

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

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

Cabinet Portfolio Holders In Attendance: County Councillors H Hulme (Portfolio Holder for Environment), R Powell (Portfolio Holder for Young People and Culture) and A Davies (Portfolio Holder for Finance, Countryside and Transport)

Officers: Nigel Brinn (Corporate Director - Economy and Environment), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager and Head of Democratic Services), Brian Price (HGSS Contracts and Programmes Manager) and Kay Thomas (Principal Librarian)

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from County Councillor L Skilton.

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interests from Members relating to items to be considered on the agenda.

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

5. REOPENING OF LIBRARIES

Documents Considered:

- Report of the Portfolio Holder for Young People and Culture.
- Message to Members regarding the Call and Collect Library Service.

Issues Discussed:

- Following the Welsh Government announcement regarding the reopening of libraries, there is a three phased approach. Phase 1 is looking at volunteer and current networks and offering a service to the public rather than reopening of libraries.
- There has been a digital offer during the pandemic.

- **Questions:**

What is the timescale for the provision of the new service and there has been no contact with volunteers to date in Newtown and also PAVO stating on facebook that they would be delivering	There are different voluntary sectors involved. The service will go live on Monday 22 nd June. Testing of the system is currently underway with the first deliveries the following
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<p>books. Can this be clarified please.</p>	<p>week. There are areas where the Council needs more volunteers such as in rural areas.</p>
<p>Will the library service be in touch with the voluntary team in Newtown.</p>	<p>Yes.</p>
<p>In terms of gaps in volunteer provision, where are these gaps and how can people come forward to assist.</p>	<p>There is good coverage in the larger towns, but mainly the issue is in the more remote rural areas. Other avenues are being considered such as the community shop in Llanbadarn Fynydd, young farmers, and finding solutions which will work for those more rural communities. Local County Councillors will be approached to help identify other volunteers who could assist the Council.</p>
<p>How will the books be cleaned after they have been distributed, and how will customers be protected.</p>	<p>Main concern has been keeping staff, volunteers and recipients of books safe. There are health and safety guidelines in place, with stipulations about handling books and a 72 hour quarantine before books are delivered, guidelines to customers to leave books for a further 72 hours before opening the package and about washing their hands having read the books. Gloves and hand sanitiser is being provided for volunteers. Books being returned will be quarantined before being checked back in by library staff.</p>
<p>Cardboard is 48 hours but plastic covers can retain the virus for several days.</p>	<p>The guidance from Public Health Wales is 72 hours for plastic jackets.</p>
<p>Resource implications, many staff have been redeployed. Where have they been redeployed to, what will be the criteria for bringing these staff back. Has any funding been provided to assist the service.</p>	<p>Library staff have been redeployed into other services and commended on their contributions. They have been working with Adult Services, PAVO, the Assist Team and welfare calls and contact tracing. The Service is short staffed for Phase 1 but some staff brought back in. A telephone help line has been set up for the call and collect service as well. Welsh Government has been supportive of Council and some funding (£5000) has been provided for the costs of the equipment for the call and collect scheme. However, the greater cost will be</p>

	<p>later when buildings reopen and there will be a need for plastic screens for receptions and between computers in libraries. It has been indicated that additional funding will be available from Welsh Government for that provision. £150,000 has been provided by Welsh Government for e-books in Wales.</p> <p>For Powys in the last month borrow books up 95%, e-book loans up 167%, e-audio downloads up 111%.</p>
<p>Are there any projections of costs for the Council in moving through the three phases.</p>	<p>The main cost will be around screening to keep staff and customers staff. Some computers for customers will have to be taken out of service temporarily, to maintain social distancing. The costs for screens could be between £10,000 and £15,000.</p>
<p>Are phases 1 to 4 directed by Welsh Government or is there some discretion for Services. What is meant in phase 4.</p>	<p>No timeframes have been included for the phases as the situation can change. The wording of phase 4 is to show how important libraries are to communities, which has been demonstrated during the pandemic but the Council needs to be more creative as to how it connects with the public in moving the service forward.</p>

Outcomes:

Action	Action By / Completion Date
Costs for libraries due to Covid-19 to be provided to the Committee and whether this is reclaimed by the Council	KT

6.	GRASS CUTTING
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Documents Considered:

- Document – Road Verge Management in Powys

Issues Discussed:

- Grass cutting in Powys was initially delayed due to staff shielding but is now underway. The service is provided by a combination of in-house staff and contractors. The cutting of grass in cemeteries, urban and rural verges are tendered out, amenity areas such as libraries, housing estates, parks and Council offices are undertaken by in-house teams.

