

Public Document Pack

Economy, Residents and Communities Scrutiny Committee Monday, 12 December 2022

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMY, RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BY ZOOM ON MONDAY, 12 DECEMBER 2022

PRESENT

County Councillor A Davies (Chair)

County Councillor D Bebb, I Harrison, Adrian Jones, Arwel Jones, K Lewis, G Mitchell, J Brignall-Thorp, C Walsh

Portfolio Holders

County Councillor D Selby, D Thomas, J Berriman, J Gibson-Watt, M Dorrance

Officers

Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager and Head of Democratic Services)

Nigel Brinn (Executive Director - Economy and Environment)

Nina Davies (Interim Head of Social Services and Housing)

Gwilym Davies (Head of Property, Planning and Public Protection)

Jane Thomas (Head of Finance) Debby Jones (Professional Lead – Legal)

Emma Palmer (Head of Transformation and Communications)

Diane Reynolds (Head of Digital Services and Economy)

Catherine James (Interim Head of Transformation and Democratic Services)

Andy Thompson (Interim Head of Service for Housing)

1.	APOLOGIES
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Apologies for absence were received from

A Cartwright, T Colbert, S Williams

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:

Cllr GM declared a personal interest for item 4 Quarterly Report and 7 Shared Prosperity Fund due to being a trustee for PAVO and sits on the Growing Mid Wales Stakeholder Group, and a trustee and employees several local organisations that may in the future apply for funding under Shared Prosperity Fund.

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.	PERFORMANCE - RISK - FINANCE - QUARTER 2
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4.1. Performance Report - Quarter 2

Documents Considered: Report by County Councillor James Gibson-Watt Portfolio Holder for Corporate Performance Management

Issues Discussed:

- Work continued towards the new Cabinet Corporate plan which hold the Cabinet priorities and vision; however, the current plan would continue for 2022-2023, which each service has set out objectives and measures with targets to achieve.
- The proforma was provided to the Committee to clarify the nature of the report.

Questions:

Question	Response
<p>The Performance reports showed that elements need updating. By 2025 would 20 schools be closed.</p> <p>(Measure Ref 342 - By March 2025, we will reduce the number of primary schools in the county by 20 schools. [There was a reduction of 7 schools in 2021-2022] RAG red).</p>	<p>Cabinet Member Comment: The performance measure was an aspiration of the previous administration's Corporate Improvement Plan. The new administration would do things slightly differently but are all committed to transforming schools. A catchment review is underway.</p>
<p>Why was the measure (above) on the report as six months has passed for the report to be updated.</p>	<p>Officer Comment: The first year of transition from plan to plan was always challenging as commitments were owned by both previous and current Cabinets. A new plan was scheduled for the new year.</p>
<p>The target of 250 new homes by the council by the end of 2025, seems a modest number. We know that the number of people on the waiting list is about 5,000, was the target appropriate and what is being done to solve the waiting list.</p> <p>(Measure Ref 22 By the end of 2025, we will have built 250 new council-owned homes RAG Amber).</p>	<p>Cabinet Member for Housing: The target was set by the previous administration. There was a deficit in terms of the number of houses in supply to those waiting. 61 new council house completions with acquisitions of 7 new developer-built homes and planning for 56 new council homes has been secured and progressing, subject to funding and availability. Challenges include phosphates, planning delays, finance, grant availability, and construction inflation which affects the sector.</p>

<p>What was the Housing Associations target for building new homes and how have they performed.</p>	<p>Cabinet Member Comment: A Strategic Housing Partnership chaired by the Portfolio Holder collaborates to find a shared approach including the social grant funding. They contribute by building new homes and bring sites forward to the council. A social lettings agency was also being considered.</p>
<p>Reports have been received that there have been delays and problems contacting the Planning Department causing deadlines to be missed. How were planning delays being managed especially with difficulties around staffing and recruitment.</p> <p>(Objective Ref 136 - We will improve routes to employability into the Council through an apprenticeship scheme, promoted to schools and people who want to return to employment across the County. As part of this we will strengthen work-based learning across the Council and provide opportunities for work experience and employment / development in apprenticeship roles, BRAG Green).</p>	<p>Officer Comment: There were recruitment issues within the service, staff have left the authority which has had a significant impact. An action plan was in place to address the issue along with a mentoring programme.</p> <p>Planning applications and enforcement numbers have shown to be going down.</p>
<p>Could the report be restructured for the Committee to focus on the economy, residents and communities' elements as the report covered the whole council.</p>	<p>Officer Comment: The report could be refocused, and officers would collaborate with committees to provide a more suitable format.</p>
<p>How is a town centre rejuvenation judged as the status showed green.</p> <p>(Objective Ref 25 - We will support businesses with Covid recovery and the economic growth of new and established businesses including the development of our town centres, BRAG Green).</p> <p>Performance Report Q2 – Growing Mid Wales section</p>	<p>Officer Comment: The assessment was drawn from the transforming towns programme. Each town has an improvement plan which underlies the assessment. 6 plans were currently in place with a further 10 in progress.</p>
<p>Would the report layout be changed in</p>	<p>Officer Comment:</p>

