

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMY, RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITIES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BY ZOOM ON MONDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 2023**

PRESENT

County Councillor A Davies (Chair)

County Councillors B Davies, A Jones, E A Jones, K Lewis, G Mitchell, J Charlton,
R Church, D Selby, D A Thomas, P James, C Kenyon-Wade, G Preston and
L Rijnenberg

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors S L Williams

1.	EXEMPT ITEM
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RESOLVED to exclude the public for the following items of business on the grounds that there would be disclosure to them of exempt information under category 3 of The Local Authorities (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007).

2.	APOLOGIES
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Apologies for absence were received from Cllr S L Williams.

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.	DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST
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There were no declarations of interest from Members relating to items for consideration on the agenda.

5.	WINTER MAINTENANCE
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Background:

- Phase two of the project includes the criteria for winter gritting routes, it was noted that the review would focus on county roads. (Powys County Council provides a gritting service on behalf of the Welsh Government for all trunk roads through the County).
- The presentation provided outcomes of customer engagement along with other factors considered to build the matrix for gritting routes.
- A precautionary network monitors and receives weather reports and actions are taken when required.
- Further details including road details and maps would be circulated to Councillors for consideration with a set deadline for additional feedback to inform the final report.

A debate took place regarding the documentation provided to the Committee, the outcomes of the discussion would feed into and finalise the Cabinet Report (phase 2).

The Committee noted:

- The explanation of the gritting matrix provided clarification which the Committee found helpful.
- It was proposed that the final report would be with Cabinet later in the autumn.
- It was felt that the public engagement exercise outcome was quite poorly received.
- It was asked how the Powys County Council strategy compared to other local authorities and comparisons may be beneficial.

The Committee expressed concern around:

- The savings target set on the service and if it was achievable.
- The environmental elements of the plan and the additional provision of salt bins which would need to be communicated to the local members and communities.
- Vehicle usage considerations would reduce fuel consumption, supporting the Council's net zero carbon targets but felt that the Council needed to ensure that the correct equipment was available for significant weather events.
- Having enough resources and HGV drivers to perform the duties involved within the gritting matrix. Additional training had been undertaken with staff to ensure cover was provided.
- The prioritisation of school routes and how they were planned.
- The consideration for vulnerable members of the community throughout the planning process and links to the Winter Plan.

Resolved: The Winter Maintenance Report be reviewed.

6.	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.

7.	DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST
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There were no declarations of interest from Members relating to items for consideration on the agenda.

8.	MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS
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The Chair was authorised to sign the Minutes of the previous meetings as a correct record 17 July 2023.

9. FREEDOM LEISURE ANNUAL REPORT

Background:

- The Annual report for 2022-2023 was presented to the Committee.
- A not-for-profit leisure trust, Freedom Leisure have entered the eighth year of the contract.
- Powys County Council have provided support to Freedom Leisure throughout the challenging times of the energy crisis whilst recovering from the Covid pandemic.
- Participation, activities, and membership figures showed a positive increase, which continues for the current year.
- A workforce structure took place last year throughout the organisation which continues to invest in staff training and development.
- The National Exercise Referral Scheme is delivered by Freedom Leisure on behalf of Powys County Council.
- Investment continued across sites; however major capital projects are on hold pending the outcomes of the Council's Leisure Review.

Points raised by the Committee:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members:
<p>Would Freedom Leisure consider changes to the free swim sessions.</p>	<p>A review took place in 2018 due to the free-swimming grant being cut, and the delivery of free-swimming sessions for the over 60's and under 16's was restructured.</p>
<p>Confirmation was requested around the financial support the Council provided to Freedom Leisure.</p> <p>And if the deficit was due to the recent energy crisis.</p> <p>Does Freedom Leisure have deficits with other contracts held with other local authorities.</p> <p>Freedom Leisure were asked if their current energy contract was the correct choice.</p>	<p>It was confirmed that Powys County Council have provided £287k to support the significant rise in energy costs experienced by the leisure industry.</p> <p>Freedom Leisure confirmed that financial data would be significantly different if the energy crisis did not occur.</p> <p>Each partnership and contact were different, Freedom Leisure have been proactive obtaining utility supplies and continue to do so. Partners had been extremely supportive throughout the energy crisis and Quarter1 is showing positive signs of recovery.</p> <p>It was explained that advice was sought from consultants and the organisation is able to be flexible and buy ahead to obtain competitive prices.</p>

