

# COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Friday, 21 September 2018

**PRESENT:** Councillor S.L. Davies (Chair)

**Councillors:**

S.M. Allen (In place of H.B. Shepardson), C.A. Davies, W.R.A. Davies, H.L. Davies, S.J.G. Gilasbey, B.W. Jones, D. Jones (In place of S. Matthews), H.I. Jones, M.J.A. Lewis (In place of G.B. Thomas), A.S.J. McPherson (In place of D.M. Cundy), B.A.L. Roberts and A.Vaughan Owen

**Also in attendance:**

Councillor L.M. Stephens, Deputy Leader of the Council

**The following Officers were in attendance:**

I. Jones, Head of Leisure  
J. Morgan, Acting Head of Homes & Safer Communities  
J. Willis, Housing Services Manager (Advice & Options)  
G. Ayers, Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager  
I.R. Llewelyn, Forward Planning Manager  
L. Evans, Empty Property Co-ordinator  
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

**Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen - 10.00 - 11.15 am**

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND OTHER MATTERS**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D. Cundy, S. Matthews, H. Shepardson and G. Thomas.

The Chair referred to the recent Tour of Britain Cycle Event, which had commenced with the Grand Depart from Pembrey Country Park, and extended her appreciation to all involved in ensuring its success including the Council's officers, cyclists, spectators and the town and community councils.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS INCLUDING ANY PARTY WHIPS ISSUED IN RELATION TO ANY AGENDA ITEM**

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

The following declarations of personal interest were made:-

Councillor	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
A Davies	5- Annual Monitoring Report 2017/18 Adopted Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan	Has submitted an application for inclusion of a site within the Carmarthenshire Revised Local Development Plan 2018-2033

A Vaughan-Owen	5- Annual Monitoring Report 2017/18 Adopted Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan	Relative has submitted an application for inclusion of a site within the Carmarthenshire Revised Local Development Plan 2018-2033
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### 3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

No public questions had been received.

### 4. COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TASK & FINISH REVIEW 2014/15 - UPDATE - EMPTY PROPERTIES IN CARMARTHENSHIRE

The Committee, in accordance with the discussion undertaken at its meeting held on the 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2018 received a power-point presentation on the progress made on implementing the recommendations of its previous Task and Finish Group in 2014/15 on Empty Properties within Carmarthenshire, the main aims of which were to:-

- Identify and evaluate the current activities undertaken by the Housing and Public Protection Division;
- Identify potential improvements and alternative delivery models;
- Formulate recommendations for consideration by the Executive Board.

The following questions/issues were raised on the presentation:-

- In response to a question on the £49k repair costs to one of the properties identified in the report, the Empty Property Co-ordinator outlined the level of works undertaken to the property in question and advised whilst it may have been possible for a private individual to commission those at a reduced rate, the Council had established a contractor framework and Contract Procedure Rules to be used/followed when awarding contracts for works. It was noted the Council's Contractor Framework had been subject to a competitive tendering process and costs were kept to a minimum.
- In response to a question on the potential for Section 106 income to be used for renovating empty properties, the Acting Head of Homes and Safer Communities advised that allocation of that income was subject to the submission of a business case and, if successful, was used in accordance with council policy to purchase homes in areas of need.
- With regard to a question on the use of the Simple Lettings Agency, it was confirmed it had been established, and was operated by the Council to assist prospective tenants to secure tenancies. It also promoted the ethos of helping people to help themselves by signposting them to other letting agencies.
- Reference was made to the varying lengths of times which homes could remain empty, ranging from a few months to a number of years and if there were any incentives available to the Council to encourage home owners to reduce that timeframe for example, via the council tax.

The Acting Head of Homes and Safer Communities advised that although that possibility had been discussed there was a view it could, especially in the short-term result in a reduction in council tax revenue for the authority.

However, he assured discussions were continually on-going to identify ways of reducing those time-frames.

- In response to a question on the Home Improvement Loan and Houses into Homes Scheme, it was confirmed the Council had received grants from the Welsh Government totalling £1.9m, over three phases, enabling 70 properties to be renovated. Each loan issued was subject to repayment within a two year period and, to date, nearly £1m had been repaid to the fund which was then recycled to provide more loans.
- It was confirmed that of the approximate 10 properties visited by the Task and Finish Group as part of its investigations all, apart from the 4 detailed within the presentation, had been renovated.
- It was confirmed that since 2010/11 when the number of empty homes brought back into use totalled 60, that had increased year on year reaching 184 for 2017/18.
- Reference was made to the 2,554 private sector properties within Carmarthenshire which had been empty for six months or more and to whether those were listed by ward and, if not, could members be provided with that information.

