

## **LOCALISED SERVICES – TRANSFER, COLLABORATE, CONTRIBUTE**

***How the county council may work closer with other bodies to sustain services and facilities within local communities.***

Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) is coming under unprecedented budgetary pressure over the next three years and the future of some services are at risk.

To maintain services and put them on a sustainable footing in the long term the county council is seeking to work more closely with local organisations.

'Local organisations' might be the town or community council, or possibly other 'not for profit' bodies with a particular interest in a service or facility (this might include sports associations, 'friends of' organisations etc.).

At this time MCC is developing budget proposals for 14/15 and into the longer term and all proposals are subject to final MCC approval through the budget setting process but it is likely that working closer with other organisations will be supported and it is prudent for MCC to invite town and community councils to engage in this process (assuming they wish to) at this time recognising the potential impact of raising funding upon any partner organisations (setting precepts is of particular relevance).

In principle the county council will be willing to look at various permutations that assist in maintaining and ideally improving a service or facility provided on behalf to the public but it should be acknowledged that the immediate impetus behind the initiative is to invite others to work with the county council in the provision of facilities and services and thereby reduce the financial demand upon the county council.

Although willing to look at any type of partnering arrangement the three methods of working together that are being promoted are *contribute, collaborate, transfer*.

***Contribute*** – is for the partnering organisation to offer resources (often funding but another example would be 'volunteer 'time) towards the continuing provision of a service by the county council for which the organisation gets a greater say in how the service is organised or prioritised on a local basis,

***Collaborate*** – is a development of the contribute approach but where the partnership is to a greater extent whereby the two partners jointly prioritise and resource the service or facility. The actual service provision might be by either body in the partnership and might even be a model used during a transition period to full transfer.

**Transfer** – is where the new partner organisation eventually takes on the provision of a service or facility perhaps wholly resourced by the partner organisation or with some ongoing or tapered/diminishing support from the county council.

It has to be acknowledged that the capacity for each partner organisation to work with the county council will vary significantly.

There are examples in place where local councils are already collaborating with MCC and in one instance a service has already transferred. There are other examples where a town or community council is already managing a service provision without any involvement of the county council.

Examples of such arrangements include:

1. In Monmouth and Abergavenny the town councils contribute funding to the provision of public toilets that would otherwise have closed.
2. In Chepstow the provision of the public toilets has transferred to the town council and the county council makes a financial contribution to the town council to maintain the service.
3. In Abergavenny the town council has wholly taken over the provision of a public toilet (that MCC would otherwise close – Bailey Park) and has offered capital funding to assist in the refurbishment of another public toilet.
4. It is understood that Magor and Undy community council employs a handy person to carry out projects within the community and Abergavenny Town Council pays for 50% of a litter picking employee (MCC pick up the remaining cost) for which Abergavenny TC get to prioritise and direct the work undertaken by the employee.
5. Community Councils (e.g. Caerwent, Llanelli Hill, Grosmont and Goytre) receive a grant from the county council towards keeping public toilets open that the county council would otherwise have closed.
6. Caldicot Town Council provide a cemetery and playing fields with no involvement from the county council.

These are some examples of arrangements already in place that sustain services and facilities that would be at risk of withdrawal or closure. However it must be acknowledged that some organisations will not be in a position to support direct provision or will not contemplate major collaboration (in particular community councils with relatively modest precepts and limited clerk support) but might be interested in making a contribution and thereby getting a say in services in their area.

In such circumstances organisations might wish to contribute to maintaining a service (such as purchasing the use of a 'community team' for one or two weeks each year).

What partner arrangements are feasible?

Below are some suggestions for partner arrangements with Community and Town Councils:

1. Community and Town councils contribute to the provision of highway maintenance and community improvement teams for which they get to direct works done in their community.

Under this proposal a community or town council ( or grouping thereof) would 'buy' a team for a week, two weeks, three weeks etc.

The 'team' would consist of a team leader plus two operatives ( maybe directly employed or possibly prisoners), plus a vehicle (Transit or similar) plus equipment suitable for routine maintenance works e.g chain saw, vibro plate, pace breakers, hedge trimmers, drills etc.

Materials would be included for routine works ( tarmac, GSB, rails, post and wire etc.) but the team leader will highlight any materials or equipment needs that would fall outside the price or where usage is going to be excessive, again falling outside the price. This wouldn't necessarily mean that the works could not take place but there may be some extra costs to be covered.

The contribution from partner organisations would be £2,500 per week.

Organisations or groups of organisations may buy as many weeks as they wish.

This type of arrangement would provide local councils with a trained team with the necessary equipment to carry out works that are important to the local community that might otherwise not be deemed a priority by the county council. It will also help to fund front line services such as highway maintenance that might otherwise be at risk of cuts – and work is done that is important to the community irrespective of whether it is highlighted by the local council or county council.

