

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMY, RESIDENTS, COMMUNITIES AND GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BY TEAMS ON THURSDAY, 16 JULY 2020

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

Cabinet Portfolio Holders In Attendance: County Councillors A W Davies (Portfolio Holder for Finance, Countryside and Transport), P Davies (Portfolio Holder for Education and Property), G Breeze (Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance and Engagement) and H Hulme (Portfolio Holder for Environment)

Officers: Nigel Brinn (Corporate Director - Economy and Environment), Diane Reynolds (Head of Digital Services), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager and Head of Democratic Services) and G Jones (Professional Lead – Regeneration)

1.	APOLOGIES
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors L Skilton and J Gibson-Watt. Apologies for absence were also received from Portfolio Holders County Councillor J Evans (Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Housing and Regulatory Services) and R Powell (Portfolio Holder for Young People and Culture).

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

3.	DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPS
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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
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4.1. Growing Mid Wales

Documents Considered:

- Vision for Growing Mid Wales – Strategic Economic Plan and Growth Deal Roadmap – May 2020

Issues Discussed:

- Growing Mid Wales Group established 2015 to progress jobs, growth and the wider economy within Mid Wales. Examples include Tri Programme and Mid Wales Freight Strategy, and the Growth Deal.
- Joint Committee established between Powys and Ceredigion Councils as well as an Economic Strategy Group. A Regional Learning and Skills Partnership is also being established.
- This is a 15 year project. 3 Programmes agreed i.e. Broadening, Strengthening and Connecting the Economy.

- Vision submitted to both Welsh and UK Government on 27th May and funding of £55m from both governments has been confirmed.
- The focus will be on programmes rather than projects.

- Questions:

<p>As the document has been worked on for some time, has it been "Covid checked" i.e. is there a need to change emphasis due to what's happened over the last few months. Is there a need to push Welsh Government on starting on some emergency projects. How are we identifying that Mid Wales has something different to offer from other regions such as South Wales or the Marches and identifying and specifying what these differences are such as green energy. Newtown was developed as a result of the Development Board for Rural Wales being created and bringing investment into the area. Has any analysis been undertaken of that previous growth project particularly in terms of resource required to deliver projects as the current project seems to be under-resourced.</p>	<p>The document has been updated to reflect the Coronavirus, but the aspirations have not changed. There is a greater need for the growth deal going forward due to the economic impact of the pandemic.</p> <p>In relation to the Development Board for Rural Wales, the growth deal will take account of things which have worked well or not in the past, but there has been no specific analysis of the work of the Development Board. In terms of delivering projects having sufficient resources is important, particularly when projects are being developed. The Strategic Economic Plan identified opportunities for growth in Mid Wales, strengths, opportunities, what makes the region different from others. It also identifies 8 priority areas for investment. However, the Council is also working on other projects in addition to the Growth Deal which could bring in funding from Welsh Government i.e. "shovel ready projects" e.g. investment in the homelessness service.</p>
<p>How will the projects delivered by the Growth Deal fit together and are there any conflicts with projects such as the Centre for Rail Excellence which relies on another cross border partnership.</p>	<p>The Centre for Rail Excellence will bring in about £150m of funding itself and the Growth Deal allows value to be added to that project such as by training and investment, or energy production on that site. Work has also been undertaken on sites and premises in Powys as its been identified that there is the absence of good quality employment sites and premises in Powys. Currently there are areas of high demand where businesses cannot find appropriate accommodation for expansion, and areas of low demand which would need support to develop those</p>

	<p>areas. There is also a lack of private sector direct investment as there has not been a corresponding return on capital investment as a result of building business units. The Council in conjunction with others (Ceredigion, Welsh Government and Brecon Beacons National Park) has been undertaking a needs analysis of business and supply issues to develop a joint strategic action plan to assist businesses.</p>
<p>Is there a means of getting Welsh Government to provide funding for emergency issues such as the consequence of the closure of Laura Ashley in Newtown and investment in some of the current units for future use, as well as the Growth Deal.</p>	<p>The Local Government community is working to try and bring projects forward i.e. "shovel ready projects" and projects have been submitted to Welsh Government and included in the Council's capital programme.</p>
<p>There is a 16% decline in working age population forecast for the next 19 years with a 37% increase in the 65+ age group. How is the Council addressing the planning issues for young people wanting to stay in Powys and local need. In terms of working with large local businesses when is the council going to contact these businesses. What assurances are there that Powys will have an equal share of projects within the Growth Deal.</p>	<p>In term of projects the key now is to establish the Programme Office to work with partners and to bring projects forward. In relation to the share of projects there are some projects which will benefit both counties such as transport projects. Powys is a larger partner in terms of geography and borders, so may can work in collaboration with others as well such as the Centre for Rail Excellence. Migration of young people and an ageing population is key, but there are no easy answers to this. It is about creating higher value job opportunities to retain and attract young people, education, housing, skills and the document does cover these matters.</p>
<p>There should be a Portfolio Holder with responsibility for the Growth deal on the Cabinet. The storage of water produces the greatest electricity yield. Where is Education in the deal to help keep youngsters in Powys, including distance learning.</p>	<p>The key message from the Economic Strategy Group is the skills agenda including the difficulties faced by businesses in recruiting people with the right skills and having to bring in people from outside the region at the same time as the county is losing younger people who are seeking career opportunities elsewhere. This is where the Regional Skills</p>

