

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMY, RESIDENTS, COMMUNITIES AND GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BY TEAMS ON MONDAY, 18 MAY 2020

PRESENT: County Councillor M J Dorrance (Chair)
County Councillors K W Curry, G Jones, I McIntosh, J Pugh, D Selby and L Skilton

Cabinet Portfolio Holders In Attendance: County Councillors A Davies (Portfolio Holder for Finance, Countryside and Transport), P Davies (Portfolio Holder for Education and Property) and J Evans (Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Housing and Regulatory Services).

Officers: C Turner (Chief Executive), N Young (Corporate Director - Transformation), Nigel Brinn (Corporate Director - Economy and Environment), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager and Head of Democratic Services)

1.	APOLOGIES
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There were no apologies for absence.

2.	DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPS
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The Committee received no disclosures of prohibited party whips which a Member had been given in relation to the meeting in accordance with Section 78(3) of the Local Government Measure 2011.

3.	DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST
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There were no disclosures of interest by Members relating to items to be considered at the meeting.

4.	SCRUTINY OF BUSINESS CRITICAL ACTIVITIES
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The Committee received for information details of the business critical activities subject to scrutiny.

5.	SCRUTINY OF BUSINESS CRITICAL ACTIVITIES - ECONOMY, RESIDENTS, COMMUNITIES AND GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
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5.1. Briefing Reports

The Committee received and noted the briefing report as background information.

5.2. Verbal Updates and Scrutiny of Business Critical Activities

The Committee received a verbal update on the briefing note circulated with the agenda.

Issues Discussed:

- **Homelessness Service**

- Few homeless people in Powys, but a number of people on the margins of homelessness. Having housed people challenge is to sustain and accommodate these individuals.
- Questions:

What is a private leasing scheme?	Council uses private accommodation to provide support and accommodation to an individual.
Priority need cases – how does the Council plan to move individuals (151) from bed and breakfast to priority need and ensure we have housing stock for this?	This is about making sure we have the housing stock available and placing people in the right size of accommodation for their needs. Also need to long at housing stock for the long term and working with partners.
Homeless Cell and longer term strategy – request to Welsh Government for Council to be involved in private housing leasing pilot scheme - what does this mean for the Council?	This will need to be referred to a subject specialist for a response.

- **Public Protection**
- Work of the Service has included support and advice to care homes, closure of caravan parks, advice to retailers. Also some prohibition notices issued. Critical work has been in establishing the temporary mortuary in Llanelwedd.

- **Support for Businesses**
- About £42.5 million paid out to support businesses in Powys. There are some gaps for some sectors and Council has been identifying these and lobbying government for support.
- Questions:

Has the criteria changed for holiday lets? Other authorities looking at the criteria differently.	The criteria has changed and Council has adhered to guidance in effect at that time.
Were those paid out in the early stages, will the money be clawed back where the criteria has changed?	The Council processed the applications based on the criteria at the time. The Portfolio Holder for Finance commented that some authorities might not be implementing all the criteria and it was unclear whether if they did so they would be reimbursed by Welsh Government.
Holiday lets – properties developed over last 12 months not eligible for these grants. Also, there is a delay in valuers visiting properties to value properties so they can seek grant aid.	Not aware that there is an issue with valuers undertaking valuations. Officers can seek clarification from the valuation office. The Portfolio Holder for Finance commented that there is team within the Finance Section looking at hard cases such as this who have not got business rating up to date.

