

Document Pack



Mark James LLM, DPA, DCA
Prif Weithredwr,
Chief Executive,
Neuadd y Sir, Caerfyrddin. SA31 1JP
County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP

THURSDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 2019

TO: ALL MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

I HEREBY SUMMON YOU TO ATTEND A MEETING OF THE **COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** WHICH WILL BE HELD IN THE **CHAMBER & ANTE ROOM, - 3, SPILMAN STREET, CARMARTHEN. SA31 1LE. AT 10.00 AM ON THURSDAY, 14TH FEBRUARY, 2019** FOR THE TRANSACTION OF THE BUSINESS OUTLINED ON THE ATTACHED AGENDA.

Mark James CBE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE



PLEASE RECYCLE

Democratic Officer:	Kevin J Thomas
Telephone (Direct Line):	01267 224027
E-Mail:	KJThomas@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
Ref:	AD016-001

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 MEMBERS

PLAID CYMRU GROUP – 6 MEMBERS

- | | | |
|-----------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. | Councillor | Ann Davies |
| 2. | Councillor | Handel Davies |
| 3. | Councillor | Jeanette Gilasbey |
| 4. | Councillor | Betsan Jones |
| 5. | Councillor | Gareth Thomas (Vice-Chair) |
| 6 | Councillor | Aled Vaughan Owen |

LABOUR GROUP – 4 MEMBERS

- | | | |
|-----------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. | Councillor | Deryk Cundy |
| 2. | Councillor | Sharen Davies (Chair) |
| 3. | Councillor | Shirley Matthews |
| 4. | Councillor | Louvain Roberts |

INDEPENDENT GROUP – 3 MEMBERS

- | | | |
|-----------|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1. | Councillor | Anthony Davies |
| 2. | Councillor | Irfon Jones |
| 3. | Councillor | Hugh Shepardson |

AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS INCLUDING ANY PARTY WHIPS ISSUED IN RELATION TO ANY AGENDA ITEM
3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)
4. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET AND HOUSING RENT SETTING FOR 2019/20 5 - 12
5. UNIVERSAL CREDIT FULL PROGRAMME ROLLOUT IN CARMARTHENSHIRE 13 - 38
6. FIRE SAFETY MANAGEMENT IN SHELTERED HOUSING AND GENERAL NEEDS BLOCKS OF FLATS 39 - 48
7. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT 49 - 50
8. FORTHCOMING ITEMS 51 - 52
9. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 23RD JANUARY 2019 53 - 58

This page is intentionally left blank

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 14TH FEBRUARY 2019

Housing Revenue Account Budget and Housing Rent Setting for 2019/20

To consider and comment on the following issues:

- That as part of the Budget Consultation process, the Scrutiny Committee considers the amendments to the rent setting proposals for 2019/20 .This was considered by Executive Board 04/02/2019 and will be considered by County Council on 20/02/2019.

REASONS:

- To enable the Authority to set its Housing Revenue Account Budget and the Housing Rent levels for 2019/20.
- To formulate views for submission to Council for consideration.

To be referred to the Executive Board for decision: NO
Full Council – 20th February 2019

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDER:- Cllr David Jenkins

<p>Directorate: Corporate Services Name of Director: Chris Moore</p>	<p>Designations: Director of Corporate Services</p>	<p>Tel No's / E Mail Addresses: 01267 224160 CMoore@carmarthenshire.gov.uk</p>
<p>Report Author: Andrea Thomas</p>	<p>Group Accountant</p>	<p>01267 228742 AndThomas@carmarthenshire.gov.uk</p>

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14TH FEBRUARY 2019**

**Housing Revenue Account Budget and Housing Rent
Setting for 2019/20**

This report explains changes applied to the rent setting element of the proposed 2019/20 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for both revenue and capital. It has been prepared in conjunction with officers from the Communities Department. This report is presented to this Community Scrutiny Committee as an update to the report presented 23/01/19 which was part of the budget consultation process. The views expressed by Community Scrutiny Committee on 23/01/19 were fed back to Executive Board.

Previously we have applied the WG Social Housing Rent Policy to progress to the mid-point target rent (County Council approved on 24/02/15). This policy ended in 2018/19.

A one year policy of maximum of CPI only was issued by WG 12/12/2018 for 2019/20, with no discretion to apply 'progression' for those tenants below target rents if an LA's current average rent is within the target rent band.

Rent increases could be set at lower than 2.4% but as there is no certainty over future rent levels applying the interim policy seems the most prudent approach for 2019/20. Setting at a lower level than 2.4% rent increase will also impact of the current proposed Business Plan.

However on the 30 January 2019, after the consultation had been completed and this report had been written and despatched, Welsh Government notified Local Authorities of an amendment to the interim policy which allowed Local Authorities with average rent within the Target Rent Band the flexibility to use the 'up to £2 per week' progression subject to ensuring that the overall rent increase for your general needs and sheltered housing stock does not exceed 2.4% and that no individual tenant will receive a rent increase of more than the agreed policy uplift of 2.4% plus the £2.00 progression.

This change in direction by WG was considered by Executive Board on 4th February and it was felt that it was appropriate to change the original recommendation proposed to Scrutiny previously as it allowed the Authority to meet its previous commitment to tenants by implementing the harmonisation policy and establishing a fairer rent level for all tenants.

This proposed amendment is presented to Scrutiny for their consideration before County Council considers the final HRA Budget for 2019/20.

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?

