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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COMMITTEE ROOM A - COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS, POWYS ON THURSDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2015

PRESENT

County Councillor E M Jones (Chair)

County Councillors K W Curry, D O Evans, V E Evans, G Hopkins, D C Jones,
R H Mills, H Lewis, ET Morgan, D R Price, K S Silk, R G Thomas and S L Williams

In attendance: County Councillors W J T Powell

Officers: Clive Jones, Professional Lead, Trading Standards, Fay Smith,
Partnership Analyst, Hugo Van Rees, Estate Manager and David Bradley, Senior
Manager, Regeneration and Property

1.	APOLOGIES	PLSC12-2015
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors D H Williams and G Williams.

The Acting Chair paid tribute to the former Chair for his contribution to the work of the Committee.

2.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	PLSC13-2015
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There were no declarations of interest.

3.	DISCLOSURES OF PARTY WHIPS	PLSC14-2015
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There were no declarations of party whips.

4.	MINUTES	PLSC15-2015
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The Chair was authorised to sign the Minutes of the last meeting, held on 2 October 2015, as a correct record.

5.	CRIME AND DISORDER	PLSC16-2015
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Documents:

- Community Safety Partnership Update
- Changes since last report to Committee

Issues:

- Following a scrutiny review into the Enforcement of Dog Fouling, recommendations were put forward to Cabinet following further discussions at Committee. The Cabinet agreed that the existing Memorandum of Understanding with the Police was generally fit for purpose but, as it had been in existence for a number of years it should be

subject to review. Additional training would be provided in the near future with the Police. A communications strategy is being developed and would be issued shortly. A survey of residents would be commenced shortly to inform the process.

- Governance of Community Safety Partnership – the Strategy Group has been reviewed and now meets every 8 weeks. Some issues, including counter terrorism, serious crime, integrated offender management and community cohesion are not mandatory but are dealt with by the Strategy Group in addition to their other functions. It had been intended that the CSP report to the Transformation Board but, following review, it now reports direct to the Local Service Board. The Prevent duty is a new responsibility offering support to those vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. A multi-agency Channel Panel has been formed, but has not yet had to meet, which would aim to divert anyone who may be at risk.
- Performance information – there has been an increase in crime in the period since January. Across the Force area this increase has been 8.8% with Powys showing an increase of 7.7%. Within the county there has been an increase in robbery – this is an increase of 5 offences. There has been an increase in sexual offences but this is attributed to an increase in confidence in reporting offences following a series of high profile cases. A study of the increase in violence against the person has been undertaken but no ‘hot spots’ have been identified. This is replicated across the Force leading the Police to address this as one of their main priorities. Members were concerned at the increase in figures and questioned whether this could be attributed to current austerity. Whilst this has been reflected in the past, Powys does not have a traditional night-time economy although some crime has been alcohol related. The Welsh Government is undertaking a consultation exercise on the night-time economy together with a separate exercise into minimum unit pricing for alcohol. Anti-social behaviour has decreased by 26% in Powys (25.3% across the Force).
- Road Safety – a slight increase in the number of younger people involved in accidents has been recorded. The CSP are in the process of amending courses to address this. There has been increased motorcycle activity on weekdays and is no longer predominantly weekend. Motorcyclists represent 1% of road users but account for 30% of KSI (killed or seriously injured) accidents. This will make it challenging to meet the Welsh Government target for reduction in accidents. There has been considerable activity in working with bikers from outside the County.
- Domestic Abuse - this cross cutting issue now falls under the Children and Young People’s Partnership (CYPP). The whole service is currently under review although the CSP will continue to undertake homicide reviews.

County Councillor D R Price arrived at 10.30am

- Acquisitive Crime – Ringmaster has proved successful and is likely to develop into a system for the whole of the Dyfed Powys area. Members queried whether there was an actual fall in incidents or if a shortage of resources had led to fewer incidents being reported. It had been expected that data would have been transferred to the Police but there had been some delay. There were further concerns that one of the benefits of Ringmaster was that it concentrated on very local issues and this could be diminished as the system was extended over a wider area. The service works with Social Care to address safeguarding issues. Assets of £3.1M

- have been restrained. Members questioned whether budget cuts would lead to an increase in crime and how funding or proceeds of crime were distributed between partners in joint operations. A priority for the service is to identify income from partner agencies and it was increasingly necessary to be inventive in how to secure funds. Some costs will fall to the Crown Prosecution Service or HMRC and income is not always realised. Prior to a prosecution, a decision is taken as to which partner organisation is best placed to lead the case. A recent operation resulted in 6000 counterfeit cigarettes being seized – more sophisticated crimes are taking place and these are to be addressed on a regional basis.
- Community Cohesion – there are 8 Co-ordinators across Dyfed Powys in this Welsh Government initiative. Their duties include immigration, gypsies and travellers, hate crime and modern slavery. Funding has been agreed for 2016/17.

Outcomes:

- An anonymised case study demonstrating IOM work will be provided to the next meeting
- Members asked that the statistic regarding motorcyclists representing 1% of road users but 30% of KSI incidents be advertised

6.	COUNTY FARMS	PLSC17-2015
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The Committee was briefed by the Estate Manager and Portfolio Holder on progress within the Estate.