<p>line with the stronger, fairer, greener agenda</p>	<p>The performance report would be set against the corporate plan and show performance against delivery regarding the aspirations in that plan.</p> <p>A move was planned towards a results-based model (RBA)</p> <p>How much How well What difference</p> <p>Against the three objectives set by the Cabinet which were out to for engagement.</p> <p>A report card per objective would be used in conjunction with Power BI to hold services accountable for delivery.</p>
<p>Cumulative sickness levels have risen since Q1, was that expected, have workloads been considered.</p> <p>(Measure Ref 202 - The (April to March) average number of days sickness per full time equivalent employee will be 9 days or less. * This does not include COVID-19 related sickness, RAG Green).</p>	<p>Officer Comment:</p> <p>A slight increase has been shown in Q2 which was not expected on the rolling twelve-month programme. Compared to other local authorities, Powys is well placed.</p>
<p>One of the poorest areas of mandatory training falls under cyber security, what was the rationale.</p> <p>(Measure Ref 371 - Number of posts completing Mandatory Training as part of their role will increase to 90% by 2023, RAG Red).</p>	<p>Officer Comment:</p> <p>Due to the importance of cyber security training, it is conducted annually, the course was discussed regularly, and Heads of Service were reminded monthly to ensure staff undertake the training.</p> <p>The dispersed workforce was reached by workbooks rather than online courses.</p>
<p>Were targets realistic and how are they decided.</p> <p>(Measure Ref 371 - Number of posts completing Mandatory Training as part of their role will increase to 90% by 2023, RAG Red).</p>	<p>Officer Comment:</p> <p>Targets were set as part of the Integrated Business plan process; the Information Well Being Bank is used along with comparison data where possible.</p> <p>Targets are set at the beginning of the plan with an annual assessment. It was suggested that deep dives could be conducted around certain elements relating to the scrutiny</p>

	committee.
<p>Could a confidential briefing be held for more discussion around the closure of 20 schools by 2025</p> <p>(Measure Ref 342 - By March 2025, we will reduce the number of primary schools in the county by 20 schools. [There was a reduction of 7 schools in 2021-2022] RAG Red).</p> <p>Why is that detail in the report.</p>	<p>Officer Comment: The same report goes to all scrutiny committees and will be drawn out by the relevant committee.</p>
<p>How much work was it for officers to complete the report and was that good value for money</p>	<p>Officer Comment: Each Head of Service is accountable for service elements. Objectives, measures, and outcomes were set out at the beginning of the process and updated quarterly. A balanced central report was then provided. Officers were familiar with the format.</p>

Discussion / Debate:

The report was a useful tool; however, the colour coding draws the eye to the red status.

The report was complex and overwhelming for the new members of the committee.

Some to the committee members were unable to work out whether the target was not achieved due to lack of funding, or underlying issues.

It was debated that the target audience varies, and the report deals with such a wide workload.

Outcomes:

The Committee welcomed proposals to change the report format, as the report It was recommended that just one scoring matrix is used across all reports

The Committee welcomed the opportunity for further report training
Committee members noted how the E-learning training courses were time consuming and would look to find a more accessible way and make them user friendly

It was suggested that other local authority data is used for comparison.

Officers would reflect on the provided proforma and focus on certain areas for the agenda more suited to the needs of the committee.

4.2. Strategic Risk Register - Quarter 2

Documents Considered: Report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Transformation, County Councillor David Thomas.

Issues Discussed:

- Strategic risks would be reported to Cabinet and the Audit Committee on a quarterly basis.
- Each service was responsible for a register and risks were escalated to the strategic risk register if required.
- Registers were updated continually as integrated into the JCAD system.
- There was a need for the committee to focus on risks and to challenge individual risks relevant to services covered by economy, residents, and communities.