YES

IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report :

Signed: Chris Moore

Director of Corporate Services

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities	Legal	Finance	ICT	Risk Management Issues	Staffing Implications	Physical Assets
NONE	NONE	YES	NONE	NONE	NONE	YES

FINANCE

The report details the HRA proposals to be considered by Executive Board. If the proposals are agreed the budget for the HRA will be set for 2019/20 with an expenditure level of £37.6M. The average rent will increase from £85.52 to £87.57 (2.4% or £2.05).

The proposed Capital Programme will be £30.9M for 2019/20, £30.8M for 2020/21 and £27.8M for 2021/22.

Physical Assets

The capital programme continues the works to maintain the Carmarthenshire Home Standard *Plus* and deliver the Affordable Homes programme as per the 30 year business plan.

CONSULTATIONS

I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below

Signed: Chris Moore

Director of Corporate Services

1. Local Member(s) - Not applicable
2. Community / Town Council – Not applicable
3. Relevant Partners - Not applicable
4. Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations – Not applicable

**Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information
List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**

THESE ARE DETAILED BELOW

Title of Document	File Ref No.	Locations that the papers are available for public inspection
Social Housing Rents Policy		Financial Services, County Hall, Carmarthen
30 year Housing Business Plan		Financial Services , County Hall, Carmarthen

UPDATE REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14th FEBRUARY 2019

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT AND HOUSING RENT SETTING 2019/20

- REVENUE AND CAPITAL

DIRECTOR & DESIGNATION.	DIRECTORATE	TELEPHONE NO.
C Moore Director of Corporate Services	Corporate Services	01267 224120
AUTHOR & DESIGNATION	DIRECTORATE	TELEPHONE NO
A Thomas Group Accountant	Corporate Services	01267 228742

1. INTRODUCTION

1. This report explains changes applied to the rent setting element of the proposed 2019/20 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for both revenue and capital. It has been prepared in conjunction with officers from the Communities Department. This report is presented to this Community Scrutiny Committee as an update to the report presented 23/01/19 which was part of the budget consultation process. The views expressed by Community Scrutiny Committee on 23/01/19 were fed back to Executive Board.

2. The HRA budget for 2019/20 is being set to reflect:

- Interim Social Housing Rent Policy issued by Welsh Government (WG) 30/01/19 (amendment from original issue 12/12/18)
- Proposals contained in the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard *Plus* (CHS+)
- Affordable Homes Delivery Plan
- Removal of HRA Borrowing Cap which has recently been agreed by WG.

3. Rent Setting

3.1. Previously we have applied the WG Social Housing Rent Policy to progress to the mid-point target rent (County Council approved on 24/02/15). This policy ended in 2018/19.

A one year policy of maximum of CPI only was issued by WG 12/12/2018 for 2019/20, with no discretion to apply 'progression' for those tenants below target rents if an LA's current average rent is within the target rent band.

Rent increases could be set at lower than 2.4% but as there is no certainty over future rent levels applying the interim policy seems the most prudent approach for 2019/20. Setting at a lower level than 2.4% rent increase will also impact of the current proposed Business Plan.

However on the 30 January 2019, after the consultation had been completed and the Executive Board (4th February) report had been written and despatched, Welsh Government notified Local Authorities of an amendment to the interim policy which allowed Local Authorities with average rent within the Target Rent Band the flexibility to use the 'up to £2 per week' progression subject to ensuring that the overall rent increase for your general needs and sheltered housing stock does not exceed 2.4% and that no individual tenant will receive a rent increase of more than the agreed policy uplift of 2.4% plus the £2.00 progression.

This change in direction by WG was initially discussed with Officers and Executive Board members on 01/02/19 and subsequently considered by Executive Board on the 4th February. It was felt that the changes allowed the Authority to meet its previous commitment to tenants by implementing the harmonisation policy and establishing a fairer rent level for all tenants.

Impact of the proposed changes:

When setting rents for 2019/20 the WG interim policy as amended can be applied.

For those properties below target rent the increase will be:-

1.92%. plus a maximum of £1.00 progression.

For those properties at target rent the increase will be:-

1.92%

Those above target rents are frozen until such time that they meet the target, there are only 12 of these properties remaining. When a property becomes empty it is placed in the target rent band.

Based on applying the above for 2019/20 these increases would produce an average rent of £87.57 an increase of 2.4% (CPI for September 2018) or £2.05.

Details of the rent increases on individual households are below:-

Receive an increase of :-	2.4% increase
No increase	12
up to £1.00	14
£1.00 to £1.99	5,822
£2.00 to £2.99	3,052
£3.00 to £3.20	189
	9,089

Table 2 : No .of Householders affected by average increases.

Currently 38% of tenants are on full Housing Benefit (HB), 27% are on partial HB and 35% in receipts of no HB.

The proportion of dwellings below target rents is 35% as a result of the £1.62 progression implemented last year and the target rent being charged as a result of properties becoming vacant. This was over 85% when we began the harmonisation process.

4. PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNTY COUNCIL.

Amended:

1. To increase the average housing rent as per the WG Interim Social Housing Rents Policy (amended 30 January).

- a. Properties at target rents will increase by 1.92%
- b. Those rents above target are frozen until such time that they meet the target rent
- c. Those rents below target rent are increased by 1.92% and are progressed by a maximum of £1 per week.

This will produce an increase on the average housing rent of 2.4% or £2.05

As previous consultation report:

- 2 This will produce a sustainable Business Plan, maintain CHS+, resource our Affordable Homes programme and is supported by the CHS+ Steering Group.**
- 3 To maintain garage rents at £9.00 per week and garage bases at £2.25 per week.**

- 4 To apply the service charge policy to ensure tenants who receive the benefit from specific services pay for those services.**
- 5 To increase charges for using our sewerage treatment works in line with rent increases.**

RECOMMENDATION

That as part of the budget consultation process, Community Scrutiny Committee consider and comment on the amended rent setting proposals 2019/20. This will be considered by County Council on 20th February 2019.

