

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BRECKNOCKSHIRE COMMITTEE
HELD AT NEUADD BRYCHEINIOG, BRECON ON
WEDNESDAY 25th JANUARY 2017**

Present: County Councillor M.J. Dorrance – Vice-Chairman (in the Chair)

County Councillors P.J. Ashton, S.C. Davies, S. Davies, M.R. Harris, G.G. Hopkins, S. McNicholas, D.W. Meredith, W.D. Powell, D.R. Price, K.S. Silk, D.A. Thomas, D.G. Thomas, T.J. Van-Rees and D.H. Williams.

In attendance:

Councillor R.G. Brown – Deputy Leader/Cabinet Portfolio Holder: Commissioning and Procurement/Children’s Services

David Powell – Strategic Director: Resources, Martin Jones - NGA Programme Manager Wales – BT Group and Shane Thomas – Clerk.

1.	APOLOGIES	BS1-2017
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Apologies for absence were accepted from County Councillors G.W. Ratcliffe and S. Williams.

2.	MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGs	BS2-2017
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The Chairman was authorised to sign the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on Monday 5th December 2016.

3.	CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS	BS3-2017
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In the absence of the Chairman the Vice-Chair raised the following matters:

- a. **Blaubeuren 750th Anniversary** – a number of members had received invites to attend a celebration at Blaubeuren to mark 750 years of the town (the earliest historical record of the town dated back to 1267). Celebrations would begin with a festive evening on Saturday 25th March. It would be usual for the Chair and/or Vice-Chair to attend twinning events, however, on this occasion neither would be able to. It was agreed to extend the invite to attend across the membership of the shire and that the Chair should be approached with regard to use of the Chairman’s fund to purchase a gift for sending to Blaubeuren to mark this special occasion. It would be usual for members attending to fund their own transport. Options to apply for EU grant funding to meet attendance costs would be explored
- b. **Brecon Barracks (Proposed Closure – 2027)** –the MOD had agreed to host a session this afternoon at Brecon Barracks from 2 p.m. The Town Council, Brecon Beacons National Parks and Brecknockshire members had been invited to attend

4.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	BS4-2017
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There were no declarations of interest received from members in relation to items to be discussed on the agenda.

4a.	SUPERFAST CYMRU	BS4a-2017
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Members welcomed Martin Jones, NGA Programme Manager Wales – BT Group to the meeting to provide an update in relation to the roll out of Superfast Cymru. During discussion particular reference was made to:

- a. **Network** – to date the programme has delivered an improved network. Coverage across Wales is at 88.9% with access speeds of 24mb. The programme is on target to achieve 90% coverage across Wales by June. Coverage in Powys is at 62% and in Brecon and Radnor 63% are able to connect to fibre broadband
- b. **Comparative Costs/Access** – despite views to the contrary UK access to the web is very good and the costs are reasonably cheap compared to other EU countries
- c. **Connections** – dwellings which are within 3km of exchange boxes are connected, for dwellings that are in excess of 3km from exchanges it would be usual for there to be a fibre connection direct to the property. Where connection costs would exceed a set limit those areas would sit outside of the programme. Areas which sit outside of the programme would be considered and there are a range of options that could deliver a service i.e. community schemes etc. The programme recognises that 5% of Wales would not be connected due to cost i.e. very isolated dwellings
- d. **Wayleaves** – there are in the region of 29,000 properties where access to land and permissions from landowners has prevented the network being upgraded to allow for connections. The Welsh Government had been kept updated and would be working with BT to look to arrive at appropriate arrangements. The normal payment to the landowner for access would be in the region of £800. Where there are issues local members could help with arrangements for access and in talking to landowners
- e. **Developments** – developers should engage with BT at the onset. There would be no charge to introduce networks at new developments where there would be thirty or more dwellings, however, where developments have been undertaken and there had been no regard to network connections or engagement with BT there would be a charge
- f. **Bwlch** – the local member for Bwlch reported that there had been raised expectations in the area for years and numerous statements that fibre would be available. The community had been holding out for the programme to deliver better connections in the area, however, it is not clear whether the network would be upgraded and website updates seemed to be misleading. Martin agreed to check with the programme and to update the members
- g. **Cwmtwrch** – the local member requested detail in relation to the roll out of the programme in her area and in particular when networks would become available. Martin would report back
- h. **Talgarth** – a member reported that there were areas between good connections in Talgarth where access seemed to be much poorer and limited. Martin would review provision in the area but would welcome more detail from the member who raised the matter (Councillor Steve Davies). The member from Gwernyfed (Councillor Geraint Hopkins) also reported on areas of poor and limited access. Again, the member was encouraged to discuss the detail with Martin