Questions:

Question	Response
<p>The Control measures were limited on the risk register with just one line of information.</p> <p>(Appendix A - 7.2.23 Qtr. 2 2022-2023 Strategic Risk Register Report)</p>	<p>Officer Comment: Catastrophic was based on the current system matrix, which was the highest level of risk, however all elements of the risk must be considered.</p>
<p>The Heatmap was difficult to understand</p> <p>(Appendix B 7.2.23 Qtr. 2 2022-2023 Heatmap for Strategic Risk Register Report)</p>	<p>Officer Comment: Risk is scored on probability and impact - How Likely v's impact</p> <p>The Heatmap shows a snapshot of where risks are on the matrix</p>
<p>How were scores achieved for the escalated Nature Risk.</p> <p>Inherent rating 25 Residual rating 16</p> <p>(Ref HTR0018 – Impact of nature emergency on our ability to deliver services).</p>	<p>Officer Comment: The Council is unable to work in isolation and works with neighbouring organisations which would hopefully see the residual risk reduce.</p>
<p>Nature risk (above) was duplicating NRW and Government legislation, and work carried out by outside bodies.</p>	<p>Officer Comment: It was not specifically for the Council to work on, but the nature risks do impact on the services the Council delivers. Specific Council duties must be adhered to.</p>
<p>What timescale have been set against risks.</p> <p>Were risks drawn up in terms of future generations or to deliver in a for five/ten-year timescales</p>	<p>Officer Comment: Several actions are being addressed straight away and reports were sent on a regular basis to the Welsh Government, Other risks were longer term but</p>

	measurable.
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Outcomes:

- Use one methodology across all reports
- Inadequate control measures were shown with limited information provided.
- To provide a timescale to show the estimated time risks will be on the register
- It was felt that duplication of work with outside bodies should be addressed.
- Unachieved targets by services implies a shortfall of workforce or workload with challenging budgets.
- The risk scale scoring system is useful, as it provides evidence of occurring issues.

4.3. Finance Report - Quarter 2

Documents Considered: Report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Transformation, County Councillor David Thomas

Issues Discussed:

- Financial forecast as year ending 31 March 2023 as at 30 September 2022.
- The report covers the impact of rising inflation, costs of fuel, food, energy and pay awards which the Cabinet has considered.
- Q1 reported £3.827 million was projected to be drawn from specific reserves to deal with the additional pressures which identified a further shortfall of £1 million.
- The deficit for Q2 has risen to £7.064m, £5.316 million would be funded through the drawdown of specific reserves.
- Capital schemes had also been impacted due to contractor and material cost increasing.
- Highways, Transport and Recycling (HTR) carried forward unachieved savings targets of £1.3 million, those unachieved savings were absorbed within the HTR budget in 2021/22. The delivery of the savings was impacted by Covid, such as car park income and public transport.
- The Head of Service has confirmed that the unachieved savings would be absorbed within the existing HTR revenue budget and has also confirmed £295,505 of the target will be achieved this financial year. The service budgets will be realigned as the targets can now be met through additional income being achieved through Street Works income, Highway Design income and Recycling income.
- The cost-of-living challenge also impacted on our local businesses and residents and creates additional pressure on the Council as demand for our services increases.
- The previous agreed budget was no longer sufficient to meet council costs and reserves would be drawn down.
- It is unlikely that the Council would receive more funding from the Welsh Government.

Questions:

Question	Response
<p>How did you overspend on routine maintenance</p> <p>(Appendix B – Head of Service Commentary - Highways Transport & Recycling Overview £222k overspend on highways routine maintenance works, which is an improvement since June 2022).</p>	<p>Officer Comment: Due to demands on the road network, a statutory duty is in place to repair dangerous elements of roads. The flooding deterioration had impacted the budget.</p>
<p>How has an overspend on green waste been attained.</p> <p>(Appendix B – Head of Service Commentary - Highways Transport & Recycling Overview £144k overspend on green waste collections).</p>	<p>Officer Comment: Collection charges will be increased as other local authorities have already made.</p>
<p>Does the green waste leave Powys to process.</p>	<p>Officer Comment: To confirm arrangements.</p>
<p>Unachievable savings in Highways were naturally concerning</p> <p>(Finance Report – section 5.2.7).</p>	<p>Officer Comment: Some savings had been impacted by Covid such as car parking income The ability to achieve budget for school transport was challenging, however those specific areas that overachieved, budgets were aligned to balance.</p>
<p>The most visible aspect in council cutbacks was the state of repair of roads, how are repairs determined</p> <p>(Appendix B – Head of Service Commentary - Highways Transport & Recycling Overview).</p>	<p>Officer Comment: Street work surveys were completed along with resident and councillor comments for consideration. The asset management plan sets out strict criteria based on risk</p>
<p>What was the reasoning on the overspend on the management of household waste sites</p> <p>(Appendix B – Head of Service Commentary - Highways Transport & Recycling Overview - £225k overspend on Household Recycling Centre management fee for July to</p>	<p>Officer Comment: The contract with Potters had expired and re-negotiated, and due for a review. All contracts have increased and impacting services.</p>

March 2023 whilst the contract retender takes place).	
Would the Highways Department consider salting unclassified roads for a paying business	Officer Comment: Winter maintenance could potentially mean less routes being carried out and details would be considered.

Outcomes:

- The Committee felt that the finance report was presented well and answered a lot of questions
- Unachievable savings in Highways were concerning
- Members of the Committee always find it difficult to explain to residents that not all highways' issues will be resolved, and everyone is treated fairly.