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 14 FEBRUARY 2019

Universal Credit Full Programme Rollout in Carmarthenshire

Recommendations / key decisions required:

That the support provided by the Council is noted.

Reasons:

To provide information on the support being provided by the Council, working with other agencies, to support Carmarthenshire residents with the introduction of Universal Credit in Carmarthenshire from 12 December 2018.

Exec Board Decision Required YES

Council Decision Required NO

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDER:- Cllr Cefin Campbell, Cllr Linda Evans & Cllr David Jenkins

Directorate:

Chief Executives, Communities & Corporate Resources

Name of Head of Service:

Jonathan Morgan

Helen Pugh

Report Author:

Gwyneth Ayers & Rebecca Llewellyn

Designations:

Acting Head of Homes & Safer Communities

Head of Revenues & Financial Compliance

Corporate Policy & Partnership Manager

Performance, Governance and Policy Officer

Tel Nos.

01267 224659

E Mail Addresses:

GAyers@carmarthenshire.gov.uk

RSLlewellyn@carmarthenshire.gov.uk

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Universal Credit Full Programme Rollout in Carmarthenshire

With effect from 12th December 2018 Carmarthenshire will become a Full Service Area for Universal Credit. Anyone making a new claim for one of the effected legacy benefits will be required to claim Universal Credit

Universal Credit will replace:

- Housing Benefit
- Working Tax Credit
- Income related Employment & Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Child Tax Credit.
- Income Based Jobseekers Allowance

Following on from the budget in October 2018, a test and learn exercise will begin for managed migration in July 2019. Changes have been made in relation to the number of claims being migrated over to Universal Credit, now reduced to 10,000, as part of the test and learn process. Migration for existing claimants of the affected legacy benefits to Universal Credit will not now begin until after July 2020. The government has maintained that the full managed migration programme will still be completed by December 2023.

As yet, the Department of Works and Pension have not issued any information on how this will be carried out. It is likely to be based on benefit type and this will allow the Authority to identify who will be moved onto Universal Credit and when that change will happen.

For a number of years Carmarthenshire County Council have been working very closely with partners and stakeholders to ensure that we mitigate any potential negative impacts this change may have on some of our customers.

This short summary provides an overview of the key support currently offered and planned, as full service roll out is implemented. The report outlines the package of support and advice provided by Council Services to help those affected with a view of minimising the financial impact and to help, where appropriate, people back into employment. This includes:

- Support for Council Tenants;
- Support for Housing Benefit Claimants;
- From April 2019 the contract for Assisted Digital support and personal budgeting will transfer to the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Support against Financial Exploitation through Trading Standards;
- Signposting to support through Yr Hwb'
- Support for Veterans.

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?

YES – UC Support

IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report :

Signed: Jonathan Morgan, Acting Head of Homes & Safer Communities

Helen Pugh, Head of Revenues & Financial Compliance

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities	Legal	Finance	ICT	Risk Management Issues	Staffing Implications	Physical Assets
YES	NONE	YES	YES	YES	YES	NONE

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities

UC is a UK Government led programme introduced as part of the Welfare Reform Act 2012. The programme is being introduced in stages across Britain.

Finance

It is expected that rent arrears will rise in the short to medium term based on the experience of other social housing landlords. We will however be offering tailored advice and support to our most vulnerable tenants in order to navigate them through the process.

Provision for bad debt for 2018/19 currently stands at £494K. While we expect the impact of Universal Credit may influence this, we do not envisage any increase in this provision for the next 12-18 months.

ICT

The UC programme requires that applications are completed online. Assisted Digital Support is being provided through the Council's Libraries and Yr Hwb with access to necessary IT equipment and staff support for residents going through the application process.

Risk Management Issues

3230 of our tenants currently claim Housing Benefit and they are likely to all transfer to U.C by 2023. Whilst it is expected that rent arrears will rise in the short to medium term based on the experience of other social housing landlords there are robust plans to mitigate the impact.

Staffing Implications

We recently completed the re-alignment of the Homes and Safer Communities Division where we reviewed our capacity to provide additional support to those affected. As a part of that re-alignment we have created a dedicated Tenancy Support Team which will assist in providing the focus required.

Through additional funding provided by Welsh Government we have employed two new members of staff. In addition, new funding will provide three specialist welfare benefit and debt advisors via a 3rd sector partner.

CONSULTATIONS

I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below

Signed: Jonathan Morgan, Acting Head of Homes & Safer Communities

Helen Pugh, Head of Revenues & Financial Compliance

1. Scrutiny Committee

Communities Scrutiny – 14th February 2018

2. Local Member(s)

All members have been invited to take part in numerous seminars relating to UC rollout.

3. Community / Town Council

The Council has supported circulation of information to all Carmarthenshire Town & Community Councils about the programme and officers from Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) attended the Liaison Forum on the 8 November 2018.

4. Relevant Partners

On-going discussions with Department for Work & Pensions and third sector support services.

5. Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations

N/A

Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information

List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

THERE ARE NONE

Carmarthenshire County Council Universal Credit Support

December 2018



Summary

With effect from 12th December 2018 Carmarthenshire will become a Full Service Area for Universal Credit. Anyone making a new claim for one of the effected legacy benefits will be required to claim Universal Credit.

