

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEES HELD BY
ZOOM ON THURSDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER 2024**

Present:

County Councillor A Davies (Chair), G Thomas, L Roberts, A Davies, G Morgan, S McNicholas, G E Jones, C Robinson, Ange Williams, D Edwards, A Jenner, B Breeze, G Preston, L Brighthouse, B Davies, P James, K Lewis, C Kenyon-Wade, R Devlin, G Mitchell, G Breeze

Co-opted Members: K Chedgzoy, S Davies, M Evitts.

Portfolio Holders:

P Roberts, D Thomas, S Davies, Richard Church, David Selby, Jackie Charlton,

Officers:

E Palmer – Chief Executive

C Pinney – Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer

A Orrells - Head of School Improvement & Learning

A Phillips - Interim Head of Finance

J Thomas - Director of Corporate Services

D Reynolds - Director of Economic Development and Growth

R Jones – Director of Education

N Davies – Director of Social Services and Wellbeing

M Perry - Chief Officer Place

M Evans – Head of Transforming Education

J Ashton – Senior Manager Community Services

A Thompson – Head of Housing

J Forsey – Head of Highways, Transport and Recycling

G Davies – Head of Planning and Regulatory Services

C James – Head of Business Intelligence & Governance

P Bradshaw – Head of People

E Sullivan – Head of Economy and Digital Services

D Burgess – Head of Economy and Climate

J Langridge-Thomas - Governance & Policy Officer

C Farmer - Governance & Policy Officer

F Llewellyn - Governance & Policy Officer

L Parry - Senior Manager Highways

S Powell – Head of Childrens Services

M Thomas - Deputy Head of Finance (Strategic Finance)

1.	APOLOGIES
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Apologies for absence were received from:

County Councillors: C Masefield, J Ewing, C Walsh, J Yeomans,

L Rijnbergen, B Davies

Portfolio Holders: J Gibson-Watt, M Dorrance, J Berriman, S Cox

2.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
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There were no Declarations of Interest from Members relating to items to be considered on the agenda.

3.	DISCLOSURE OF PARTY WHIPS
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The Committee did not receive any disclosures of prohibited party whips which a Member had been given in relation to the meeting in accordance with Section 78(3) of the Local Government Measure 2011.

4.	CORPORATE STRATEGIC AND EQUALITY PLAN (CSEP) SCORECARD: QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT (2024-2025)
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Points raised	Responses
Members noted that data from Q1 of 2023-2024 would have been helpful to understand the document better.	
Committee asked if the targets set were ambitious enough and questioned the validity.	This would be raised with the Corporate Leadership Team, will review and set further challenge where appropriate.
Questions raised as to the awareness and accessibility of services to the residents across Powys.	
The response to the survey was poor, 7 respondents and therefore not statistically robust.	
The current operational approach seems to be flawed, and it's crucial to identify the key feeders to the report. We need to clarify what we are achieving, especially for the residents of Powys, as this was of paramount importance. Collaboration with various other agencies and partners was essential, particularly in light of future Welsh Government legislative changes and social partnership duties. It's important to align with the PSB plans and objectives and recognise that the service boards' achievements are part of a much larger picture. We must consider whether the PCC's strategies align with these goals and question the financial sustainability of our initiatives. There's a bigger picture to paint here, and we need to determine whether we are meeting the specific objectives. The wellbeing objective represents the big picture, but it doesn't advise if aligning with anything else. Finally, we must evaluate if our current strategies are meeting the predictions and recommendations of future trends reports	<p>This report does not necessarily cover all of this.</p> <p>Cabinet Members and Officers would review how to expand the scope of information to residents.</p>
It was noted that the scorecard was useful if measuring trends.	