- i. **Fibre Connections (Schools)** – a programme to connect all schools to ensure good access had been progressed by the Welsh Government some years ago
- j. **Delivery on the Programme (Welsh Government)** – despite damaging media reports regarding the programme and criticism of its delivery the Welsh Government had praised and recognised BT for the work it had undertaken to upgrade the network
- k. **Broadband Connections (Network Speeds)** – as people opt to move to fibre connections it would free space on older networks, however, the benefit of fewer users accessing the older network would be minimal. A fibre solution would be the best option for speedy access

5.	REPORTS FROM AND QUESTIONS TO CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDERS	BS5-2017
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Members welcomed the opportunity to receive reports from, and to put questions to, Cabinet Portfolio Holders.

a. Councillor Graham Brown – Deputy Leader/Cabinet Portfolio Holder: Commissioning and Procurement and Children’s Services

- i. **Libraries (Co-location with the Department for Work and Pensions)** – the Department for Work and Pensions had approach the Authority with a view to locating at library sites in Ystradgynlais, Newtown and Llandrindod. Local member would be kept updated and informed. A member suggested introducing coffee facilities at Ystradgynlais library, the Portfolio Holder would raise the matter with the relevant manager
- ii. **Llanwrtyd Library** – the local member urged the speedy delivery of training by the Authority to volunteers in order that they could staff the library and meet the standards imposed by the Welsh Government in order to retain the facility
- iii. **Hay-on-Wye Library (The Book Town)** – there had been significant objections locally with regard to reviewing provision. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the proposal had been to move the library so that would operate from a new school site once it had been built. Hours of operating etc. would need to be considered. The Authority had attempted to engage with the community regarding an asset transfer. To date the Town Council had indicated an interest, however, proposals had not been received. A local group had arranged a public meeting on Monday of next week to discuss matters but had done so without engaging with the Council, the Portfolio Holder could not attend the date which had been by the group
- iv. **Commercial Services** – the Commercial Services Team continues to support services in reviewing spends and delivering on the commissioning and procurement approach. In this regard the team has supported delivering on savings running into the millions. There had been a focus on reviewing the 3rd party spend which is in the region of £140 million per annum. More recently the payment system had been reviewed. Members were informed that it costs the Authority in excess of £40 to raise an invoice and recover funds and that we issue around 100,000 invoices per annum
- v. **Theatr Brycheiniog / Coliseum** – there had been an issue in that the local cinema (the Coliseum) had expressed concern with regard to Theatr Brycheiniog applying to show film. The Portfolio Holder would be meeting with both organisations later to discuss the matter. Whilst understanding the position with

- the local cinema it was reported that the theatre would be looking to show non-mainstream films which would not impact on the cinema and its profits
- vi. **Children's Services** – Amanda Lewis had recently left the Authority, Amanda held the position of Strategic Director: People which included Director of Social Services. In the light of the position Carol Shillabeer, Director of the Health Board had assumed the role of Director of Social Services and Phil Hodgson had been appointed Head of Operations for Social Services. The arrangement was cost neutral. There had been recent changes with a view to strengthening arrangements for supporting children which included a move to locality based services (multi-agency teams). The position would be monitored and there are significant benefits to be achieved through working locally and across agencies (there are four locality teams operating in Powys). The Portfolio Holder suggested an update on the structure and arrangements for the local delivery of services to the next meeting or possibly to the new Council after May
 - vii. **Fostering Services** – support for foster carers had been strengthened in a bid to provide a better service for those operating within Powys. It's very important to provide a strong support network in order to build provision and reduce the use of agencies. The Portfolio Holder assured members that he had been re-assured that changes introduced to support foster caring (which had also delivered on savings) had maintained, even improved, levels of service. Members were reminded that the focus would always be on retaining, and improving, levels of service. Quality and levels of service are monitored with service user input
 - viii. **Welsh Speaking Educational Psychologists** – a member requesting an update in relation to recruitment issues was urged to contact the portfolio holder for education (Councillor Arwel Jones)
 - ix. **Welsh Government Funding (Autism)** – a member referred to the Welsh Government having provided targeted funding some years back to support autism services. The member expects the Welsh Government to seek reassurance shortly regarding the use of funds provided for such purposes
 - x. **Out of County Placements** – placements would be used as required. In most situations placements in county or close to the home were preferred
 - xi. **Respite (Camlais/Bannau – Brecon)** – spare capacity at both sites would be made available for purchase and could become an income stream