Following on from the budget in October 2018, a test and learn exercise will begin for managed migration in July 2019. Changes have been made in relation to the number of claims being migrated over to Universal Credit, now reduced to 10,000, as part of the test and learn process. Migration for existing claimants of the affected legacy benefits to Universal Credit will not now begin until after July 2020. The government has maintained that the full managed migration programme will still be completed by December 2023.

As yet, the Department for Work and Pensions have not issued any information on how this will be carried out. It is likely to be based on benefit type and this will allow us to identify who will be moved onto Universal Credit and when that change will happen.

For a number of years Carmarthenshire County Council have been working very closely with partners and stakeholders to ensure that we mitigate any potential negative impacts this change may have on some of our customers. This included being awarded one of eleven UK USDL trials to develop and test new models of working and customer support services with a range of public and third sector partners. We are committed to ensuring that the transition to this new way of claiming and receiving financial assistance is as smooth as possible for Carmarthenshire residents.

This summary provides an overview of the key support currently offered and planned, as full service roll out is implemented. The report outlines the package of support and advice provided by Council Services to help those affected with a view of minimising the financial impact and to help, where appropriate, people back into employment.

Universal Credit Full Service Support

Division: Housing Benefit

Department: Corporate Services

1. Following the Carmarthenshire USDL trial the personal budgeting support service is now embedded in the Benefits Section. The personal budgeting support officer is proactively providing assistance to customers including via referrals from:
 - Jobcentre Plus (JCP) of both Universal Credit and ESA customers
 - The council's housing services division
 - The benefits assessment team for claimants seeking additional support to meet their rent via Discretionary Housing Payments

The personal budgeting support officer (Craig Evans), is based for one day a week at each of the 3 JCP offices in Carmarthenshire – Ammanford, Llanelli & Carmarthen. He ensures that the customer is able to budget their finances providing money advice, recommending applying for alternative payments, liaising with stakeholders / organisations, such as the foodbanks, for additional support and apply for discretionary

assistance fund grants. From April 2019, the personal budgeting support service will be provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau.

2. The section are the first point of contact and the main link with DWP.
3. The Revenue Services Unit have facilitated the acquisition of the Data Tank Welfare Reform Impact Analysis System. This system uses a range of data including housing benefit and council tax data provided by the revenue services unit to gain a clearer understanding of the impact welfare reform policies are having on residents. The system will enable better targeting of resources to provide support where it is most needed, and the housing division will use this analysis to determine those tenants most in need of support.
4. The housing benefits section continues to make other stakeholder services aware of key changes and updates as provided by the DWP and other information sources, particularly in relation to the roll-out of Universal Credit and issues arising from the roll-out areas elsewhere in the country.
5. The unit has facilitated Universal Credit awareness training for unit staff, staff in other relevant services and colleagues in other stakeholder organisations whose customers are likely to be affected by Universal Credit roll-out. Working closely with DWP colleagues these sessions have been delivered to: Landlords, Elected Members, Customer Service Centre & Contact Centre Staff and other partners delivering support in the community. Further training sessions are planned as we approach full service roll out.
6. The section co-ordinates the Delivery Partnership Agreement.
7. The housing benefits section is currently facilitating and co-ordinating liaison between council services that will either be impacted upon, or otherwise involved in the Full-Service Roll-out of Universal Credit. These meetings have provided the platform to encourage good working relationships and in these meetings we have been able to successfully address how we will be delivering support throughout the County. They have also resulted in the development of an information leaflet – Appendix 1.
8. The benefits team have attended regular meetings with JCP Work Coach Team Leaders, Council Housing Services, PBSO, Housing Associations e.g. Gwalia, Family Housing etc., with the purpose of addressing and resolving operational issues prior to going live with full service.
9. The housing benefits section is represented on the Universal Credit Full Service Engagement Workshops run by the DWP and attended by all the Welsh Local Authorities. Here we are able to learn from the experiences of those already live in full service and share best practice.
10. We have visited Swansea and Neath Port Talbot who have already gone live with full service to better understand the problems and issues they went through in order to inform how we go forward i.e. ensuring a good communication / relationship is set up between the HB officer and JCP work coaches.

Support for Council Tenants

Division: Homes and Safer Communities

Department: Communities

Within Carmarthenshire County Council's housing stock, we have approximately 3,300 tenancies that are in receipt of housing benefit that fall within the working age category. Experience in other housing organisations with a similar level of housing stock report around a hundred households a month move onto Universal Credit following the launch of Full Service.

We have a further 2,100 tenancies below pensionable age, not in receipt of benefits but if they have a change of circumstances, will need to claim Universal Credit. These changes do not apply to those who occupy temporary accommodation because they are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

We currently have 160 tenancies in receipt of Universal Credit made up of live service and full service tenants. Whilst these are low numbers it has given us a flavour of the impact and issues locally.

We have engaged the Department of Works and Pensions and Housing Quality Network (a national organisation who work with local authorities to develop best practise) to ensure we are doing all we can to support our tenants through the process. We have also learned from other local authority pilots. The main focus is clearly to try to mitigate the financial impact by providing early support and intervention. An outline of actions and progress is provided in Appendix 2. The main actions are as follows:

Build capacity to ensure we can meet demand

- Realignment of the service to offer a dedicated Advice and Tenancy Support Team;
- We have refocused the work of 14 Housing Officers who will specialise in providing the necessary support to tenants. These Officers will work closely with our Housing Advisors to ensure we maintain tenancies and prevent homelessness;
- Established a pre-tenancy service using new grant funding to help and advise new tenants to ensure appropriate benefits are accessed.