- Cemetery grass cutting is unchanged and all have been cut at the same time using contractors. Urban verges, are due for a cut in May, July and September. There has been a trial this year of a safety cut, to reduce the extent cut, and to respond to Covid-19 allowing people to avoid each other when out walking. This has been successful and may be continued in future.
- There has been agreement with towns and voluntary groups not to cut certain areas, which could be promoted in other areas.
- Amenity areas such as housing estates, these cuts did start late due to Covid-19, but this is now back on schedule. Rural verges which are cut annually, the cutting of verges on B and unclassified roads has commenced.

- Questions:

Housing estates, a service charge is paid by tenants for grass cutting. As the service started last is there a possibility of a rebate being paid to tenants.	The service is provided on behalf of the Housing Service. Where all the cuts are not possible then other services might be offered in winter such as cleaning moss off footpaths.
Within urban areas where there has been significant growth recently is an assessment taking place of where there has been such significant growth.	Within speed limits, the teams will undertake checks on safety visibility and will cut for safety but will leave other grass uncut to assist biodiversity.
There has been a noticeable improvement in the cutting and avoiding wild flowers. In urban areas are there more opportunities to develop biodiversity areas and are there any good examples which could be used as examples.	Housing estates are one of the locations which are being considered for biodiversity sites. Presteigne is a good example of a successful scheme which could be utilised elsewhere.
The HGSS Contracts and Programmes Manager was complimented on the road management document. Could the details of the cuts for each category be circulated to the Committee.	Yes.
If community and other groups assessed other areas for biodiversity schemes would there be a concern by the service that it could be inundated by requests. As a result of Covid-19 there have been a number of advantages which should be retained. Could these be listed and circulated to the Committee.	Yes the information can be circulated. Due to Covid-19 the public have been accepting of changes, including more biodiversity schemes. Any groups are encouraged to contact their Town or Community Council in the first instance about biodiversity schemes.
Are you confident about the arrangements with contractors, that the number of cuts are being delivered.	Cemeteries are 14 cuts a year, and there has been positive feedback about this service. Rural areas use local contractors and this was tendered this year. The number of cuts required is being delivered.
Is there scope for the service to look at other issues such as removing	The Service would look at more environmentally friendly ways of

<p>footpaths.</p>	<p>doing this. Housing estates last year had an improvement in footways. An assessment of estates has been completed and a schedule of work will be drawn up for the winter period.</p> <p>The Corporate Director commented that it was necessary to have a mix of in-house staff and using contractors to provide the service and that it was felt that the current mix worked well.</p>
<p>Herbicides, is it being used at all currently. Is it used on footpaths or is it the intention to phase its use out completely.</p>	<p>A total droplet system is used around crash barriers or to avoid the need for strimming. Welsh Government also insist on spraying kerbsides on trunk roads once a year. Staff are trained in the use of herbicides, and there is no wide spread of the spray as would have happened previously. The Service will use something other than herbicides where possible.</p>

Outcomes:

Action	Action By / Completion Date
<p>Corporate Director to discuss the issue of whether the Housing Service would be offering a rebate to tenants on estates where the full grass cutting schedule was not completed with the service and report back to the Committee.</p>	<p>NB / WR</p>
<p>BP to circulate facebook link of the Presteigne biodiversity scheme to Members</p>	<p>BP / WR</p>
<p>Details of the grass cutting schedule for each category be circulated to members of the Committee</p>	<p>BP / WR</p>
<p>Details of the advantages which the Service has identified since the pandemic to be listed and circulated to the Committee</p>	<p>BP / WR</p>

Outcomes:

- **Noted.**

7.	WORK PROGRAMME
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The Committee noted that the next meetings would be held as follows:

02/07/2020	14.00 – 15.00
16/07/2020	14.00 – 15.00
30/07/2020	14.00 – 15.00

Potential items for consideration:

- Regulatory Services
- Support for Businesses
- Contact Tracing
- Grass Cutting
- Global Centre for Rail Excellence
- Mid Wales Growth Deal – proposal document
- 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 – carry forward to next meeting (NB)
- Car Parking Charges review - update on the current status of the review (WR).
- Tenants paying a service charge for grass cutting – will there be a rebate by the service if the full service is not provided. (NB)

The Committee asked whether minutes of meetings were being prepared. The Scrutiny Manager responded that minutes were being prepared and he would advise Members when they were approved and uploaded onto the Council's website.

County Councillor M J Dorrance (Chair)