b. Councillor Rosemarie Harris – Cabinet Portfolio Holder: Property, Housing, Catering and Cleaning, Armed Forces, Business and Customer Services and Standards/Monitoring Officer

- i. **Property** – officers are continuing to consider options for the property portfolio which include sale, investment, leasing etc. Local members would be engaged in relation to considerations for their areas. The Portfolio Holder informed members that she chairs the Authority's Strategic Asset Management Board
- i. **StAMP (Strategic Asset Management Plan)** – members had been invited to attend StAMP meetings to discuss options for the management/treatment of properties/assets. Members were urged to attend meetings to input
- ii. **Agile Working** – the programme would be progressed in order to support accommodation reviews and provide a better experience for those employees who would benefit from working this way. Members were encouraged to visit an agile working space which was on the 2nd Floor, Powys County Hall to view arrangements
- iii. **Ladywell House, Newtown** – the Council would be looking to purchase the premise. There are letting options and the Council would be sharing the building

with a tenant. Councillor David Price, Chair of the Planning Committee reminded members of the difficulties with Welshpool and the facilities in terms of public access to Neuadd Maldwyn. Ladywell House could offer an alternative option which might be more appropriate for such events

- iv. **Brecon Cultural Hub** – officers are supporting the creation of the hub which would be a £10 million project within Brecon town. There are issues relating to the building being ‘grade 2 and listed’ which would need to be regarded
- v. **Archives** – the Authority had been found failing in its archive provision and had undertaken significant capital works to upgrade facilities at Ddole Road, Llandrindod Wells. Members were encouraged to visit the facility
- vi. **Judge’s Lodgings (Presteigne)** – the lodgings had been offered for asset transfer and a Trustee group had entered into an agreement with the Council for the site. The Authority had provided £50k to undertake much needed capital works which included a significant sum for the roof
- vii. **Gypsy and Travellers** – the Authority had been found lacking in its provision to meet the recognised need. Further units would be provided using Welsh Government funding at Brecon (3 additional units), Welshpool and Machynlleth. Arrangement for planning to provide a temporary stopping site for travellers for the annual Royal Welsh Show had proven very positive (the Council and Royal Welsh Agricultural Society fund the site equally). The local member for Llanfan-fawr praised arrangements and the planned approach
- viii. **Right to Buy** – the previous application to the Welsh Government to suspend the right to buy had been unsuccessful. A further application, supported by housing associations, had been submitted and it’s hoped that this application would be approved
- ix. **Affordable Housing** – there’s a recognised shortfall in affordable housing. The Authority had been working with property owners with a view making properties available for rent. The Portfolio Holder agreed to link with the Ministry of Defence with regard to options for housing that becomes available

Members **RESOLVED** to exclude the public for the following item of business on the grounds that there would be disclosure to them of exempt information under category 3 of The Local Authorities (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007)

- x. **Joint Venture Company** – members requested a Council seminar or similar in order that they be updated on progress given that the position was unclear. During discussion it was reported that officers were in negotiations with Kier regarding contract detail. Members requested scrutiny of the contract prior to any award and expressed concern regarding the absence of member involvement in the tendering and award process. The Strategic Director reminded members that they were removed from tendering and award process for due reason and in accordance with commissioning and procurement guidance/legislation

Members **RESOLVED** to move back into public session for the remainder of the meeting.

