

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMY, RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITIES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BY ZOOM ON MONDAY, 12 APRIL 2021**

PRESENT: County Councillor M J Dorrance (Chair)
County Councillors D Selby, G Jones, K W Curry, D O Evans, P C Pritchard, J Pugh,
J Charlton, K Lewis and S L Williams

Cabinet Portfolio Holders In Attendance: County Councillors R Powell (Portfolio Holder for Young People and Culture), I McIntosh (Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Housing), A Davies (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Transport), H Hulme (Portfolio Holder for Environment).

Officers: Nigel Brinn (Corporate Director - Economy and Environment), Nina Davies (Head of Housing and Community Development), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager and Head of Democratic Services) and A Thompson (Service Manager – Tenancy Services)

1.	APOLOGIES
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The Committee held a minute's silence as a tribute to HRH the Duke of Edinburgh following his death the previous week.

An apology for absence was received from County Councillor R Harris.

2.	DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST
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The Committee received the following disclosure of interests by Members relating to items to be considered at the meeting:

Item 4 – Revision of the Statement of Intent to Improve Delivery of ECO-3 LA Flex in Powys – County Councillor G Jones disclosed a Personal and Prejudicial Interest as a private landlord who could be eligible to apply for a grant under the scheme.

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.	REVISION OF THE STATEMENT OF INTENT TO IMPROVE DELIVERY OF ECO-3 LA FLEX IN POWYS
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Documents Considered:

- Draft Cabinet Report by the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Housing.

Issues Discussed:

- ECO 3 is the UK wide energy company obligation programme which commenced in the Autumn of 2018 and will run until March 2022. The programme delivers energy efficiency and heating measures to homes. ECO3 allows a local authority to develop its own eligibility criteria. Whilst a

- Council does not have to have its own scheme, having a scheme benefits options for residents to improve energy efficiency and reduce fuel costs.
- The scheme in Powys is delivered by Warm Wales. Since the scheme was adopted in Powys in September 2020 Warm Wales has processed 37 applications, but has only generated the delivery of 2 installations which is below expectations. The report therefore proposes amendments to the eligibility criteria, informed by the latest guidance from the Department of Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy and OFGEM. This is hoped to widen the client group and take up of the scheme. The revised guidance increases eligible income levels in comparison with higher child benefit thresholds. The current criteria are not in line with the revised guidance and are unviable for Warm Wales to deliver.
- A review by Warm Wales indicates that the low take up of the scheme is as a result of the restrictive eligibility criteria. Other Councils in Wales have more generous eligibility criteria when compared with Powys. The revised proposals do not mean an additional resource requirement for the Council as ECO Flex is fully funded by the energy companies and delivered by Warm Wales at no cost to the Council.
- County Councillor G. Jones disclosed a Personal and Prejudicial interest during the discussion as a private landlord with rented property who could be eligible to apply for assistance under the scheme, and took no further part in the discussion.
- Questions:

<p>This is good news as the Council can offer a service to more people than under the original scheme. Have lessons been learned other than comparing eligibility criteria with other Councils.</p> <p>Are there measures / mechanisms in place to ensure we do speak to other Councils to ensure parity between eligibility criteria across Wales especially if other initiatives come up in future.</p> <p>It is of concern that as the scheme does not cost the Council the criteria were set so tightly initially.</p>	<p>A working group has been set up by officers working within the scheme to discuss this across authorities in Wales, It is important that this dialogue continues - Action for the Service.</p> <p>The UK guidance was updated since Powys launched its scheme which is why the Council is reviewing its criteria to match that updated guidance.</p>
<p>With the funding being on a first come, first served basis for all Councils and only 12 months left in the scheme, is there enough money in the pot for Powys residents</p>	<p>Yes as far as the Council is aware there is sufficient funding remaining. The Council is keen to make these changes as soon as possible so that as many Powys residents as possible can benefit from the scheme.</p>
<p>This is welcomed and has probably come from advice from Warm Wales. Does Warm Wales support other</p>	<p>It is not known whether Warm Wales is working with other Councils – this information can be obtained and</p>

