Given the need to report to Democratic Services in November members had been asked to complete an individual questionnaire with regard to their views on shire meetings and functions. To date 18 returns had been received from Council. The clerk agreed to re-circulate the questionnaire to the shire.

9.	ROAD SAFETY AND TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SCHEMES	BS43-2016
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Members welcomed Tony Caine, Traffic and Travel Manager to the meeting for this item of business.

- 9a. **Pontneddfechain, Tawe Uchaf** – members **RESOLVED** to uphold the objections and implement the revised proposal as show on the plan attached to the report. It was noted that there are areas near the bridge in Pontneddfechain, Tawe Uchaf that were within Neath Port Talbot. Neath Port Talbot had decided not to engage with the Council regarding parking arrangements.

While discussing matters it was noted that changes had been introduced at the Priory Hill signals in Brecon without coming back to the shire for a view. Brecon Town members welcomed the approach taken, however, it was agreed that there should be a report back to the next shire meeting.

A member suggested it would be helpful to know where certain works to roads, bridges and drainage etc. are within the capital programme. A summary of the capital programme should be reported back to the next shire meeting.

10.	CORRESPONDENCE	BS44-2016
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There were no items of correspondence.

11.	DATE OF NEXT MEETING	BS45-2016
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The next meeting would be held on Monday 5th December 2016 and not 5th September as stated on the agenda.

**County Councillor G.W. Ratcliffe
(Chairman)**

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