

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMY, RESIDENTS, COMMUNITIES AND GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BY TEAMS ON THURSDAY, 2 JULY 2020

PRESENT: County Councillor M J Dorrance (Chair)
County Councillors K W Curry, D O Evans, J Gibson-Watt, G Jones, I McIntosh, J Pugh and D Selby

Cabinet Portfolio Holders In Attendance: County Councillor P Davies (Portfolio Holder for Education and Property), County Councillor A Davies (Portfolio Holder for Finance, Countryside and Transport), and County Councillor H Hulme (Portfolio Holder for Environment)

Officers: Nigel Brinn (Corporate Director - Economy and Environment), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager and Head of Democratic Services), Gareth Jones (Professional Lead – Regeneration), David Morris (Income and Awards Senior Manager), Jo Weale (Business Manager HTR) and Nicola Williams (Programme Delivery Manager - Transformation)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor L Skilton and from County Councillor J Evans, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Housing and Regulatory Services.

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest by Members relating to items to be considered at the meeting

3. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPS

The Committee did not receive any disclosures of prohibited party whips which a Member has been given in relation to the meeting in accordance with Section 78(3) of the Local Government Measure 2011.

4. SCRUTINY ITEMS

4.1. Business Support

Documents Considered:

- Covid-19 – Business Support Summary

Issues Discussed:

- Much activity going on in this respect. This cuts across a number of areas such as rate support grants, reviewing existing investment programmes.
- An economic recovery group was established at the beginning of the outbreak which has changed to a group looking as Thriving and Sustainable Economy (TASE).

- Questions:

How can you expect to support	It is hoped that the economic impact
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<p>businesses when you don't know what business you are supporting. This situation is different to previous recessions due to good work by Powys getting money out to businesses. 60% of the money is going back into the economy, but unless we understand our businesses how can we support them.</p>	<p>is not as great as feared. Whilst we are not operating on a national level, there are things the council can do locally such as supporting the Powys pound. There has been communications with businesses through various channels, and the business support helpline has received a large number of enquiries. Advice and support has been provided to businesses. The funding from Welsh Government has been able to go direct to businesses as its through the business rates system. The economic analysis which the Council is undertaking should give a better picture of the impact on the local economy.</p>
<p>We do not have a business register, and we are trying to get economic data, which we should already have. What we are doing will not support our economy.</p>	<p>The Council does know its businesses and do work with them regularly e.g. small business rates relief, and this is how we could get money out to businesses so quickly.</p>
<p>The council cannot support businesses it does not understand. The concern is how the economy links into apprenticeships, how will we attract and support businesses and support high streets. We need a proper business strategy to take this forward.</p>	<p>The first phase of the recovery work will be published next week. A large impact of the coronavirus has been on the economy e.g. GVA decreasing by almost 25% over the 2 year period March 2018 to 2020, potentially between 4.4% and 7.3% fewer jobs. The Council does know its businesses, we regulate a number of businesses and the Council has taken many calls over the period from businesses. Tourism is one sector that has been adversely impacted by the outbreak.</p>
<p>Congratulations to the team who have been distributing funding to businesses. When businesses had the £10,000 or £25,000 grants those businesses could only apply if they were adversely affected. Some businesses have remained open or benefitted from the closure of others. Will there be a review of whether these businesses were eligible to receive this funding.</p>	<p>This is a Welsh Government scheme, so they established the criteria. There were no eligibility criteria about whether businesses continued trading, the only sector with an additional scrutiny test was the holiday sector. Checks are also being undertaken that businesses that receive grants are eligible to receive them. Businesses were also advised that checks would be undertaken and if there was any fraud that the money could be reclaimed.</p>

<p>How will these checks be undertaken.</p>	<p>A corporate fraud team will be undertaking these checks and verification checks after payments made.</p>
<p>There are a number of initiatives being implemented at present. Is there any cross over of assistance and is it better to focus the assistance locally or by sector.</p>	<p>This is a challenge in terms of a co-ordinated response. There is sector specific support. The Economic Group mentioned earlier undertakes this co-ordination role. There is a range of support available and it can be a challenge to know which to bid for, and prioritising resources for best impact. Lobbying has been undertaken for support for the hospitality and tourism sector which has been particularly badly hit.</p>
<p>Would a free car parking scheme assist town centres in getting them going again.</p>	<p>Car parks are not free, they are costs associated with them, and they need to be regulated and monitored. They are also a source of income for the Council. A loss of that income would need to be balanced elsewhere.</p>
<p>Thanks to officers. Powys was one of the first authorities to get the £10,000 grants out which helped businesses survive. Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASC), have they all been paid the grants due. Has any work been undertaken to ensure that businesses that are eligible have claimed.</p>	<p>The closing date for applications was 30th June, and a number of organisations received phone calls to ensure that as many as possible who were eligible for the grant applied for it. Some who were eligible but did not apply were also contacted. The Council contacted these organisations either through social media, by letter or by telephone.</p>
<p>Mid Wales Town Centre Action Group – who is on the group, what level of expertise do we have access to.</p>	<p>A meeting had been held involving representatives of Powys, Ceredigion Council and Welsh Government which was considering how to broaden the list of those invited to get the expertise needed, including engaging with the business sector. Some basic issues are being considered at present such as reopening high streets, dealing with empty businesses and changing the limited powers which local government have in this respect. The focus needs to be not replicating what others are doing but adding value. This working group is also feeding directly into a Ministerial Town Action Group and</p>