Business rates – Community Amateur Sports Clubs – not eligible for small business rate relief but discretionary relief, but Welsh Government may have recently amended that, the same as for charities – is this correct.	That is the position, but we are awaiting the guidance from Welsh Government.
PPE levels and those being produced by volunteer groups. These groups being asked for PPE. Do we have a true reflection of the amount of PPE available in Powys.	There is a Council group which co-ordinates the availability of PPE and the Council is confident that currently there is sufficient PPE for its requirements. May be additional requirements coming out of lockdown. Based on information currently available for front line staff, Council is not aware of any issues. Council would be interested in obtaining PPE produced within the county as long as it meets required standards, and anyone who can provide this should be encouraged to contact the Council.
Hotel sector and holiday sites – although businesses have received payments, businesses may not be able to continue due to a loss of revenue. Other retailers also considering closing. Is Welsh Government recognising ongoing costs and doing anything about this?	Council does recognise that business sector is under pressure and is lobbying Welsh Government. Council is to be involved in a Welsh Government Towns Initiative. It is recognised that there is a significant challenge for a rural economy such as Powys due to Coronavirus.
Business rates grants – number of businesses not accessing grants. Can some quality assurance work be undertaken on the process?	Happy to raise this with the team.

- **Refuse Collection**
- Service has been able to retain its key functions. Feedback from the public has been generally positive. Only service which was suspended was bulky waste collection which is being reinstated. Household Waste Recycling Sites (HWRCs) also to be reopened from 26th May with restrictions in place. Council has also met its statutory recycling targets for last year.
- Questions:

Opening of HWRCs – is the message clear enough that people can put out additional materials such as cardboard and plastics from the kerbside which will be collected? Is message strong enough?	Hopefully so. Message which has gone out is that there is no limit to recycling and crews will pick up what's put out. Good point about reinforcing the message.
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Should this be reinforced before the 26 th ?	
Lowest paid Council staff to be furloughed – is this the case?	To be discussed by Cabinet on 19 th May and also discussions held with Unions. There are specific requirements for Council staff being furloughed which is different to the private sector. Staff will receive 100% of their salaries. The specific criteria to enable the Council to access the money is that posts must be linked to income generation which limits the categories of staff who could be considered.
Any staff furloughed, the 20% of their salary will be made up by the Council.	Yes.
HWRCs – number of steps being undertaken to mitigate risks. Why has council decided on an open access rather than a timetabled or staggered access?	This is the more straightforward form of access. Other types of access are administratively more complicated such as a booking system.
Are there forecasts as to how many will turn up at HWRCs? If excessive numbers turn up, how do we manage risk to staff?	No. If excessive numbers turn up may need to seek support from the police or undertake traffic management.
If there are issues on the sites who will take the decision to close sites?	This will be a conversation between the Council and the contractor. If a solution cannot be found then the site may have to be closed.

- **Emergency Housing Repairs and Maintenance**

- Requests for repairs and maintenance have reduced. Some issues with contractors being refused access to properties by customers.

- Questions:

There was a backlog on gas safety checks. How are we managing the backlog and is this up to the Welsh Government standard, who were withholding some funding?	The funding from Welsh Government for last year has been released. In relation to the contractors performance this is now up to contractual compliance. Any outstanding testing is now due to failure of access to properties.
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- **Highways**

- Essential repairs and maintenance on roads has continued. Some of the capital programme has commenced e.g. surface dressing.

- Questions:

Emergency childcare transport – provision of hand sanitiser and PPE – is this for users or drivers?	Not aware of any ongoing issues, issues have been addressed. Officers to check with the team.
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Grass cutting – levels of grass cutting being reduced due to manpower transferred elsewhere. Communities believe that this is helpful in terms of wild flowers. Do verges need to be cut as widely as previously?	This is very area specific and changes to grass cutting have been welcomed by communities previously. However, in relation to trunk roads the Council has to adhere to trunk road requirements. Where the Council has been able to pare back grass cutting in the past, it has done so successfully. Need for the Council to keep under review and check that the service it provides in future is appropriate.
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Outcomes:

Action	Action By / Completion Date
Clarification to be sought form the valuation officer in respect of perceived delays in new businesses being valued.	NB
Emergency childcare transport – have the issues regarding the supply of hand sanitiser and PPE been resolved?	NB
Grass cutting – area for Committee to look at again in more detail in future	WR / NB

6.	SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME
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The Committee noted the date of the next meeting on 1st June, 2020 and the request to consider items for the future work programme.

HWRCs and Homelessness Services were identified for future meetings in addition to items already identified.

County Councillor M J Dorrance (Chair)