

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

**PRESENT**

County Councillor A Davies (Chair)  
County Councillors A Jones, C Kenyon-Wade, E A Jones, G Mitchell, G Preston, K Lewis, L Rijnenberg and S Williams

James Gibson-Watt Cabinet Member for and Open and Transparent Powys  
J Berriman Cabinet Member for a Connected Powys  
M Dorrance Cabinet Member for a More Prosperous Powys  
D Selby Cabinet Member for a More Prosperous Powys  
D Thomas Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation  
J Charlton Cabinet Member for a Greener Powys

Jane Thomas – Section 151 Officer  
Marie James – Account Manager  
Diane Reynolds - Interim Director of Economy & Digital Services  
Ellen Sullivan – Interim Head of Economy and Digital Services  
Betts Ingram - Strategic Equalities and Risk Officer  
Matt Perry – Interim Director of the Environment  
Nina Davies – Director of Social Services and Housing  
Andy Thompson – Interim Head of Housing  
Richard Batt - Service Manager - Housing Communities

<b>1.</b>	<b>APOLOGIES</b>
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Apologies received: Cllr B Davies and P James.

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

<b>3.</b>	<b>DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPS</b>
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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.

<b>4.</b>	<b>MINUTES</b>
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The Chair was authorised to sign the Minutes of the previous meeting on 30 October 2023 as a correct record.

<b>5.</b>	<b>STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER</b>
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Background:

- The report contained fifteen strategic risks which were presented to the Committee to inform of the latest results for quarter two.
- Most risks presented were in the higher brackets of the heat map which represented a major or severe score.

- The report provided details of the risk implications which were reviewed, monitored, and managed on a regular basis.

<b>Points raised by the Committee:</b>	<b>Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members:</b>
<p>How were the risks monitored to ensure actions were carried out as frustrations were felt that progress was not shown.</p>	<p>It was explained that the policy contained six key stages. Risk owners provide actions against the mitigation/control stage which was a significant part to the process.</p> <p>It was further added that detailed information and challenge could be sought directly from risk owners.</p> <p>The Portfolio Holder added that some risks would remain on the register and migration was required due to the nature of the risk for example the ICT0010 GDPR due to the size of the organisation and individuals involved.</p>
<p>A query was raised around the terminology used within the risk register and the consistency of officer standards. And asked if sufficient monitoring was undertaken.</p>	<p>Definition and clarification were provided for 'actions completed' and 'actions withdrawn,' reassurance was provided that work was ongoing with officers around risk management and the Section 151 Officer seeks assurance to ensure risks were actioned appropriately.</p>
<p>It was asked how scoring took place and if guidance had been followed.</p>	<p>It was explained that there was a policy and framework containing a matrix in place and that scoring, and moderation took place with officers to keep the risk relevant which provided assurance to the Committee.</p>
<p>Email received from Ellen Sullivan (risk owner) A query on risk was raised, as the residual rating of risk number ICT0010 remained the same even though there were mitigating actions.</p>	<p>Email received - Risk ICT0010 If the Council is found non-compliant with either UK General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and or the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 then, it could be subject to monetary penalties or other regulatory action, data protection audits, civil action, and associated consequences, including suffering reputational damage, and resultant detriment to the affected data subjects.</p> <p>Response</p> <p>Even with mitigations staff can still cause a breach of the legislation or a personal data breach through not following instruction or through human error. The mitigations enable us to argue our position as a controller of personal data committed to processing personal data appropriately and in line with the individual's rights, with the</p>

	right measures in place. This can help us with Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) decisions over taking regulatory action. The breach is still the same, the impact on the individual is still the same, but the decision of the ICO can be improved by the measures being in place. The risk of the event happening is the same it is the outcome that can be assisted by the measures in place.
It was asked if a general trend had been identified and if registers remain static as the summary received.	As each risk was so different and with an overview of service and project risk registers, it was emphasised that there was no pattern to risks being added and removed from registers.