5. WORKING GROUP FEEDBACK / COUNCILLOR REPORTS

5.1. Phosphates Working Group

The Group met to explore options explore options, councillors felt they would be best placed to support officer roles with engagement with external bodies and would evolve into the nature and climate emergency work of the Council.

5.2. County Farms Working Group

In addition to the recent meeting, conversations have been held with the Leader the151 Officer and Finance Team. A detailed briefing would be held with the Estate Manager early next year. A draft Terms of Reference would be shared with the committee once finalised.

5.3. LDP Working Group

Closing date for candidate sites was the13 December, councillors were asked to encourage potential candidates to come forward as further advertisement has been released.

It was noted that previous sites would not automatically be included into the plan and would need to re-apply.

One to one assistance is available for applicants.

It was noted that the scheme is progressing well.

Questions:

Question	Response
Deadlines are tight, would they potentially be extended	Portfolio Holder No, as prior warning has been given to enable candidates to meet the deadline.

<p>What do you envisage your total to be from candidate sites throughout Powys</p>	<p>Portfolio Holder Approximately 90 applications were received The Property Team would also be looking at sites</p> <p>A message has been released around phosphates that problems will be worked through not to discourage applications.</p>
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6. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the schedule of future meetings.

7. SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

7.1. Shared Prosperity Fund

Documents Considered: Consider the report of the Cabinet Member for a Prosperous Powys, County Councillor David Selby: Shared Prosperity Fund: Submission of a Regional Investment Plan for Mid Wales.

Outcomes:

Scrutiny made the following observations:

- The Committee was generally content with the report presented for consideration and that the application form was very clear and straightforward.
- Funding has been confirmed and a memorandum of understanding would need to be completed so that the funding could be accessed.
- £2.7m had been allocated for year 1 and that it was hoped that written confirmation would be received that some of this funding could be rolled forward to Year 2.
- The Investment plan sets out the high-level information which was available for everyone to share to encourage applications.
- In the first-year applications would be focussed on Council based projects due to the short timescale but subsequently would be an open to a wider range of applications.
- In response to whether support would be available for organisations who required it to complete applications, which limited support would be available, but a series of guides were being prepared to support applicants in completing the form.
- A further update would be provided to Town and Community Councils about the Fund and how to make applications as well as a further briefing to Members.
- Consideration was being given as to whether applicants could apply for multiple workstreams rather than a single workstream as suggested.

- Organisations involved in the Local Partnership would be allowed to apply for funding for projects but could not take part in the determination of their own applications.
- All applications would be assessed by officers and then applications and officer recommendations would be considered by the Local Partnership.

The Committee suggested that:

- the overall investment plan be sent out in advance of the requests for applications being issued and noted that a communications plan for the plan had been agreed.
- Consideration be given to representation on the Local Partnership from a work-based learning provider and also Local Nature Partnerships.

Scrutiny Recommendations to Cabinet

1. that the overall investment plan be sent out in advance of the requests for applications being issued
2. that consideration be given to representation on the Local Partnership from a work-based learning provider and Local Nature Partnerships

7.2. Exempt Item

RESOLVED: to exclude the public for the following item 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).

The Monitoring Officer has determined that category 3 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules applies to the following item. His view on the public interest test (having taken account of the provisions of Rule 14.8 of the Council's Access to Information Rules) was that to make this information public would disclose information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

These factors in his view outweigh the public interest in disclosing this information. Members are asked to consider these factors when determining the public interest test, which they must decide when considering excluding the public from this part of the meeting.

7.3. Confidential Report

Issues Discussed:

- Suggestions of organisations to form part of the panel
- Cabinet has approved the list
- The Panel should be a reasonable cross section of the County

Questions:

Question	Response
Will support be available for application completion	Officer Comment: Limited support was available, in addition, guidance notes have been provided.
Is pre application advise available	Portfolio Holder Comment:

	Investment programme - reference document
Will documentation be sent out to town and community councils automatically How are forms obtained	Officer/ Portfolio Holder A further briefing would take place with town and community councils, all information will be online.
Could applicant choose multiple workstreams	Officer Comment: Consideration will be taken over the options as the council would not want to stop innovation.
If an organisation was a member of the panel, would they be excluded from voting on applications	Officer Comment: An organisation for example would be excluded from voting on its own application only – but would not be excluded from applying.
If anyone can apply, how would the process work (scoring system)	Officer Comment: A deadline process would be in place for all applications Officer recommendations would be made to the panel who would receive and assess the complete set.

Outcomes:

- In-depth document.
- Application form was very clear and straightforward - needs to provide good guidance.
- The Committee was happy with the selection criteria that will be used to help the panel assess criteria .
- Application form was very clear gives business of all sizes to apply.

County Councillor A Davies (Chair)