	<p>Partnership fits in. This partnership will need to focus on the needs of Mid Wales in conjunction with Ceredigion and service providers. In relation to energy there are opportunities across Mid Wales for hydro schemes etc, and work has been ongoing to see what programmes other partners such as Scottish Power have. One issue in "greening" energy usage means using more electricity which will mean a need to upgrade the network which will require a capital investment. The question would also be how local projects can feed their surplus generated electricity into the grid, and could be used locally, which is currently not possible. In relation to the Cabinet the Leader is the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for the Growth Deal, and County Councillor James Evans has responsibility for Economic Development.</p>
<p>The need to improve the electricity network is highlighted as a challenge in the document. There is resistance to an increase in wind energy schemes and improvement of the electricity network in Powys. Is there an appetite now for change.</p>	<p>It is likely that focus in future will be on more subtle forms of alternative energy such as anaerobic digesters. However the barrier to this is the infrastructure costs. Local energy grids may also be the way forward.</p>
<p>Infrastructure is still the problem for any form of scheme as the overall capacity in the grid is not sufficient for these projects to connect to the grid.</p>	<p>This is why the Council is working with Scottish Power and Western Power. However, there are other infrastructure issues e.g. relating to infrastructure for waste water and sewerage, which could stop development.</p>
<p>Skills and Education – Whilst the effect of Covid-19 is less on school children, this is not the case in higher education and universities lecturers are currently undertaking lectures over the internet. Students working from home may be the future. Is the Council supporting this happening and one of those means is by good connectivity.</p>	<p>Digital Connectivity is key for a number of sectors including higher education. There is a need for the digital infrastructure to be in place, but there are some areas in Powys where the connectivity is poor.</p>
<p>Whilst there is a need to ensure that there are facilities for those in higher education those who could not be</p>	<p>This has been one of the criticisms of Regional Learning and Skills partnerships across Wales to date</p>

taught electronically such as vocational training need to be catered for as well.	such as are the right courses being offered locally. If there is a demand locally then there should be a course offered locally.
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- The Chair asked about ongoing scrutiny of the Growth Deal and in particular about joint scrutiny with Ceredigion. The Scrutiny Manager advised the Committee that the Working Group which the Council had established would be half of the Joint Scrutiny Committee with Ceredigion. Governance arrangements were to be established. In addition, any projects which affected both counties would fall to be scrutinised by the Joint Scrutiny Committee, whilst any projects falling solely within a single council area would be scrutinised by the relevant scrutiny committee from that Council.

Outcomes:

Action	Action By / Completion Date
Regional Skills Partnership – progress report on this development for a future meeting of the Committee.	WR / NB
That the comments of the Committee on the Growth Deal be sent to the Leader for information	WR / MD

4.2. Welfare Calls

Documents Considered:

- Report of the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance and Engagement regarding Welfare Call Monitoring

Issues Discussed:

- Update report as shielding does not end until 16th August 2020.
- Originally the Council made 18,000 calls to individuals. The Council now makes about 5,000 follow up calls every week or fortnight to individuals. Initially 915 requests for food boxes have been sent to Welsh Government, this has now reduced to 326 boxes.
- As part of recovery, consideration is being given to whether the calls can be undertaken by volunteers. Welsh Government is also seeking to transfer the provision of food boxes to local authorities, and the Council is awaiting clarity of the requirement. The monthly cost of resourcing welfare calls etc is about £10k per month, but this is now reducing.
- The Chair commented that this work had been undertaken sympathetically and the public welcomed the calls.

- Questions:**

This has shown that Social Services and others do not know what is being delivered locally by 800 other organisations in the county.	The first call made to individuals was by the Council and advice was taken about connecting with other organisations. This should be continually reviewed, including local organisations and connections as the pandemic is not over as yet.
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Some wastage in the process in relation to food boxes. Need for groups and organisations to link in better together and have an understanding who should be responsible for what element of the service provided. Could people opt out of food parcel service.	Once a person opts out, the Council advised Welsh Government. However, there may have been a delay in the information being received by the food delivered as well as a delay for the service being stopped. Working on improving local connections would be an useful piece of work for the Council if shielding continues.
If there another coronavirus spike in the winter, what plans are in place to address the issues raised e.g. collaboration with local groups.	The Council is awaiting the announcement by Welsh Government of the future plans for shielding.
There has been a significant increase in the numbers of people who the Council had to contact (initially 500 up to 6000). Did the Council receive sufficient notice of changes to numbers, and are any improvements to communications being fed back to Welsh Government and Health.	The Council received little notice of changes, with numbers requiring to be called growing within a two week period. The Council increased the number of people undertaking calls with over 100 people being redeployed from other services to assist. If there is a second spike, the Council has robust systems and experienced officers who can undertake calls.
Will the cost of £10k per month for welfare calls be recovered from Welsh Government.	It is hoped to recover the majority of this cost from Welsh Government.

Outcomes:

Action	Action By / Completion Date
Plan for future Welfare Calls etc to be brought back to a future meeting of the committee.	WR / DR

5. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held as follows:

27/07/2020	14.00 – 15.00	Items:
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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.
- Economic Impact Study / Town Centre Focus Group

Update Information arising from previous meeting:

- Car Parking Charges review – meeting to be held on 27th July.

Economy, Residents, Communities and Governance Scrutiny Committee – 16-07-2020.

County Councillor M J Dorrance (Chair)