- The committee felt that the risk register document provided a fair, accurate account with scoring profiles being produced with the support of the policy and guidance in place.

Resolved: The Strategic Risk Register be noted.

<b>6. HOMES IN POWYS - OVERVIEW</b>
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Background:

- A summary was provided to the Committee and background provided on how the scheme impacted on meeting housing needs across Powys.
- The Portfolio Holder expressed that a robust policy was in place for officers to make informed decisions despite the unprecedented demand.

<b>Points raised by the Committee:</b>	<b>Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members:</b>
Concerns were raised that even though priority needs were being identified, accommodation was not available.	200 empty homes within the council portfolio were confirmed and explained that several properties were planned for demolition.  Officers would provide more detail and numbers of empty properties within partner groups and the community housing sector for the Committee.
It was asked how long a void process would take to achieve a tenant moving in.	Turnaround times for voids including historical empty properties was 21 weeks, since April 2023 it had reduced to 12 weeks demonstrating efficiency within Council Services.
A question was raised on how support was provided to those without online facilities.	Wherever possible, self-service online was encouraged, however an application could be carried out over the phone, or an officer visit was possible.
It was asked if the shortest and longest waiting times for homes could be provided to the Committee for more	Officers would feedback on the range of times taken on average waiting times for each band.

understanding.	
It was asked if the council was ambitious enough to look into alternative accommodation methods e.g. office blocks.	The Portfolio Holder explained that the service was determined to increase the number of properties, however best value for tenants was the highest priority and costs must be considered. Corporate properties had been explored, without any viable options to date.
It was asked if the support mechanism from other agencies could be explained.	Reassurance was provided to the Committee that regular multi agency meetings and wider organisations were held. Awareness was raised through the Homes in Powys allocation policy along with regular thorough checks.
Concerns were raised around the length of time people were waiting for a home with only 5000 homes and 4000 people/families on the waiting list.	The Portfolio Holder explained that high demand areas had less turnover and therefore the demand remains high. Officers offer the search to be widened for accommodation needs. It was emphasised that the waiting list was actively managed to review housing needs and that people were in the correct banding.
Concerns were raised that with 122 temporary units becoming permanent homes, was the service actively seeking a further 122 units.	45 households were currently in Bed and Breakfast accommodation with a further 14 in the private rented sector and with the need increasing units are constantly being sought.
Was the number of homelessness increasing.	The number of homeless presentations were increasing, driven by various elements including the economy, legislation changes, and wider needs, and reflected in the Rapid Housing Transition Plan. Prevention rates had improved as the key intention was to avoid homelessness.
Did the same regulations and standards apply for temporary accommodation to permanent housing.	It was confirmed that the standard of the accommodation must meet housing quality standards with white goods also being provided if needed.

- The Committee agreed that an incredibly detailed report had been produced.
- The band priorities were explained within the presentation with additional clarity from officers.
- The Committee were reassured that work progresses at pace and all considerations were met.
- It was asked if rural wards with family care needs (members moving to help and support family needs) could be considered to help both the family and to elevate pressure on services.

Resolved: The Homes in Powys Overview be noted.

<b>7.</b>	<b>POWYS RAPID HOUSING TRANSITION PLAN - UPDATE</b>
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Background:

- The report provided an update to the Committee of the delivery of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.
- It was explained that a five-year plan was in place.
- And the key focus was to prevent homelessness where possible, where it cannot be prevented it was vital to minimise the time spent in temporary accommodation until the right home could be provided.
- Initial priorities of the plan included instant access triage centres, two interim supported accommodation schemes and the provision of modular temporary accommodation.