- xi. **Older People’s Accommodation** – the Council has in the region of 2000 designated dwellings and would be looking to provide to meet the need
- xii. **Supporting Local Businesses/Loan Scheme** – when considering build projects there would be as strong focus on supporting local tradesmen etc. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that an agreement had been entered into to ensure the use of

- local timber in relation to some developments. The Council also operates a loan scheme which developers could access
- xiii. **Syrian Refugees** – the Council would play its part in re-settling Syrian refugees in line with a national programme. There are two accepting areas (Newtown and Ystradgynlais). Communities in both areas had been very welcoming
 - xiv. **Armed Forces Covenant** – the Portfolio Holder chairs the Covenant Board. The Board can provide funding to support activities which link to the forces (serving, ex-serving and forces families/communities). It would be important to maximise the drawdown of funding to support Powys projects. There are two funding streams, one for projects of a value of up to £20k, the other up to £200k
 - xv. **Catering and Cleaning Services** – the service has an annual budget of in the region of £6million. The service continues to be recognised and has received a number of high level awards. It was reported that catering services and facilities provided at the offices of the Council would be under review i.e. canteen facilities in Brecon were being considered and coffee machines from offices would be removed across all sites. It was felt by members that the canteen facility at Neuadd Brycheiniog could be made available for use by the general public and promoted locally
 - xvi. **Cashless System for Schools (Business Services)** – business services are supporting the roll out of school cashless payment systems which have proven positive and welcome. The roll out would focus on high schools first then be introduced in the primary sector
 - xvii. **Maintenance and Upkeep of Council Estates** – the focus of efforts continues to be on delivering improvements in order to meet requirements under the Welsh Housing Quality Standard. Although estate maintenance and upkeep work is important it would be prioritised after WHQS work
 - xviii. **Garage Rentals** - there are different arrangements in different areas for reviewing Council garage space (some have been levelled to make space for parking, others sold, some rented out etc.). In some areas there are concerns regarding the rental of garages by people who are not local. The Portfolio Holder agreed to request an update on the operation of garages (by area) from the Head of Service (Simon Inkson) in order to update those members who have garages in their wards
 - xix. **Housing (Schools/Cemeteries)** – there are properties which historically were linked to schools/cemeteries etc. and sit outside of the general housing portfolio which have come into disrepair and could be made available for social housing i.e. old caretaker houses and cemetery keepers. It was felt by members with dwellings in their wards that the Council should review them with a view to making them available. The Portfolio Holder agreed to raise the matter with the Head of Housing
 - xx. **Universal Credit** – a member requested detail in relation to rent arrears in terms of whether the Authority had identified any link between arrears and the introduction of universal credit (universal credit would see one benefit payment to the head of household). Also, where the Authority would support those in receipt of benefits and were experiencing difficulties
 - xxi. **Brecon Cultural Hub** – during works asbestos had been exposed. There would be a significant cost of in the region of £207k to remove it. In the light of the position the matter would be discussed at tomorrow's Council meeting. It was noted that the Regimental Museum of the Royal Welsh would be entering into an agreement to provide taster exhibits at the new site once open/in use. The regeneration benefit to Brecon Town and the immediate community during the

build phase would be recognised (local employment etc.). A member requested details of schemes and how the local economy would be engaged/supported
xxii. **Rorkes Drift** – there had been an approach by KwaZulu, South Africa to enter into a twinning arrangement on a national level to recognise the war back in 1879. It is likely that there would be media attention etc.

Members thanked the Portfolio Holders for their updates and for responding to issues raised.

6.	REPORTS FROM AND QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS SERVING ON OUTSIDE BODIES	BS6-2017
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Members welcomed the opportunity to receive reports from, and to put questions to, members serving on outside bodies.

a. **Brecon and Radnorshire Sports Partnership** – while recognising the request to appoint to the position following the resignation of Councillor York as County Councillor for Builth Wells it was agreed that it should be for the new Council to appoint after the May elections. The clerk would inform those who support the partnership.

7.	CORRESPONDENCE	BS7-2017
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There were no items of correspondence.

8.	DATE OF NEXT MEETING	BS8-2017
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The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 12th April 2017.

County Councillor M.J. Dorrance
Vice-Chairman
(in the Chair)