<p>Councils who have taken guidance about changes to the eligibility criteria.</p> <p>If you are a vulnerable individual income increases to £34,000 where you can be considered for support. Other changes in the report are an increase of a net income of £9,300 up to a gross income of £14,000.</p> <p>The concern would be if a person is on universal credit and not vulnerable, but are working, does this take you over the threshold where you could lose out even though the person is in a low income bracket.</p> <p>If you look at this on the basis of fuel poverty the thresholds and people's eligibility can be complicated and may put people off applying.</p>	<p>Members advised - ACTION.</p> <p>Once the scheme launched the Council did work to publicise scheme and Warm Wales did publicise it as well. However, the Service needs to look at what else can be done to encourage the take up of the scheme - ACTION.</p> <p>In relation to income thresholds this is based on the gross income and income will come from different sources. Universal credit is designed as a top up for other incomes. The focus is on the income coming into the household. The Statement of Intent does include information about the size of the household as well and the relationship to income levels.</p>
<p>This raises the concern that £14,000 gross is a very low level of income. Can the Council increase this if necessary or can we be flexible with this threshold? This would be a particular issue for a single parent with small children with that low level of income.</p>	<p>This is the figure per adult. The proposal is following the UK guidance and what other Welsh authorities are doing, but the Service will review this and see if there is any way that this threshold can be increased. ACTION</p>
<p>Can this scheme be used to provide voltaic panels on Council properties as it could provide savings for individuals. Is there an opportunity for the Council within this scheme as it would assist tenants and improve the housing stock.</p> <p>In relation to sheltered housing the Council has been re-roofing properties. Is there an opportunity to follow this up with the installation of voltaic panels</p>	<p>This scheme is purely for the private sector and is not available for public housing stock, but the Council is looking at what can be done to improve energy efficiency in Council properties.</p> <p>Measures are being introduced in Council houses such as insulation. Solar voltaic panels are location specific in terms of suitability and they do not suit every property. As the panels become cheaper and more efficient they can be introduced into more properties. What the Council is trying to do is putting the right solution into the right property. The Council has improved the energy efficiency of Council houses.</p>
<p>In relation to advertising not been aware about the scheme. Should the Council be advising residents of Powys as to what other grants of all</p>	<p>The Powys pound and other issues need to be dealt with separately from the eligibility criteria.</p> <p>It would be helpful for the Committee</p>

<p>types are available for insulation and efficiency schemes not just the Warm Wales scheme.</p> <p>Should the Committee look at the criteria forms to gain a better understanding of the process.</p> <p>How does this scheme affect local plumbers (fitting boilers). Where is evidence that Warm Wales have engaged with local plumbers.</p>	<p>to look at the forms and understand the process.</p>
<p>The Impact Assessment produced for the scheme did say that the Council should gain £340,000 income from the scheme. Will the scheme still generate this income for the Council in terms of its current performance and if not, why not and what will be the impact on the Council more broadly.</p>	<p>Hopefully with more installations we can get the scheme back on track, and the low take up has affected the projections. The change of criteria it is hoped will bring the Council back to its original projections for the scheme.</p> <p>Unsure what the time scale was for the original projections – a response can be provided for Members and a review can be undertaken of the effects on income arising from the change of criteria. ACTION.</p>
<p>Can the information about grants be circulated to Councillors which can be shared locally and possibly assist take up of the scheme.</p> <p>Are Warm Wales engaging with local plumbers for fitting and servicing boilers.</p>	<p>With regard to publicising this scheme and what other schemes and packages are available – the Service will circulate information to Councillors. ACTION.</p> <p>ECO3 is not a boiler scheme. The person having the work done will select the installer, it is not recommended by Warm Wales or the Council. This scheme is about other energy efficiency schemes, including new and upgraded central heating systems, insulation. This would include loft and cavity insulation and windows as well.</p>
<p>The income to Council for the period 2019 - 2023. The Service needs to look at the financial position for the scheme and changes to this should be known as part of making the recommendations to amend the scheme. The Impact Assessment also needs to be revised as a result of changes to the scheme.</p>	<p>The scheme is not delivering as expected at present, hence the proposed change to the eligibility criteria to bring the scheme back to what was originally anticipated. This it is hoped will bring the scheme back to the original targets proposed for the scheme.</p> <p>There are no guarantees that the scheme will achieve the income target and there will be a need to keep this under review.</p>

