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Economy, Residents and Communities Scrutiny Committee Monday, 30 October 2023

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMY, RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BY ZOOM ON MONDAY, 30 OCTOBER 2023

PRESENT

County Councillor A Davies (Chair)

County Councillors B Davies, A Jones, E A Jones, P James, C Kenyon-Wade, G Preston, L Rijnenberg, S Williams

David Selby - Cabinet Member for a More Prosperous Powys

David Thomas - Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation

Jackie Charlton - Cabinet Member for a Greener Powys

Diane Reynolds - Head of Economy & Digital Services

Matt Perry - Head of Highways, Transport and Recycling -Highways Operations

Paul Wozencraft - Improvement and Programme Change Manager (HTR)

John Forsey - Senior Manager - Corporate Fleet and Transport

Jane Thomas – 151 Officer

Jenny Ashton – Head of Community Services

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies received: Cllr G Mitchell

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 MEETING

The Chair was authorised to sign the Minutes of the previous meeting on 11 September 2023 as a correct record.

5. HTR MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT CLIMATE ACTION PLAN - UPDATE

Background:

- The Climate Action Plan had been reviewed and an update was presented.
- The document showed how work had progressed and any slippages were closely monitored and actioned.
- Dates had been populated as requested by the Committee to reflect actions taken and when targets were due for completion.
- Red RAG status items were highlighted and explained that the majority were around the depot infrastructure and fleet requirements.
- Costings were being worked through for the introduction of electric vehicles and the impact on the eleven Council depots.

- Work in progress involved the development of the sub stations in both Brecon and Abermule.
- The Council were exploring various fuel options including:
 - the use of hydrated vegetable oil (hvo) which would result in a significant reduction in CO2 without vehicle adaption.
 - a business case was also in progress for liquefied petroleum gas (LPG).
- The Fleet section was flagged as a red status due to the uplift of 50% in costs for any electric light goods vehicle (lgv) and 100% for HGV's that may be purchased in comparison to a non-electric vehicle.
- It was explained that analysis would take place around the change in behaviours towards the use of public transport to help in the next steps towards active travel.
- And new role would be introduced to help support the need for active travel including support for school travel.

Points raised by the Panel	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members
The price of hvo was questioned and it was asked if it would be obtained from a sustainable source.	It was explained that the cost difference would be approximately 20p per litre more expensive, but the Council would see a 90% reduction in CO2. It was noted that a lot of hvo was produced aboard and brought into the UK. The Cabinet Member for a Greener Powys added that the procurement process would be controlled, and only clean oil would be used (no palm oil).
It was asked if other types of oil could be used for example old chips shop oil and rape seed oil.	The officer was aware that other oils could be used and would investigate further.
It was commented that in certain areas of Powys bus services had been cut and the public would hesitate to use services until reviewed.	
A school walking bus had been seen in some towns, and asked if that could this be encouraged.	It was stressed that schools were a focus, and an educational service was key to the action plan.
Some actions had long term (10 year) targets, would there be a way of providing more detail along the transition to the target or additional targets to show progression.	It was explained that the targets were monitored, and the street lighting target was given as an example and progression showed the usage in 2008 as 6.6 million kilowatt a year and in 2030 will be reduced to under 1 million kilowatt a year.
	The Cabinet Member for a Greener Powys added that the annual carbon accounts had been submitted in September to the Welsh Government, and could be used for the purpose of checking, monitoring, and comparing data.
It was asked if the cooler led lighting change to amber lighting for streetlights was part of the dark skies scheme and felt the scheme concept may not be fully understood.	The officer confirmed it was part of the dark night skies.

<p>How would staff be charged to use the facilities in depots to charge personal electric vehicles.</p>	<p>The options were being explored and vehicle chargers would predominantly be used for the Council at night and potentially could be used for staff personal vehicles during the day through a charging mechanism like the ones in public car parks. The infrastructure was being explored to ensure it would be used to the full advantage.</p>
<p>It was noted that a lot of the actions were dependant on funding and more details were requested.</p>	<p>Cost had significant implications on the plan and additional funding would be required to facilitate some of the actions. The Cabinet Member for a Greener Powys stressed that additional funding was required and would not be taken from the core fund provided to the service.</p>
	<p>It was explained that under the Climate Board there were separate action plans for different areas of the Council operations and external work. The plans identify what is needed and would then be costed. Limited funding would then be allocated across all action plans and further additional funds needed to help support the Council achieve net zero. One coherent plan would then be compiled in readiness for future funding opportunities.</p>
<p>It was noted that in certain areas active travel was not considered safe and additional paths would be needed, and the current offer of public transport was not attractive to the public as bus shelters and timetables were poor.</p>	
<p>It was commented that the HTR services had the majority of actions to reduce CO2 and would benefit from additional funding from other services towards the cost.</p>	
<p>It was asked if grid capacity had been considered for Council usage. And felt that spare capacity could be used for Powys residents. It was asked if partnerships had been considered regarding wind farms and hydrogen as it was felt that national links were not joined up around certain issues.</p>	<p>Communications and data gathering was underway with energy providers and all options including hydrogen were being explored, however it was not readily available but may change in the near future. The Grow Mid Wales partnership with Ceredigion included an energy workstream who in conjunction with the Welsh Government would compile a joint action plan. Grid capacity had been identified at a national level, and the Leader of the Council had requested a conference on that issue for rural locations.</p>