<b>Points raised by the Committee:</b>	<b>Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members:</b>
<p>It was asked if more detail could be provided around the modular housing units and if planning permission was required.</p>	<p>The temporary accommodation units would be self-contained flats connected to all utilities and would require planning permission, all opportunities for potential sites were being explored. The units were planned to be used for 'meanwhile use' while assessments were being carried out. It was stressed that all services and support mechanisms would need to be in place before hand.</p> <p>The Portfolio Holder added that supporting people into accommodation could reduce costs in other areas and produce beneficial outcomes.</p>
<p>It was suggested that a lot of rural areas could provide opportunities for off grid sites and to ensure that services had community involvement. It was asked that care and consideration was taken in the design phase to ensure a comforting look and feel.</p>	<p>Off grid would be investigated and cost factors considered.</p>
<p>How far had the project progressed and would Powys manufacturers be considered for the temporary accommodation units.</p>	<p>It was explained that sites were key and once identified, the process of tendering for production could begin.</p>
<p>It was asked if staff would be redeployed from other areas into the triage services. And noted that support could be gathered from other multi agencies and partners to help with costs.</p>	<p>There would be some redeployment of staff and stressed that Bed and Breakfast and privately provided accommodation would be used less so the overall cost would go down. A safe environment would be provided, and professional expertise would be brought in if needed to enable the individual to tell their story just once.</p>
<p>More detail was requested around what the triage centres would look like.</p>	<p>The centres would be self-contained flats with their own front door and would have private facilities and if they were not required for homelessness could be used for permanent homes which would arise from new builds or conversions including commercial buildings.</p>

It was acknowledged that a Recognition and a Trauma Informed Working Ways strategy was in place and more detail was requested.

A bundle of support was in place for staff and the need to decompress after challenging interactions was recognised for staff to give the best version of themselves. Regular reviews were undertaken to ensure the strategy was kept up to date.

- The Committee showed appreciation for an ambitious paper with positive plans and the units would provide a positive resolution to an increasing problem.
- It was commented that with limited availability across the county challenges would arise however the project was long term and would provide tenants with secure accommodation with their own front door.
- It was asked if timescales could be added to the plan to provide reassurance that sites had been identified.
- And noted that it would be a worthwhile spend to save exercise to provide the council with ongoing vital assets.

Resolved: That the Powys Rapid Housing Transition Plan Update be noted.

## **8. WORKING GROUP PROPOSAL**

Background:

- Advice had been provided to the current Economy, Residents and Communities Scrutiny County Farms Working Group that their work was evolving out of remit and must move into a more formal forum.
- The proposal was for the current Economy, Residents and Communities Scrutiny County Farms Working Group to disband.
- And for the Economy, Residents and Communities Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise any upcoming related topics.
- For a Cabinet Advisory Group proposal to go to Cabinet and if established would seek future opportunities for the County Farms Estate.
- It was confirmed that any member within the Cabinet Advisory Group as well as being part of a Scrutiny Committee would declare an interest to any related subject matter.
- It was noted that previous recommendations to the Cabinet around the current asset policy and framework had been accepted for action.
- It was confirmed that members would not transition automatically, and a process would be followed to seek nominations and additional secondments.
- The Portfolio Holder had gained guidance from the Legal and Monitoring Officer and stressed that inclusivity was important to the group.
- The Leader added that a comprehensive review of the policy framework around the county farms estate was to be undertaken quickly and hoped it would be completed by the advisory group if the proposal were accepted.
- It was emphasised that both a political and geographical balance was needed.
- The next steps would be to draft the proposal to Cabinet which if approved would generate a task to develop a term of reference for the group.

Resolved: The recommendations on the proposal be approved.

Recommendations

1. That the ERC Scrutiny Committee considers the proposal of the ERC County Farms Working Group to disband.

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2. For the Council's County farm and woodland estate scrutiny, be undertaken by the ERC Scrutiny Committee.
3. For the establishment of a Cabinet Advisory Group be proposed to Cabinet.

<b>9.</b>	<b>SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME</b>
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Resolved: The scrutiny work programme be noted.

**County Councillor A Davies (Chair)**