Provide tenants with early support and specialist advice

- Working with the Communication team to ensure we raise awareness of UC. This will involve press releases, newsletters, promotional material and use of social media;
- Visiting and or contacting all tenants likely to be affected by UC in order to raise awareness and determine vulnerability in order to correctly target support;
- We will be notified when a tenant makes an application for Universal Credit via the landlord portal and aim to make immediate contact to offer support if required.

Support tenants to maximise income and gain employment

- Advise on where to get employment advice and actively make referrals to Workways;
- Look to improve a household's income through activities including basic budgeting support, advice on savings via utility bills etc. and help to complete DHP applications;
- Housing Officers to work out of JCP offices

- Work closely with our colleagues in Shelter Cymru to help sustain tenancies.

Support tenants to access and use smart technology

- As part of our visit program we will ensure tenants have access to the appropriate technology. Officers will have iPads which may assist
- Tenants will be signposted to our libraries and Hubs where they can access computers and free wifi. From April 2019, Assisted Digital Support will be provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Ensure we develop and enhance key partnerships

- Work closely with JCP and DWP staff who oversee the introduction of Full Service;
- Continue to work with third sector partners to ensure we provide as much advice and support as possible;
- Co-location of the Wallich Mediation Service and Shelter Cymru with our Advice and Tenancy Support Team in our Eastgate Offices;
- We will procure a partner to provide specialist debt and welfare benefits advice, co-located at Eastgate to allow ease of referral by Housing Officers.

Digital Support

Division: Library Services

Department: Communities

Carmarthenshire's Library Service will be providing Assisted Digital Support across the County, with 3 main libraries and 19 branches available to customers. Computers will be available for customers to use to access the internet and claim Universal Credit along with support from staff based at the library to do so. The main libraries at Llanelli, Carmarthen and Ammanford will offer extended opening times until 6pm on Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday and until 7pm on Monday and Thursday. Saturday opening hours will remain as 9am-5pm, along with the mobile library service they provide.

Support against Financial Exploitation

Division: Trading Standards

Department: Communities

The implementation of Universal Credit and the hardship that may befall recipients during the transition may provide opportunities for high risk credit providers, doorstep lenders, payday and illegal money lenders to take advantage of favourable market conditions brought about by consumer hardship.

Trading Standards operate a number of initiatives designed to prevent hardship and to protect the public from financial abuse:

1. The Financial Exploitation Safeguarding Scheme (FESS) creates a network of support and intelligence sharing with social care partners, private and third sector organisations to help identify and support vulnerable victims.

2. Trading Standards will work closely with debt advice providers, such as Citizens Advice Bureau, during the transition to ensure that vulnerable recipients of Universal Credit are not taken advantage of by unscrupulous lenders nor intimidated/harassed by debt collection agencies.
3. Where financial abuse is identified Trading Standards working with partners such as Social Services and the Police, may take civil/criminal enforcement action against the perpetrators.
4. Trading Standards provide specialist advice and training to partner agencies in relation to consumer credit and debt collection practices and have the powers to intervene in cases of irresponsible/inappropriate lending, aggressive or non-compliant debt collection practices.
5. Trading Standards administer Money Wise, digital financial education resources available in all county primary schools and are developing a financial education app for mobile devices designed to prevent financial hardship and to provide consumers with information about their consumer rights.
6. Trading Standards are further able to install protective/assistive technology in vulnerable consumers' homes in the form of nuisance call blockers, telephone line monitoring and call recording to prevent abuse and harassment.
7. Trading Standards Officers attend "pop-up shops" at local building societies, banks and Job Centre Plus to offer advice and guidance to service users and take priority referrals for vulnerable persons.
8. Trading Standards Officers sit on the Mid & West Wales Financial Capability Forum, giving them access to a range of regional support services such as Money Advice Service and Housing Associations.

Signposting Support

Division: Yr Hwb

Department: Regeneration & Policy

Similarly to library services, Yr Hwb in Llanelli will be offering digital support to customers affected by Universal Credit. Yr Hwb also works with a range of advice and support agencies to offer appropriate and effective signposting to relevant support for those affected by Universal Credit.

In addition, as part of a six month trial, the rural hwb will be heading out into five pilot communities (Meidrim, Cwmann, Llanybydder, Ffarmers and Crugybar) to ensure rural residents are also able to access this support. The mobile libraries and customer services are working together to provide services that Carmarthenshire County Council offer on the door step of those living in rural areas.

Support for Veterans

Division: Corporate Policy

Department: Regeneration & Policy

Two 'Armed Forces Universal Credit' overview sessions were held in September 2018 in partnership with DWP as part of a regional Veterans Hubs and One Stop Shops project, funded by the Ministry of Defence (MOD). Members of the Carmarthenshire Armed Forces

Steering Group including the Royal British Legion, Alabare (Wales Homes for Veterans), University of Wales Trinity Saint David and Links Combined Forces Project attended and positive feedback received. As a result a further session is being arranged in October 2019.

DWP have presented an overview of the Universal Credit and wider welfare reform changes to the Carmarthenshire Armed Forces Steering Group on a separate occasion. Many of the steering group member organisations are offering some level of advice on UC and also some digitally based support, so these links have helped to ensure a consistent level of knowledge and to create links between member organisations and the DWP for detailed advice and signposting.

