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Economy, Residents and Communities Scrutiny Committee Monday, 17 July 2023

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMY, RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BY ZOOM ON MONDAY, 17 JULY 2023

PRESENT

County Councillor Karl Lewis

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

J Charlton Cabinet member of a Greener Powys

R Church Cabinet member of a Safer Powys

D Thomas Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation

J Berriman Cabinet Member for a Connected Powys

M Dorrance Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for a Fairer Powys

Nigel Brinn (Executive Director Economy & Environment)

Diane Reynolds (Head of Economy and Digital Services)

Paul Bradshaw (Head of Workforce and OD)

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

Matthew Perry (Head of Highways, Transport and Recycling)

Lynne Griffin (Professional Lead Organisational Design and Development)

Wayne Welsby - Professional Lead Procurement and Commercial Services

Tom Yeo - Programme Delivery Manager (Climate and Nature)

Jenny Ashton – Interim Head of Community Services

Anne Phillips – Deputy Head of Finance

Sarah Quibell - Service Manager for Education Support Services

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor A Davies

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest by Members relating to items to be considered at the meeting

3. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPS

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. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Outcome: The Chair was authorised to sign the Minutes of the previous meetings as a correct record 05.06.2023.

5. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN WORKING GROUP - OBSERVER

Resolved: that County Councillor A Jones volunteered to be the Observer on the Local Development Plan Working Group.

6. FREE SCHOOL MEAL VOUCHERS

The Committee were reassured that:

Vouchers provided to families through the Catering Services are tracked.
Families can only use the vouchers in specifically allocated locations.
For those families without an email address direct bacs payments are made.
The SHEP (School Holiday Enrichment Programme) scheme is available, but this is not universal and is only available in certain areas of Powys.

The Committee expressed concern that:

The short notice from Welsh Government given to the Council regarding the withdrawal of the scheme.
The disparity being created across Wales with some authorities continuing the scheme or providing alternatives.
Families having to manage and adapt budgets accordingly at short notice due to the impending summer holidays.
The potential additional demand on Council Services if the vouchers/payments are not provided to families.
The Council intends making a single year extension to the scheme i.e., for this summer only.
Direct payments are not capable of being tracked and we are unable to ensure that the payments are used for the correct purpose.
Vouchers although issues are not fully utilised in all cases.
Less financial reserves will be available within the authority for families with complex needs.

Correspondence to the Welsh Government will be drawn up by the Committee to express concerns around the position that the Council has been presented with and in particular the short notice period provided for the existing schemes withdrawal.

Recommendations:

1. That the Cabinet accepts Option 2 and continues to provide the Scheme previously provided by Welsh Government during the school summer holiday period in 2023 only.
2. The sum of £280k is vired from the central Risk Budget to the catering budget.

7. HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

Background:

- The updated Home to School Transport Policy aims be aligned with the School Admission arrangements.
- The new Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) are to be introduced in January 2026, which would enable all public transport to be accessible to disabled people and 'spare seats' will then be available for sale.
- The cost to the Council is £11m per annum to provide transport for learners.
- The average cost per pupil for transport to school is approximately £1500, the Council propose to charge £400 per spare seat.
- It was clarified that the Policy was brought to the Committee under the Portfolio for a Green Powys which includes transport.

Points raised by the Committee:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members:
Align Policies	
Clarification was required If the proposal were to amend the policy from the nearest school to the catchment area school.	Currently the Council policy states nearest or catchment area. The Learner Travel Wales Measure States that travel provision must be made to the pupils nearest suitable school and would be a matter for the local authority to determine the most suitable school.
Would the Learner Travel Wales Measure be contravened if the Council policy is changed.	Specific legal advice will be taken.
Simplicity is key, a catchment area map when selecting a school would help parents make informed decisions.	The Council aim to provide a streamlined process for parents to make informed decisions.
Concerns were raised around siblings attending different schools.	The change in policy has led to very few cases of siblings attending different school. The Council have an appeal process for parents if required.
It was asked if the allocation of spare seats could be brought forward before the 2026.	The date is changeable, however the officer advised for consistency matters of implementation across Powys the date remain as set.
	It was clarified that the catchment areas are defined as the normal place of residence of parents and learner.
	It was clarified that only one primary and one high school would be available within the catchment area and stressed that parents always have a choice of schools.
Has the figure of £59k (Council transport cost per day), been remodelled for potential catchment changes.	Due to the complications more work would be conducted around the modelling.
What was the process in which the catchment areas were determined.	Assurances were provided that an admissions process consultation was conducted annually as a statutory requirement.
Changes on catchment areas around vacancy rates could significantly impact on the transformation agenda.	
PSVAR	
Concerns were raised around the equality of the providing spare seats, as not all parents would be able to afford the additional cost.	
With fuel prices dropping and the move to electric vehicles, would the	PSVAR requires an additional cost, with a year-on-year additional cost due to contract