It was confirmed that whilst the current list of empty properties was not broken down into a ward basis, officers could examine the feasibility of disseminating that information. Additionally, a letter could be sent to all members of the Council asking them to provide the department with details of any empty properties within their wards not appearing on the current list.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the update report on the Committee's previous Task and Finish Group on Empty Properties within Carmarthenshire be received.**

## **5. ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2017/18 ADOPTED CARMARTHENSHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

The Committee received for consideration the Planning Division's Annual Performance Report (APR) for the period April 2017 – March 2018, being the third such report produced in accordance with the requirement of the Planning Performance Framework Table, and which had to be submitted to the Welsh Government by the 31<sup>st</sup> October each year for evaluation against set indicators and targets.

The Following questions/issues were raised on the report:-

- Reference was made to the practice of 'land banking' where land was left undeveloped for a large number of years increasing its value for its owners. Clarification was sought on whether the current review of the Local Development Plan could address that practice.

The Forward Planning Manager advised that where planning consent had been granted and development work commenced, that consent was valid in perpetuity. However, where sites had been incorporated within the current LDP, but not progressed and applications were received for their inclusion within the revised Plan, developers would have to demonstrate their development was deliverable. An expression of desire to develop would no longer be sufficient. Should that demonstration not be provided, there was a possibility land allocated within previous plans may not be included as an

allocation within the revised Plan. That is, there was no automatic re-inclusion or, indeed, guaranteed inclusion for currently allocated sites in terms of the revised LDP.

- Reference was made to the revised LDP's principles of promoting sustainability and sustainable development by facilitating the creation of communities and local economies by providing access to local services and facilities and reducing the need to travel. Clarification was sought on how those principles would dovetail into other public sector development plans for example, the Hywel Dda Health Board.

The Forward Planning Manager confirmed that as part of the review plan it was important to ensure, wherever possible, the appropriate infrastructure was in place to meet the sustainable ethos. As part of that process, the department would consult with all major partners such as the Health Board and Natural Resources Wales to obtain their feed-back on the plan proposals.

- Reference was made to the need to rejuvenate rural economies and whether there was scope within the revised LDP to request infrastructure companies to use abandoned railway tracks to provide facilities such as fibre optic communications. Those tracks could also be used to increase the number of cycle paths within the county.

The Forward Planning Manager advised that whilst the Council could not dictate to infrastructure providers, the feasibility of utilising old rail tracks had previously been considered and could be re-examined as part of the review process.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED THAT IT BE RECOMMENDED TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD/COUNCIL that the third Annual Monitoring Report for the Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan, and its recommendations, be approved for submission to the Welsh Government**

## **6. COMPLAINTS & COMPLIMENTS ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18**

The Committee considered the Council's Annual Complaints and Compliments report for the period 2017/18 with specific attention having been paid to Sections 9.4 and 9.6 which were relevant to its remit . It was noted the report detailed:-

- the numbers of complaints investigated and responded to between April 2017 – March 2018 by department,
- statistics on communications received by the Complaints Team and redirected. Those related to enquiries and requests for assistance which, once presented, offered the opportunity to try and rectify difficulties before complaints arose,
- complaints with any equalities or Welsh language issues,
- complaints determined by the Ombudsman,
- analysis of complaints and compliments by department.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2017/18 be received.**

## **7. COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TASK & FINISH GROUP 2018/19**

The Committee was reminded that at its meeting held on the 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2018 it had resolved to establish a Task and Finish Group to examine the Provision of Affordable Bungalows within Carmarthenshire and to seek nominations from the Council's political groups for members of the Community Scrutiny Committee to serve on that Group. In accordance with that decision, the Committee considered the following nominations received:-

Plaid Cymru Group x3

Councillors Gareth Thomas, Jeanette Gilasbey and Betsan Jones

Labour Group x2

Councillors Deryk Cundy and Sharen Davies

Independent Group x1

Councillor Irfon Jones

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the abovementioned nominees be accepted and the members be appointed to serve on the Community Scrutiny Committee's Task and Finish Group on Affordable Bungalows within Carmarthenshire.**

**8. FORTHCOMING ITEMS**

The Committee received a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting to be held on the 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2018.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items for the meeting of the Committee to be held on the 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2018 be received.**

**9. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT**

The Committee considered the explanation provided for the non-submission of a report.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the non-submission report be received.**

**10. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25TH JUNE, 2018**

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2018 be signed as a correct record.**

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CHAIR

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DATE