Universal Credit Action Plan

Action:	Outcome:	Progress:
<p>1. Identify how many tenants will potentially be affected across tenures including Simple Lettings and Temporary Accommodation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine potential impact on rent arrears in council housing, Simple Lettings and Temporary Accommodation. • Identify any potential impact on the private sector and homelessness. • Identify Business Plan implications including provision of bad debt. • Develop performance measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have completed an analysis to identify all tenants of working age who will be expected to migrate to UC to allow a program of support. We anticipate approx. 3,300 tenants will be affected. We have completed a mapping process and broken down those affected by ward and will target resources according to demand. • Provision of bad debt for 2018/19 currently stands at £494K. While we expect the impact of the UC may influence this, we do not envisage any increases in this provision for the next 12 – 18 months. In the business plan the bad debt provision does increase over the next 3 years to £1110K. • We expect to see a rise in rent arrears rising in the short to medium term. We expect the actions within this plan to mitigate the level of arrears. • Temporary accommodation will no longer be subject to UC from April 2018. • New performance measures have been devised using a themed approach under the headings: income, tenancy support, affordability and tenancy sustainment.

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 26</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple lettings are carrying out awareness visits to all of the tenants they believe will be effected. From this visit a detailed individual plan for them on how they can manage their income. • The potential impact on the private sector and homelessness is ongoing.
<p>2. Devise a communications plan to include for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UC Impact presentation to staff & members • Use of social media to raise awareness • Use of website to convey key messages • Regular Tenant 2 Tenant articles • Mail shots • The preparation of a Pre Tenancy package • Radio Adverts • Dangers of illegal Borrowing • Doctors and health professionals • Domestic violence / abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To inform and raise awareness of the UC internally and externally • Prepare staff and customers for likely impact. • Prepare Local Members • Include Tenant Groups • Advise and signpost to support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A programme of presentations on awareness of Universal Credit to staff has been completed, including front line staff in Customer Services and the Contact centre. • Corporate/Housing leaflet is complete and in circulation. • Articles have been published in Tenant 2 Tenant, with further articles scheduled for each new issue. • A suite of new correspondence and information packages are complete and have been circulated for use. • A package of training has been completed on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Illegal borrowing ✓ Appealing sanctions ✓ Recognising domestic abuse ✓ Applying for direct payments ✓ Third party deductions ✓ Hardship payments ✓ Water rates direct

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation completed to some local members and tenants via Housing Service Advisory Panel. • We plan to arrange further briefing session for local members prior to launch of Full Service in December – waiting for guidance from Executive Board Member. • A package of support has been developed for new tenants by the pre-tenancy team, with particular emphasis on Universal Credit. The team has been particularly successful in the promotion of DD with 41% of new tenants completing a mandate. • Universal Credit information has been update on the corporate website, with regular updates planned as changes occur. • Communications plan will target the use of social media, including such platforms as twitter and Facebook to raise awareness of Universal credit and encourage our tenants to seek help and support if required – we are currently working with our corporate partners and DWP Partnership Managers to agree a combined approach.
<p>3. Map UC application and payment process to identify triggers and interventions</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 27</p>	<p>Develop guidance documents to assist staff and provide training to give absolute clarity on how the key processes work. e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making an application online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance documents for staff have been developed and training given on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Alternative Payment Arrangements ✓ Appealing Sanctions ✓ Third Party Deductions ✓ Eligible service charges and water rates

- Alternative Payment Arrangements (APA)
- DWP Sanction process and appeal
- Third Party deductions (APA)
- Eligible service charges
- Water Rates (APA)
- Hardship advance payments
- Secure Email Address
- Arrears Recovery Process
- Supporting customers through hardship
- UC user guide

✓ **Hardship and advance of payments**

- **Training on making an online application provided by the DWP has been completed.**
- **Secure emails are required to allow email discussions with DWP. These have been completed including a dedicated Rent Matters email address.**
- **Research points to a 30% increase of the use of foodbanks with the introduction of Universal Credit Full Service. In anticipation for this we have met with the 3 local foodbanks. Each area office now issue foodbank vouchers or can deliver food parcels to support our tenants through financial hardship.**
- **Additionally, a proposal to provide additional funding to the foodbanks to further assist in the work they carry out supporting the tenants and residents of Carmarthenshire has been agreed. Cheques have been distributed.**
- **Further training of housing staff has been undertaken. 8 UC awareness sessions have been carried out in different locations – this has seen a total of 79 Homes and Safer Communities staff, 17 Customer Service Staff, 9 from the New Homes team and 21 third party support providers attended.**
- **A Carmarthenshire specific UC user guide including a new rent recovery process has been completed. Training will be given to Housing Officers via team meetings.**

4. Plan and undertake programme of visits to Council tenants who are likely to change to UC.

Visit each of the current UC cases to ensure that sufficient support is being provided.

- Gather up to date information.
- Identify vulnerability which will determine ongoing support.
- Identify possible digital exclusion.
- Raise awareness of the need for an email address and bank account.
- Offer and signpost to assistance & support.
- Begin profiling exercise to enable targeting of resources.
- Warn of the dangers of borrowing from illegal lenders

- **Visits are complete for SA4 Hendy Area as part of Swansea roll out of UC. The OHMS system has been updated with triage information.**
- **Following the mapping process the tenancy support team officers have begun the programme of visits to the tenants who will be affected by Universal Credit. The visit includes raising awareness of Universal Credit, maximise income through completion of Welsh Waters Help U and Discretionary Housing Payment. Pathways to employment is also an important part of the visit, with the option for a referral to the Workways project.**
- **Where possible, visits have been prioritised based on current issues of known vulnerabilities, as it is unlikely that all visits will be completed by December. These include, but are not limited to: current or former tenant arrears, those currently in receipt of DWP direct payments and involvement with support services. The visits further seek to triage around vulnerability to determine the level of support that maybe require on full roll out.**
- **The majority of live service tenants have now transitioned to full service successfully. Housing Officers are trying to contact any remaining tenants who have not yet made full service claims.**
- **Through the mapping process a number of wards have been identified with very high levels of those likely to be affected. We are currently undertaking public awareness sessions in**