<p>There was a significant amount of missing data, were there opportunities for services to respond to the narrative. There are no clear, discernible positive outcomes for residents at this time. The narrative could be enriched with clear benefits, offering a more comprehensive picture of the positive impacts on the community.</p> <p>While there has been some training provided, it appears sporadic and could be enhanced. It's important to address these gaps to ensure that the services provided are effectively meeting the needs of the residents and demonstrating tangible benefits.</p>	
<p>Objective 2</p>	
<p>Where target were noted as "off target" how were these being addressed. Where objectives stated percentage of staff on Real Living Wage or above were statistics missing as cannot identify measure being addressed.</p>	<p>100% of staff have been paid the real living wage or above since 2023, this was also being incorporated by those services supporting the Council via procurement contracts. In terms of statistics these would be available the following year.</p>
<p>The apprenticeships target for the period of 2023-2025 requires a clear explanation of how these targets were determined. It's important to understand the rationale and methodology behind setting these goals to ensure they are monitored, realistic and achievable. Additionally, while 65% of staff reporting good wellbeing was a positive indicator, there was room for improvement. On the other hand, the fact that 79% of staff feel proud to work for the council, it's important to consider the reasons behind the dissatisfaction of the remainder.</p>	<p>In respect of apprenticeships further targets on staff turnover would be developed.</p> <p>79% of staff feeling proud to work for the Council was higher than the Local NHS Board and better than NHS UK, however, did not meet the PCC target set.</p>
<p>The current objective appears to be inward-looking, rather than focusing the residents of Powys. It's important to consider the broader impact on the community, especially when discussing financial matters. For instance, asking people on minimum wage to pay council tax for Powys County Council to afford the Real Living Wage raises concerns. Such an approach can be perceived as self-centred, particularly when the community's financial wellbeing was at stake. Powys has one of the lowest average take-home pays in Wales, with</p>	<p>To achieve the status of a Real Living Wage employer, it's important to consider the broader implications for all workers in Powys. The Welsh Government has already included registered care staff and the third sector in this initiative. Procurement processes should also reflect the commitment, ensuring that all who work in Powys are considered. In terms of the wider economy, collecting baseline data was a crucial first step. This data will inform the aspirations for the future, including the goal of becoming a Real Living Wage employer.</p>

<p>only Blaenau Gwent reporting lower figures. The economic context was crucial when setting objectives and making financial decisions that affect residents.</p>	<p>Additionally, there was a commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant, which guarantees certain standards. Anecdotal evidence can be useful, but setting ambitious targets to improve and reflecting on progress as we move along was essential. The actions and objectives should be part of a collaborative approach. Objectives will be reviewed annually, and any suggestions for improvement should be sent through for consideration. This process ensures that the objectives remain relevant and aligned with the overall goal of promoting a fair and sustainable economy in Powys.</p>
<p>The Corporate Strategic and Equality Plan (CSEP) would benefit from Trade Union comments.</p>	
<p>Objective 3</p>	
<p>The current approach shows a lack of targets for the figures provided. It's important to establish annual targets, and there would be no harm in setting quarterly targets for new homes created. This would provide a clearer aim and allow for better tracking of progress. Additionally, there was no target for the absolute poverty rate. Instead of using percentages, it would be beneficial to have the actual numbers, as this would give a more tangible understanding of the situation. For instance, what does a rate of 35 mean in real terms? Providing this context would make the data more relatable and actionable. Furthermore, it's crucial to outline what was being done to reduce the number of homeless households.</p>	<p>The figure showing zero achieved has raised concerns, and it's important to review the target figure. The Service have taken this back for further consideration. The current target was 292, but the actual figure stands at 284. The team was actively working to improve homelessness throughout the county. This includes efforts to reduce the number of voids, which should lead to a reduction in homelessness over the next few months. By focusing on these areas, the team aims to make significant progress in addressing homelessness and ensuring that the targets set are realistic and achievable. It's crucial to monitor these efforts closely to ensure that the desired outcomes are being met.</p>
<p>The issue of child poverty was particularly concerning in a rural county like Powys, where the number of affected children was as high as 4,000. This figure was alarming, especially since there was no target set to address it. Without intervention, the situation was likely to deteriorate further. Tackling child poverty must be a priority, requiring a comprehensive strategy that includes child social care and addresses the outcomes of poverty. The impact of absolute poverty was significant,</p>	<p>Raised several interesting points regarding the collaborative efforts to reduce poverty, which was a growing concern across Wales and the UK. It's crucial to work out targets and scrutinize the efficiency and effectiveness of these efforts. The meaningfulness of percentages and numbers should be considered, with a value base aiming for zero as close as possible, ensuring that children's individual needs are being met. There was a strategy in place for reducing the impact of poverty across</p>