It is important that this element of the initiative is not perceived as 'blackmail'. If a town or community council chooses not to take part then essential highway maintenance and planned maintenance will continue to be carried out in that area. However involvement in the scheme does offer a local council the opportunity to prioritise work is done in their area and to get jobs done that might otherwise not be a priority when considering work county wide.

*(It is quite likely that some will consider £2,500 per week as an expensive option and that they could get works done cheaper. This is correct but the cost helps to fund the wider services such as 24 hour emergency cover, winter maintenance etc.. A specific costing for a vehicle plus three operatives would inevitably be cheaper but by including equipment and materials along*

*with the opportunity to have a say in how the resources work in the area it is hoped that a partnership can be forged between the parties to sustain services in the longer term).*

2. Some councils may wish to support manual street sweeping or mini sweepers within their area. Other proposals within the budget process see manual sweeping being cut back in some towns and a mini sweeper being withdrawn. Again whether these proposal are acted upon is an MCC budget decision yet to be taken but the proposal includes for the manual sweeper in Usk and the manual sweeper in Caldicot reducing to 50% of present hours (i.e. from full time to part time).

These councils may on balance consider the retention of this service to be of such importance that they would wish to collaborate with MCC to maintain a full time service.

A rough guide of costs would be to assume that a full time manual sweeper (including all employer on costs, some overtime, holiday cover etc.) is £25,000 so to fund 50% would cost a council £12,500.

Possibly a group of community councils might wish to collaborate to retain a mini sweeper purely to work in their communities. The rough guide price for the vehicle lease, fuel, consumables, maintenance and repairs plus the operator is £65,000 per year.

(Again this should not be construed as 'blackmail' and the work presently undertaken by the five mini sweepers will be reallocated amongst the remaining four but obviously the frequency of visits to towns, villages etc. will reduce accordingly).

3. There may be services such as toilet cleaning that a town or community council would wish to provide directly or collaborate with the county council to maintain provision (although there are no proposals in the 14/15 budget exercise to reduce the provision of public toilets at this time).

Officers would be happy to discuss any form of partnering arrangement to bring this about. This might include some form of transitional arrangement whereby a town council makes a contribution towards costs as a phased process to taking over the service after a couple of years.

4. Some services/facilities are unique to a particular town or community.

These may be suitable for partnering arrangements with local councils or possibly voluntary organisations ('friends of', civic societies etc.).

Specific examples are:

Bailey Park

Linda Vista

Abergavenny Castle and Museum

Monmouth Nelson Museum and Rolls Collection

Caldicot Castle

Chepstow Museum

Tintern Railway Station

TIC's

Libraries ( Abergavenny, Caldicot, Chepstow, Gilwern, Monmouth, Usk)

MCC incurs costs in the provision of all of these facilities and they are largely managed by MCC.

However all are suitable for collaboration and possibly transfer in the longer term to local councils or even voluntary organisations.

Obviously any organisation interested in working in partnership with the county council will want to understand the costs and resources associated with providing the service. It is not feasible to provide this level of detail in this document but officers will be able to provide detail about existing budgets, staffing etc..( the area services officers will be able to put interested organisations in touch with the relevant officers in the first instance.

These discussions should facilitate an agreement being put together for approval by the relevant channels in each organisation ( likely to be the Cabinet member in MCC assuming the initiative overall is approved).

If a partner organisation wished to work with MCC in a phased collaboration, whether for the long term or as a transition phase to a transfer, then this could be developed over a period of years with contributions increasing year on year.

Alternatively the contribution does not have to be by way of funding. Possibly staff resources through volunteering could supplement paid staff. This would reduce costs to the county council whilst a facility remains open and available to the public/ users etc.

## **What Next?**

Although there are some examples of where the county council is already working with local councils the concept of widespread partnering through contribution, collaboration or transfer would be a major change in how facilities have been resourced and managed for a long time.

For this to work it will be important that trust and transparency is created between those involved. For the county council it would require a willingness to work with other organisations and accept them as true partners and equally for local councils or voluntary organisations to acknowledge that they will become jointly responsible for the continued provision of a facility or service.

This will not be without its challenges as not everything goes to plan and often partners have different ideas about how best to get things done. Undoubtedly this will bring tension in the early stages and will continue until a partnership becomes mature but initially it will be important for interested parties to be transparent and open about what they are endeavouring to achieve and their short, medium and long term goals.

Fortunately, assuming there is a will amongst partners to make it work, relationships can be developed over a period of time.

To support the development of any partnerships that local councils or voluntary organisations wish to explore MCC officers will make themselves available to attend meetings and work with representatives of the partner organisations to develop plans.

It is anticipated that initial work will be done during December and January in order that local councils that wish to raise funding may set an appropriate precept. In the following months more detail can be added to how the partnership will work and what the longer term plans might be.

Where resource is made available by way of volunteering or some other method then the timescale need not be so compressed but nevertheless work can proceed to turn ideas into actual delivery.

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