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 30</p>		<p>these areas. Sessions have been carried out in Llwynhendy in September and November. A session has also been carried out in Glanymor ward during December.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If digital exclusion, no e-mail address or lack of a current bank account is identified on the visit, tenants will be provided with the help and support needed to overcome this barrier. This could mean assistance by our officers, or sign posting to the library service who are the main providers of assisted digital support. Assisted Digital Support will be provided by the CAB from the 1st of April. We are waiting instruction from the DWP Partnership Managers on how this will work in practice.
<p>5. Impact through better relationships with key partners by forming a dedicated partnership group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure there is a joined up approach to the introduction of U.C and key actions are delivered <p>Further partnership arrangements with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DWP Jobcentre + • Support Providers • CAB • Shelter • Housing Benefit • Mobile Library 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have established an officer working group which includes representatives from the RSL's, DWP, frontline services, housing benefit and Shelter Cymru. This allows us to discuss issues at a local level and build key relationships with staff from the Job Centre Plus. • Shadowing has been arranged with the DWP for its Service Improvement leads to work with Housing Officers in order to understand the importance of getting the rent element right, the effect of non-payment of rent on the business and understanding the relationships we have with our tenants. • It has been further agreed that Housing Staff will locate themselves at the three main Job Centre offices during the initial first weeks of full rollout. A rota has been produced and will start in January on the request of the Job Centre

		<p>Managers. They do not anticipate a large number of cases in the first few weeks. This is based on historical changes at this time of the year and evidence from other local areas that have gone Full Service in the last few months.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We have met with all Carmarthenshire support providers including supporting people and begun discussions on how best to support our tenants and ensure speedy referrals. We have also included these providers in our training programme.• We have an established relationship with Shelter through co-location and expect that to continue.• We have met with representatives of the library service and they are happy for us to use the mobile library to reach rural tenants and to use the Wi-Fi in areas of poor internet access.
--	--	--

<p>Ensure there is sufficient officer resources to mitigate demand.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure officer resources are established in the right areas • Identify specialist requirements e.g. welfare benefit assessors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The tenancy support team now has 14 officers dedicated to income recovery and tenancy sustainment. This will allow a more focus approach to supporting our tenant through debt and the introduction of Universal Credit Full Service. • We recently secured grant funding to expand the team in key areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A further 4 officers within the pre-tenancy team providing help and support to approx. 800 new tenants each year. Specific emphasis will be placed on UC and our preferred method of payment – Direct Debit(DD). ✓ Approval for 3 new welfare benefit advisors sourced through our 3rd sector partners, exclusively accepting referral from the tenancy support team and options and advice staff. They will deal with more complex debt issues, focus on maximising income and tenancy sustainment. These are in addition to the Money Advice Officer currently dealing with crisis debt.
<p>7. Plan and coordinate county wide Direct Debit campaign to actively encourage all tenants to pay by DD where possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More efficient method of payment • Positive impact on account management • Cost saving in comparison to GIRO • Helping our tenants manage their money better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A pilot exercise was undertaken in the Ammanford area, with 1100 tenants contacted leading to a 3% take up. • Monthly direct debit draw offering a prize of £200 was launched to encourage take up. • Through our partners we have identified 394 of our tenants who pay council tax by DD but not ourselves. These were contacted at the end of August.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have met with the contact centre and hub staff and they in turn will encourage all tenants where possible to sign up to a DD. • Signing up to a DD is also part of the discussion on the Universal Credit visit. • The pre-tenancy team actively promote payment by DD and have successfully encouraged 41% of the tenants they have supported to pay by this method.
<p>8. Further develop our management information systems to help us communicate better and analyse data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have an automatic Payment Reminder Email/SMS • Better household profile information • A better way of analysing • Data Tank profiling system for welfare reform planning • Save Customers Money • Target Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The facility for automatic payment reminder emails is now available and in use. The SMS function is currently being tested and is due to be rolled out before the end of this financial year. • Checklist function for UC on OHMS is now active and has been further expanded. This allows the reporting of up-to-date key information including support required, DHP, Help U, use of foodbanks and prevention fund. • The Data tank profiling system has been procured, however there have been some teething problems. This is currently being looked into. Linked to up-to date benefit information, this will allow us to map our tenants that are adversely affected by welfare reform and target our resources accordingly.

<p>Page 34</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Data tank system will also allow us to target tenants in order to maximise their income and provide better off calculations.
<p>Revise process for current activities to tie in with Universal Credit procedures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rent Arrears• Former Tenants• Allocations• Tenancy Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We have reviewed and amended our current processes around tenancy support and rent arrears to reflect the changes that Universal C will bring.• Discussions on Universal Credit former tenant arrears and any potential impact on allocations remain on going.

Opening up work_

Universal Credit Full Service is coming to
Carmarthenshire from the 12th December 2018

Are you in receipt of any of these?

- *Child Tax Credit*
- *Housing Benefit*
- *Income Support*
- *Working Tax Credit*
- *Income based Jobseekers Allowance*
- *Income-related Employment and Support Allowance*

***Anyone making a new claim for one of the above benefits
after this date will be required to claim Universal Credit.***

Don't panic...