<p>especially among primary and secondary school students. With 18.8% of the population dependent on a low-wage economy, the effects on learning and development can be profound. Absolute poverty was defined as having an income less than 60% of the median income in the area. It's important to determine what this threshold was for Powys to understand the full extent of the issue. Relative poverty refers to having an income below the average, based on CACI data. This measure provides insight into the economic disparities within the community and helps identify those who are struggling to make ends meet.</p>	<p>Powys involving partners. These initiatives focus on supporting communities, families, and learners, as well as community-focused schools. The impact of deprivation was being addressed through these measures. Annually, national measures from the Department Work and Pensions are used to assess progress. The target for empty properties was usually set at 25. Indicators 34 and 37, which relate to homelessness, are driven by demand. As house prices rise and wages fall, private landlord no-fault evictions contribute to the issue. Modular housing, which requires the same planning consent as permanent housing, was considered an interim measure. The root cause of homelessness was identified as the lack of houses. The council's budget was sustained by 10% through these measures, providing a home for life. The new build indicator 28 shows a target of 122, with 32 on site this year, 32 out to tender, and an upcoming pipeline of 333 council houses against a target of 331. Indicator 33 was more about management than performance, allowing anyone who feels the need to apply and join. The process of finding sites and handing over the keys was expected to take 3 years.</p>
	<p>The Leader commented that the child poverty figures in Powys are stark and worrying, highlighting a significant challenge for the county. With levels of income being low, the direct action that can be taken was limited. However, efforts are being made to stimulate the economy and provide better salaries and wages, which in turn should help to upskill the workforce. There was a clear need for action, and it's important to recognise the scale of the task facing not only the Local Authority but also other stakeholders. The economy, both locally and nationally, plays a vital role in addressing these issues. By focusing on economic growth and development, there was potential to make a positive impact on child poverty and improve the overall wellbeing of the community.</p>

<p>Acquisitions of homes target of 10 was achieved could the target be increased</p>	<p>The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) has no borrowing limits, which allows for significant flexibility in financing. It's designed to pay for itself within 60 years and even generate a surplus. This surplus can be used for repairs, maintenance, and other related expenses. The provisional budget is set up in a way that if more funds are needed, the HRA is not restricted, thanks to its self-financing nature. After the initial 60 years, it's expected that serious works may be required, but the account is structured to accommodate these future costs.</p>
<p>Was the Council on estate agents lists, for when properties become available.</p>	<p>When considering the housing market, it was important to ensure that actions do not distort the market. This was particularly relevant for ex-council houses, as was challenging for people to get into the housing market. Being prudent was a key factor in maintaining market stability. It was essential to balance the need for housing with the potential impact on the market. The roles of Clerk of Works and Property Quality Managers are crucial in this context. They ensure that the properties meet the required standards</p>
<p>Building small houses just above cost helps to keep the market accessible, allowing people to enter the housing market, and these houses are also offered to individuals outside of Powys.</p>	<p>The allocation policy for homes in Powys prioritised local connections when letting properties, taking into account the differences in local development and the impact of school closures on communities.</p>

Observations:

Objective 2:

Addressing red/off-target measures.

RLW payment made by PCC since 2023 and procurement contracts.

Apprenticeships target and staff wellbeing statistics.

Turnover rate targets to be developed.

Objective 3:

Lack of targets for figures; annual and quarterly targets needed.

Addressing homelessness and child poverty.

Collaborative approach to reducing poverty.

Strategy for reducing the impact of deprivation.

Indicators required for homelessness and new builds.

General:

Change wording to “accessible to all” in option one.

Agreement on actual figures where there are % sample sizes.
Ambitious targets and links to strategic documents.
More columns for Q1 comparisons and seasonal variations.
Structure and detail of the document.

Actions:

The Corporate Strategic and Equality Plan (CSEP):

Clarity needed in the right place.
Comments from Trade Unions to be considered.
Monitoring and benchmarking of apprenticeships.
Addressing homelessness and child poverty targets.
Collaborative approach to reducing poverty.

Review and Adjust Targets:

Corporate Leadership Team to review and ensure targets are challenging and valid.
Address red/off-target measures and develop turnover rate targets.

Expand Information Sources:

Expand the scope of information sources for better data accuracy.

Improve Accessibility and Communication:

Improve awareness and access to services for all residents.
Refresh communications on grievances and whistleblowing.

Embed Statistical Significance:

Clearly mark statistical insignificance in reports.

Enhance Training and Reporting:

Use the report for training resources, especially with flowcharts.
Ensure detailed and overview text for Quarter 1 objectives.

Collaborative Approach to Poverty Reduction:

Implement a collaborative strategy to reduce poverty and homelessness.
Monitor and benchmark apprenticeships and other key indicators.

Policy and Procedure Adjustments:

Embed missing flowcharts in policies once approved.
Ensure policies do not obligate informing whistleblowers of investigation outcomes.

County Councillor A Jenner (Chair)