Key Issues:

- Farm Delivery Plan (FDP) has been approved by the Portfolio Holder but has been put on hold pending completion of the Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP). When that document is approved by Cabinet a revised Corporate Asset Plan (CAP) will be produced which will include the FDP.
- The existing FDP contains live appendices detailing those holdings subject to review
- Capital receipts of £2.8M are expected within years 1 to 3, £1.625M within years 4 to 6 and £675K in years 7 to 9
- The number of holdings is expected to reduce to 145 in the initial stages, 137 in years 4 to 6 and 132 in years 7 to 9. The majority of disposals will be in Montgomeryshire.
- It is expected that revenue income will be maintained over the life of the Plan
- Condition surveys on 93 holdings have been completed – 57 holdings are in need of urgent attention requiring investment of £237K which will include the removal of asbestos. If this is projected across the entire Estate, it is anticipated that an investment of £615K will be required.
- Surveys have identified costs of £150K for electrical works at the 57 priority holdings which, if typical across the Estate, will require an investment of £389K
- 9 of the 57 properties do not have central heating
- All but one of those 9 properties have been let under pre secure 1995 tenancies

- The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the work would be procured from local contractors
- Members queried the methodology for determining which holdings were to be disposed of. This would tend to be those which were poorly equipped or represented a significant liability, particularly those where there were no agricultural buildings. It was envisaged that the total area of the Estate would remain broadly the same. Local Members would be advised at an early stage if a disposal were to be contemplated in their ward.
- Members recalled that an earlier version of the FDP had sought to encourage installation of renewables either by the Council or by Tenants and sought details of progress. Tenants are consulted regularly and had been advised that the Council would support such installations. Several sites had been considered for renewables but the payback terms had not been adequate. Only one solar system has been installed. The Estate Manager thought that changes in FIT payments would make future installations less likely. Members were of the opinion that the Authority had not been sufficiently proactive in accessing renewables and noted that the FIT scheme had been extended to the end of March 2016.
- Welsh Government initiative to review local authority holdings across Wales – Members were concerned that the project had ceased after only one year and that the Authority had been left with costs of £40K. The consultant appointed had not secured funding from other local authorities as identified in his remit. Members wanted to know what actions had been taken with the Welsh Government to address the injustice. The Portfolio Holder reported that the Welsh Government had insisted funding be repaid as the Plan had not come to fruition. Members were particularly concerned that this issue had been highlighted to Cabinet on previous occasions and by the Internal Audit Working Group yet no action had been taken.
- Tenancies – 60 were farm business tenancies, 25 retirement tenancies and 45 lifetime tenancies. Whilst the service is actively involved if a tenant wishes to vacate, there are no proactive measures to encourage older tenants to move on due to insufficient capital funding being available.
- The feasibility of increasing forestation to provide woodchip for boilers is currently being assessed

Outcome:

A letter be set to the Cabinet regarding the issues surrounding the hosting of a consultant at the request of the Welsh Government and the subsequent costs incurred

County Councillors K Silk and R Mills left the meeting at 12 noon.

7.	BRECON CULTURAL HUB	PLSC18-2015
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The Committee received a presentation on progress with the Brecon Cultural Hub

Key Issues:

- Planning consent was obtained in March 2015

- Construction cost pressures had led to an increase in potential costs of £1.4M over the whole project
- The consultant, design team and contractor developed a plan to reduce costs whilst protecting grant eligible work and satisfying the Brecon Beacons National Park Planning Authority
- A variation of Planning consent was agreed in October 2015
- Currently the market is being tested with completion by February 2016
- A bat license has been applied for
- Alternative funding is being researched although some partners have already agreed to increases in funding. The Heritage Lottery Fund have agreed to accept a submission for additional funding.
- It is still hoped to complete the project by July 2017
- Members queried the prospects for further increases in costs or reduction in the size of the project – it was hoped that a contract price would be fixed in April 2016. There was further concern that the project might fail as there was no additional finance available within the Authority. It was noted that budget proposals contained an inflation figure of 1% but that labour costs were currently running at 7% and construction costs at 20% inflation. The increases were not technically inflation but a national ‘all in tender price index’. Whether this would be revised once the current low price of oil was factored in remains to be seen. It could potentially affect a number of other capital projects. The Committee queried why the cheaper option had not been considered initially – they were advised that there had been considerable negotiation between the Authority, the planning authority and the Design Council of Wales over an 18 month period but that considerable pressure had had to be applied as budgets reduce and costs increase
- Members further queried the accuracy of figures quoted and cited recent examples where quotes had been in excess of the costs actually incurred – a variation of 10 – 15% accuracy either way was considered acceptable in large projects
- The project was estimated to cost £8.5M but a detailed breakdown would be circulated to Members after the meeting

8.	STREET LIGHTING	PLSC19-2015
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Documents:

- Scrutiny summary report

Issues:

- The Portfolio Holder for Finance had requested that work be undertaken to assess the effects of the switch of streetlights on crime and accident statistics
- The Group studied research from across the country and within Powys and could find no evidence to suggest that there had been an increase in crime or accidents following the switch off of streetlights
- The Committee was informed that there had been a reduction in energy consumption of two thirds following the initial switch off and subsequent replacement of some traditional sodium lights with LEDs

9.	WORK PROGRAMME	PLSC20-2015
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Documents:

- Work Programme

Issues:

- The Committee had an extensive remit and Members were concerned that the current salami slicing approach to reducing budgets could have a significant impact on services
- It was believed that scrutiny should be concentrating on the effects of budget cuts on services rather than costs per se
- Members considered there was a lack of direction to officers
- Members believed they would have no alternative but to agree a budget
- The Finance Scrutiny Panel was in the process of monitoring the budget setting process and would be making recommendations to Cabinet shortly
- There were further concerns regarding IT systems as Member had noticed a number of failures in recent notifications. Furthermore, there was concern that the Cabinet were now being issued with iPads and queried the cost and reasoning of this decision.

10.	CORRESPONDENCE	PLSC21-2015
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There were no items of correspondence.

County Councillor E M Jones (Chair)