<p>cost to spare seats change.</p>	<p>changes. Electric vehicles would be marginally cheaper to run but the capital outlay would be significantly higher than diesel/petrol vehicles. Clarification was provided to the Committee around the PSVR regulations from Welsh Government and the dates set for implementation.</p>
<p>Why was the vacant seat scheme cancelled.</p>	<p>The vehicles used to transport children to school were not PSVAR compliant and therefore the Council were not authorised to provide the spare seat scheme within the regulations of the Department for Transport.</p>
<p>It was commented that equity of the spare seat scheme would mean a cheaper option than parents driving children to school.</p>	
<p>It was asked if information was available around the number of private companies that were compliant with PSVAR. Concerns were raised that smaller firms may find it difficult to comply.</p>	<p>Operators have been required to provide fleet information to the Welsh Government. Transport contracts will be renewed at the end of July 2025.</p>
<p>Concerns raised that if the spare seat scheme was available out of catchment areas, it may encourage parents to choose a different school.</p>	
	<p>The Cabinet Member expressed the complexity of the process and added that the Council supported 68 operators. Twice yearly meetings were held with operators to enable information to be gathered. The spare seat scheme was not an income generating scheme.</p>
<p>If a school would like to amend a cluster would transport be provided.</p>	<p>The annual consultation process would raise any concerns from schools around any changes to cluster areas.</p>

It was moved and duly seconded to recommend the Home to School Transport Policy is received by the Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendation:

The Home to School Transport Paper be considered by the Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee.

Background:

- A comprehensive presentation was provided to the Committee.
- It was explained that Workforce Planning is a strategic organisational development activity and an integral part to the Integrated Business Planning process which is supported by the Service.
- The Service is seeking continuous improvement through training and shared good practice examples from service areas within the Council.

Resolved: The Committee noted a very positive presentation from Workforce Planning.

9.	PROCUREMENT - CLIMATE ACTION PLAN
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Background:

- Key activities were provided to the Committee including:
Gathering emissions information in order to provide a full picture for the Council.
- The four key spend areas showed that a third of emissions levels fall within the Highways, Transport and Recycling supply chain.
- The Procurement Service supports Council Services to identify and drive opportunities.

Points raised by the Committee:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members:
What percentage of carbon emissions does Wales equate to, in the overall total for the UK. What is the Powys percentage of carbon emissions in Wales.	Information to be provided.
Would the Procurement Service actively change contracts with suppliers that were taking steps towards reducing carbon emissions. Concerns were raised that the process may exclude smaller suppliers that are less able to adapt. What support would the Council provide as a purchaser to mitigate impacts.	The full life cycle of the procurement process has been reviewed, considered financially and environmentally. The aim was to provide mechanisms and support for the smaller suppliers to help reduce carbon emissions. An example provided showed that the Council would provide an Information Tool to local suppliers, with the opportunity to work with Business Wales to submit tenders to meet Council needs to gain a competitive advantage.
How would the Council police suppliers in the reduction of carbon and evident it as a true record.	Methodology issued by the Welsh Government was very limited, the aim of the Council was to gain information at a granular level to provide better understanding. New contract management framework approach will be introduced which will provide a standards criteria to tier supply chains.

Resolved: The Procurement Climate Action Plan be noted.

10.	BUILDINGS AND LAND - CLIMATE ACTION PLAN
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Background:

- Work continues to compile the Building and Land Climate Action Plan.
- Positive actions have been taken including the ECO4 scheme, schools having led lighting and a new asset collaboration programme, which also assists schools and community centres to be more sustainable.
- It was noted that in order to meet the ambitions of the Council, a better understanding of assets was needed, by measuring emissions and conducting condition surveys will ensure a more informed decision-making process and value for money.

Points raised by the Committee:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members:
It was noted that farm tenants have expressed that they were unable to access the ECHO 4 scheme.	Condition and sustainability surveys of farm estate buildings were being undertaken to ensure the Council can take informed decisions for the future of the estate.
Clarification was asked regarding the need for electricity at landfill sites and settlement ponds.	Clarification was provided that settlement ponds require an electric supply for aeration, the Property Team were exploring opportunities around grant funding to implement the infrastructure.
How would resources be sourced to conduct the Climate Action Plan.	Most of the actions on the plan would be carried out as business as usual, however if a more ambitious approach was taken, investment would be required for Project Managers.
The work of the Council was encouraging, however without a wraparound view including the National Grid, the Welsh Government target of 2030 and UK Government 2050 may not be achieved.	Cabinet Member: Work carried out on the Local Area Energy Plan for Powys has a strong and positive network. The whole estate of Powys was being reviewed and was explained that the National Grid may not be able to assist, therefore the Council will look at what can be done and what infrastructure can be introduced.
	Cabinet Member: Added there was a real need to address National grid issues and capabilities. Resources were a concern and Transformation Programme was being looked into to ensure officers were in the correct roles to conduct Climate Action plans.

Resolved: The Building and Land Climate Action Plan be noted.

11. GOVERNANCE - CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

Background:

- The Governance Climate Action Plan is in place as part of the wider actions undertaken by the Council in response to the Climate and Nature Emergency.
- It demonstrated the commitment to the Welsh Government public sector 2030 targets.
- The plan is based around 7 key themes to be considered to meet the climate needs and ambitions.
- And would identify funding and where resources were needed for effective impact.
- Actions within the Council was running in parallel along with the Welsh Government targets.

Points raised by the Committee:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members:
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	<p>Cabinet Member Expressed thanks to all the services for the hard work being conducted and the collaboration that is being conducted. For additional support and actions, the staff Green Network would begin meeting on a regular basis.</p>
	<p>Cabinet Member A red rag status was highlighted and expressed concern that the climate action plans need to be costed as assistance will be required from both Welsh Government and UK Government.</p>

Resolved: The Governance Climate Action Plan be noted.

12.	SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME
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Resolved: The Work Programme be noted.

County Councillor Karl Lewis (Vice-Chair)

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