	Update to the Committee on the financial position for the scheme. ACTION
What are we doing to ensure that Powys tradespeople are on the installer list for the scheme, and who is checking this?	Warm Wales have a key role and the Service can request a specific update on this aspect of the scheme - ACTION .
The financial criteria clearly needs to be improved. There is a need to improve the publicity for the scheme and target it at private landlords and where heating systems are not adequate for needs. It has taken a long time to review the criteria since the original scheme started and Cabinet needs to build in an automatic review of the thresholds for example in 3 months so that the scheme can be promoted and more installations undertaken.	The Service is happy to commit to increased publicity from the Council and Warm Wales if the changes to the criteria are agreed by Cabinet. The Service will also add a review date into the paper to Cabinet.
In the report, relating to the applications that were rejected, if the Cabinet change criteria, will the Council ask Warm Wales to revisit these rejected applications in light of the changed criteria, to see if any are now eligible for assistance.	The Council will discuss revisiting previously rejected applications with Warm Wales. That the Committee be updated on eligible applications once this has been undertaken. ACTION .
With regard to emailing information about all grants to County Councillors, when will this be done and how often will it be updated	Information will be sent out once Cabinet takes the decision to revise the scheme. Quarterly updates can be provided to Councillors as schemes are not amended that frequently.
Are there review periods in the contract with Warm Wales.	This information can be provided to the Committee. ACTION

Scrutiny made the following observations to the Cabinet:

- The Committee supported:
 - the widening of the scheme to make it more attractive for Powys residents.
 - the need by the Council and Warm Wales to publicise the scheme more widely to encourage take up by Powys residents.
 - the need to provide information to Councillors and Powys residents as to what other grant and fuel efficiency schemes are available, with information to Councillors updated on a quarterly basis.
 - that the Council continues to consult with other authorities in Wales to ensure that the Powys scheme is on a parity with other schemes in Wales.
- The Committee expressed concern regarding the following:

- that the revised thresholds could still be too low for example for those on universal credit who are working could be earning above the gross income target and therefore ineligible for assistance under the scheme.
- what evidence is there that Powys suppliers are on the Warm Wales installer list and that Warm Wales are engaging with local providers for the provision of solutions under the scheme.
- The Committee requested:
 - Whether the income thresholds could be increased or whether there could be more flexibility as £14,000 gross income is a low level of income and this could be an issue for example for a single parent with small children whose net income mean that they could be in fuel poverty
 - that should the Cabinet agree the proposal that it be reviewed 3 months after the decision is taken so that any further changes to the eligibility criteria can be undertaken sooner if required.
 - that Warm Wales be asked to review those previous applications which were rejected under the current eligibility criteria, to see whether any applications would be eligible under the revised criteria.
 - That the income and cost projections for the ECO3 scheme be reviewed to reflect the proposed changes in eligibility criteria.

Further information to be provided to the Committee:

- Has Warm Wales advised other Councils about the need to change their eligibility criteria following the change in government guidance.
- A copy of the eligibility criteria so that the Committee can understand the application process.
- Update to the Committee on the financial position for the scheme and the likely income to the Council to be derived from the scheme.
- Whether there are any review periods built into the agreement with Warm Wales.

Scrutiny Recommendations to the Cabinet:

1	that the Cabinet consider whether it is possible to increase the income threshold level or allow more flexibility to assist those on lower incomes
2	that if agreed the eligibility criteria be reviewed in 3 months time to ensure that the scheme continues to deliver improvements for Powys residents
3	that if approved Warm Wales be asked to review previous applications against the revised criteria.
4	that the income and cost projections for the scheme be reviewed to reflect the changes in eligibility criteria.

5. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted that future meetings would be held as follows:

03-06-21	10.00 - 12.00	HOWPS Review Report (Confidential) Performance Q4 + Risk (TBC)
12-07-21	10.00 - 12.00	Leadership and apprenticeship

		Performance Q1 + Risk (TBC) Freedom Leisure (provisional) Q1 budget - efficiency savings (TBC)
06-09-21	10.00 - 12.00	Freedom Leisure (provisional)
18-10-21	14.00 - 16.00	Performance Q2 + Risk Q2 budget - efficiency savings (TBC)
29-11-21	10.00 - 12.00	

County Councillor M J Dorrance (Chair)