<p>Freedom Leisure were vocal in the press around the energy crisis and what is meant to the leisure industry, has there been any update.</p>	<p>The Government offer schemes to the leisure industry which were split between England and Wales (currently in the application stages), which are not expected to provide a substantive impact.</p>
<p>Were Freedom Leisure noticing a recent decline in footfall in centres due to the cost-of-living crisis.</p>	<p>Significant growth continues in casual usage of centres and membership is being maintained which was credit to the teams within centres providing services to the community.</p>
<p>It was asked if Freedom Leisure was an accredited living way employer and to explain the pension scheme.</p>	<p>Freedom Leisure confirmed they had adopted the national minimum living wage. Those staff transferred to Freedom Leisure at the start of the contract carried over their local government pensions. New employees are automatically opted into the organisation pension scheme, but also have the local government scheme as an option.</p>
<p>Reported accidents figures within the report were questioned.</p>	<p>The Committee were reassured that the figures provided were correct and reflected the size and activities held within each centre. A high percentage of accidents are slips, trips and falls were around swimming pool-based activities.</p>
<p>Freedom Leisure were asked to explain the remedial backlog maintenance fund.</p>	<p>The fund was in place from year one of the contract to clear the backlog of historical projects that require completion for the 13 sites. Freedom Leisure work with colleagues in PCC to</p>

	<p>conduct the outstanding work needed. Freedom Leisure have a robust maintenance programme with an allocated budget, along with a capital programme bid submission. Capital work at Brecon and Maldwyn was on hold but stressed that any urgent essential work was discussed immediately with council colleagues for urgent consideration.</p>
<p>The survival of leisure centres was depended on customers and asked if community management groups would be re-considered.</p>	<p>It was felt that community groups could be reinstated, and customers are encouraged to chat with staff and always open to all ideas and suggestions.</p>

Resolved: The Freedom Leisure Annual Report be noted.

10. PERFORMANCE REPORT - Q1

Background:

- The new scorecard is part of the Council's Corporate strategic and Equality 5-year plan.
- It presented the 3 wellbeing objectives for the Council which support the 7 national wellbeing goals of the Wellbeing and Future Generations Act 2015.
- The system follows an outcomes-based approach focused on how much, how well and what difference or impact has been made.
- It was noted that only Q1 data was available within the new system, however as the year progresses, we will be able to understand our performance over time (using comparative data).

Points raised by the Committee:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members:
Objective 1	
A query was raised around the number My Powys Account holders.	It was explained that more than one member of a household could hold an account and duplicate accounts may occur, which will elevate the number above the population.
Objective 2	
The number of vacancies was questioned.	It was noted that the vacancies at that point in time was 366 which equates to a 6% vacancy rate, the figures showed in the scorecard were cumulative. The data was checked and verified before submitting to the scorecard.
Concerns were raised around the	Staff survey banding was explained

<p>wellbeing of staff, as the report showed a figure of 50%.</p>	<p>which has improved from the previous year. (If the neutral banding were included the figure would show as 80% plus).</p>
<p>It was asked if the number of ethnic job applicants not being successful was a concern to the Council.</p> <p>Also, under the disability act, how many applications do the council receive, to ensure the Council is open to all.</p>	<p>Figures were monitored to ensure equality throughout the process, the service year on year have been obtaining the equalities data for a greater number of staff as new staff commenced. This figure now stands at 60% for the current workforce employment, which will help with measuring ongoing performance.</p> <p>A new application process and website have been introduced. The Head of Workforce and Organisation Development would provide application figures to the Committee.</p>
<p>Objective 3</p>	
<p>A comment was made that the narrative around child poverty was unclear and would need to be corrected to reflect the way the Council calculates the outcome.</p>	<p>It was noted by officers to rectify.</p>

The Committee noted that:

- The scorecard was easier to navigate and provided detailed information which was an improvement to the previous system.
- The Committee were assured anomalies identified within the report would be resolved by the officers.
- It would have benefited the Committee to have comparable data from last year.
- Colour coding and rating status system within the scorecard was not distinguished and considered confusing.

Recommendations:

1. The Council have a standard consistent approach to rating status (for easy visibility and understanding e.g., traffic lights)
2. Comparable data for benchmarking be available from previous years for context.
3. Ensure clear and precise narrative information is available.

Resolved: The Performance Report Q1 be considered

11.	MARCHES PARTNERSHIP
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Background:

- The partnership includes four neighbouring authorities to Powys, which will join to support and work on major projects.
- The aim of the partnership was to increase overall government investment and unlock opportunities for agreed initiatives.
- The geographical profile would support mutually beneficial goals for all parties. Including transport links, retail, and education.

Points raised by the Committee:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members:
It was asked how the relationship with Ceredigion would be affected.	The partnership with Ceredigion would not be affected as the Marches Partnership is flexible, collaborative, and regional working will continue.
Concerns were raised around government differences of cross border working and the demand finances and stretched Council resources.	It was felt that many opportunities including transport links and education were available across the Marches and challenges around resources would be considered.
It was noted that the Council are leading on Housing and asked if the Service had capacity for additional projects.	It was explained that differences have been identified in cross border working regarding legislation and guidance and many local authorities are no longer landlords.
The presentation shows Powys would be taking the lead on Skills, and referenced a cross border skills offer, would that lead to losing people across the border.	If was felt that the Marches Partnership would enhance and extend opportunities with the Regional Skills Partnership to support educational needs.

Resolved: The Marches Partnership Presentation be noted.

12. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Resolved: The Work Programme be noted.

County Councillor A Davies (Chair)