	<p>It was emphasised by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Transformation that forecasts for service core funding was under enormous pressure and a number of climate change initiatives had already been built into services. However additional funding would need to be sought to achieve actions and every possible opportunity was taken.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for a Greener Powys added that a lot of positivity had been driven by the Climate Action Plan and contributions were included from external parties including stakeholders and avenues were being explored with different groups.</p>
	<p>It was noted that the Council must look at how it invests to deal with current impacts of climate, particularly around increased flooding, and the impact it was having on the infrastructure.</p>
<p>The Officers were thanked for a comprehensive update and providing in-depth detail behind the actions within the plan.</p>	

Action: that the HTR Mobility And Transport Climate Action Plan reflect more detail of progression towards achieving the set targets as some of the actions/targets were long term.

Resolved: HTR Mobility And Transport Climate Action Plan Update be noted.

6.	SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS
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The Chair reported the Cabinet's responses to Scrutiny recommendations to the Committee and thanked them for their contributions.

1. Q1 Performance Report - Cabinet 19.09.23 - three recommendations were made to Cabinet and all partially accepted.
2. Powys Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan 2023-2028 – Cabinet 01.08.23– all four recommendations to Cabinet were fully accepted.

Resolved: The Scrutiny Recommendations be noted.

7.	WORKING GROUP UPDATES
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Updates were received:

1. County Farms
 - The Chair deferred the decision to disband the County Farms Working Group and would contact the Lead Member to clarify concerns.
 - It was felt that the Working Group had made good progress but had slowed recently due to Council issues.
 - Recent frustration was expressed that information had not been forthcoming.

- Reservations were relayed that the Cabinet Advisory Group may become too close to the Cabinet and would need to be aware of any impact.

2. Heart of Wales Property Services

- The Working Group investigated the transition of the Heart of Wales Property Services back to the Council.
- Various elements of the transition had been analysed and reviewed including speaking with staff to gain understanding and gauge morale levels.
- It was explained to the meeting that minor ICT issues were to be resolved and would be reviewed at the next meeting.
- It was felt that staff have received a positive experience and overall were pleased to be working for the Council.
- The Cabinet were congratulated on the number of apprenticeships being undertaken with the Council.

3. Leisure Review (Joint Scrutiny)

- It was explained that the Working Group had received a significant amount of useful helpful information from officers including:
- Results of the engagement survey and the number of responses received were amongst the highest of any Council survey.
- Findings from the condition surveys.
- It was expressed that officers had conducted a tremendous amount of work and enormous effort had been provided to the project.
- The Project would conclude findings and determine the next steps.

Resolved: The Working Group Updates be noted.

8.	SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME
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Resolved: The Scrutiny Work Programme and dates of future meetings be noted.

9.	EXEMPT
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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).

10.	ECONOMY UPDATE
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The Cabinet Member for a More Prosperous Powys introduced the presentation and explained to the Committee that elements within the presentation aligned to the delivery of the Corporate Plan.

The Committee noted that:

- The presentation provided a comprehensive overview of projects ongoing and completed and how the Council had worked on collaborations and partnerships and with organisations, stakeholders, and groups to achieve successful outcomes.
- Assurances were given that regular updates would be circulated.
- Positive impacts and benefits of each project were highlighted to the Committee and would be delivered at pace, however tight timescales had been a challenge for the team to work with to achieve set goals.

- Additional local resource had been made available through funding to provide support to Town and Community Councils.
- The presentation provided details of grant funding opportunities provided by the Council aligned with the Stronger Fairer, Greener ambitions.
Stronger - We will become a county that succeeds together, with communities and people that are well connected socially, and are personally and economically resilient.
Fairer - We will be an open, well-run, Council where people's voices are heard and help to shape our work and priorities, with fairer, more equal, access to services and opportunities. We will work to tackle poverty and inequality to support the well-being of the people of Powys.
Greener - We want to ensure a greener future for Powys, where our well-being is linked to that of the natural world, and our response to the climate and nature emergencies is at the heart of everything we do.
- Rurality and locations were challenged, and assurance given that each application received is considered on set criteria.
- It was explained how each enquiry was dealt with within the team and guided towards the best possible outcome and how further developments were planned to improve the service.

Resolved: The Full Economy Round Up be noted.

County Councillor A Davies (Chair)