	influence Welsh Government. The current work is around reopening town centres, transport, greening town centre infrastructure, repurposing of buildings, financial support.
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- It was suggested that the Council should look strategically and decide what we want our market towns to do, as our market towns are relatively small compared to those in England or elsewhere in Wales. There is a need to have a conversation with Towns as to what they want to become in future. We should also be asking what sort of tourists does the Council want to attract to the County.

Outcomes:

Action	Action By / Completion Date
Scrutiny to look at the Economic Impact Study	WR
Scrutiny to track the work being undertaken by the Town Centre Focus Group	WR

4.2. Contact Tracing

Documents Considered:

- Test, Track and Protect – Questions and Answers for External Stakeholders.

Issues Discussed:

- The Council is working closely with Powys Teaching Health Board. This is a Welsh Government project.
- Approximately 5400 tests undertaken to date with a 5.5% positivity rate which is below the Welsh average of 8.4%. There is currently an incomplete reporting of cross border tests which affects the Powys figures.

- **Questions:**

When you compare the numbers of tests undertaken between England and Wales and then undertaken in Powys, why are the numbers so low e.g. are we having difficulty accessing testing kits.	There is greater testing capacity available than being used at present across the region and Wales.
Why are people not using the testing stations that have been established.	Prior to undertaking a test a person must have symptoms.
Are the testing stations being kept indefinitely or is there a cut off date.	There has been no discussion about withdrawing them and they need to be there in case there are increased numbers.
There seems to be a disproportionately high number of cases in Rhayader. Is there any reason for this.	The larger number of cases relate to care homes. The numbers of cases across Powys are generally low.

<p>There has been controversy in England about obtaining figures from the national testing scheme by comparison to local testing schemes and the issue around postcode data. In Wales as testing is local are we getting better information down to postcode information about results.</p>	<p>Yes this is the case. One of the issues about cross border testing is the non recording of postcode information which makes it difficult to match back to the correct Health Board.</p>
<p>If you have a large employer with many employees, and a member of staff tests positive, does that mean that the business would need to shut down and employees self isolate. Should we be advising businesses to take the temperature of employees so that the whole of the business does not need to shut down.</p>	<p>The Council is aware that there are high risk areas such as meat processing. However, each individual case will be reviewed and contacts traced. This will include tracing those contacts that an individual has had including with work colleagues. Most employers would be expected to operate a system with minimal interaction between staff.</p>

Outcomes:

- **Noted.**

5.	SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME
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The Committee noted that the next meetings of the Committee will be held as follows:

16/07/2020	14.00 – 15.00	Items: Mid Wales Growth Deal – proposal document Global Centre for Rail Excellence
27/07/2020	14.00 – 15.00	Items:

Potential items for consideration:

- Regulatory Services
- Recycling rates – what advantage is being taken of the increases in recycling rates and how can we maintain recycling rates.

Update Information arising from previous meeting:

- Valuation Service – valuation of new businesses. **(Issue completed)**.
- Car Parking Charges review - update on the current status of the review.
- Tenants paying a service charge for grass cutting – will there be a rebate by the service if the full service is not provided. A response has been prepared by the Service which will be circulated to Members. There was no intention to pay a rebate for this year. However, this would be reviewed at the end of the season and if the number of required cuts had not been undertaken then a rebate would be considered for next year. **(Issue Completed)**

The Scrutiny Manager confirmed that the Mid Wales Growth Deal would be considered on 16th July and the Centre for Rail excellence on 27th July. An

additional item regarding Welfare Calls would also be added to one of these meetings.

The Scrutiny Manager clarified the timeline in relation to the Car Park Review. The Director of Economy and Environment agreed to review this and to start the work. It was clarified that the Highways Service was intending to undertake a review of car parking in the 2020/21 financial year, to be implemented in the 2021/22 financial year. The aim was that the Highways Service and Scrutiny would work together, and the scoping meeting would take account of the view of scrutiny members and to consider what options were to be investigated as part of the review.

County Councillor M J Dorrance (Chair)