**If you are currently getting one or more of the benefits listed,
you will not be affected straight away.**

The DWP will let you know when and how to claim Universal Credit.

Universal Credit is Coming...

Are you ready?

Page 36

Universal Credit will replace:

- Income based Jobseekers Allowance
- Housing Benefit
- Working Tax Credit
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Child Tax Credit

From 12th December Carmarthenshire Residents making a new claim to one or more of the six benefits listed will be required to make a claim for Universal Credit.

Pension Credit and Personal Independent Payment (PIP) are not affected by Universal Credit.

Paying your rent...

Once you make a claim for Universal Credit your Housing Benefit will stop and you will need to claim the Housing Cost Element as part of your Universal Credit claim. This will be paid directly to you and you must use this money to pay your rent. Failure to do so may cause you to lose your home.

Some tenants may be eligible to have rent paid directly to their landlord. Please speak to your Jobcentre.

If you are a tenant of Carmarthenshire County Council, please speak to your Housing Officer and advise them that you have claimed Universal Credit

Tel: 01267 234567

Rent Matters



If you need help with money before you receive your first payment, you can request an Advance. This is an interest free loan. Deductions are made from your monthly Universal Credit Payment.

You will have up to 12 months to repay the Advance.

In some instances you can be paid every two weeks or have your payment split.

Your Claimant Commitment

You will have to accept a 'claimant commitment' if you want to get Universal Credit. This is a tailored contract that details the steps you will take to prepare and look for work.



Banking

Universal Credit will be paid into a bank account

Set one up or use the one you have.



Online

All claims are managed online, so you need to know where you can access the internet and you will need an e-mail account.



Budgeting

You need to plan your budget. Universal Credit is paid **monthly** rather than weekly or fortnightly. Please ask at your Jobcentre what support is available.

How you will be paid

Universal Credit will be paid once a month, into your bank / building society account

If you live with a partner and you both claim Universal Credit you'll receive a single payment that covers you both.

Council Tax Reduction

If you apply for Universal Credit, your Universal Credit payment includes a payment of your rent (housing costs), but does not include Council Tax Reduction. The application form can be found on the Carmarthenshire County Council website, for information contact:

01554 742100 or **hb@carmarthenshire.gov.uk**

To claim go to: www.gov.uk/universal-credit
Universal Credit helpline – 0800 328 5644

or contact via your journal or visiting your local Jobcentre Plus office.

Claim Checklist

Before you can complete your Universal Credit Claim online, you will need all of the following details:

- ✓ Your bank or building society account details (call the Universal Credit helpline if you do not have one)
- ✓ An email address
- ✓ Your National Insurance number
- ✓ Information about your housing, for example how much rent you pay
- ✓ Details of your income, for example payslips
- ✓ Details of savings and any investments, like shares or a property that you rent out
- ✓ Details of how much you pay for childcare if you're applying for help with childcare costs

You also have to verify your identity online.

You'll need some proof of identity for this, for example your:

- ✓ Driving licence
- ✓ Passport
- ✓ Debit or credit card

What support Carmarthenshire County Council will offer their residents...

Access to Wi-Fi and computers available in the following...

Llanelli Library - 01554 744327

Carmarthen Library - 01267 244824

Ammanford Library - 01269 598360

Monday & Thursday: 9am – 7pm

Tuesday, Wednesday & Friday: 9am – 6pm

Saturday: 9am – 5pm

If you're not a member remember your ID (proof of address e.g. driving licence or utility bill) to join for free.

Hwb Llanelli

01267 234567

Monday - Thursday: 9am – 5pm

Friday: 9am – 4pm

Gyda chefnogaeth | Supported by



This page is intentionally left blank

Community Scrutiny Committee

14 February 2019

Fire Safety Management in Sheltered Housing and General Needs Blocks of Flats

Purpose:

To provide information on general fire safety, incorporating issues raised by Councillors in relation to the installation of sprinklers and tilt and turn windows.

Reasons:

In response to a previous request from the Committee

To be referred to the Executive Board / Council for decision: NO

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDERS:

Cllr Linda Evans (Housing); Cllr Hazel Evans (Environment)

Directorate: Environment

Name of Head of Service:

Jonathan Fearn

Report Author:

Andrew Rees

Designations:

Head of Property

Principal Condition and Compliance
Manager

Tel Nos.

E Mail Addresses:

Executive Summary
Community Scrutiny Committee
14 February 2019

**Fire Safety Management in Sheltered Housing
and General Needs Blocks of Flats**

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide an overview of fire safety on the Council's General Needs and Sheltered Housing stock.

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?

YES

IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report :

Signed: Jonathan Fearn, Head of Property

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities	Legal	Finance	ICT	Risk Management Issues	Staffing Implications	Physical Assets
NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE	NONE

CONSULTATIONS

I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below

Signed: Jonathan Fearn, Head of Property

**Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information
List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**

THERE ARE NONE

This page is intentionally left blank

Fire Safety Management in Sheltered Housing and General Needs Blocks of Flats

Report to Community Scrutiny, 14th February 2019

Introduction

A significant national focus was placed on social landlords since the Grenfell Tower fire which led to the fatality of 79 residents in June 2017. Much of this focus was on the external cladding used as part of a significant restoration programme which has been proven to have accelerated the spread of the fire.

This led to an extensive verification programme of the national housing stock to confirm the extent of Aluminium Composite Material cladding application, which was further extended to schools and other high-rise properties.

Authorities, Housing Associations and Social Landlords were also encouraged to review their current arrangements for Fire Management effectiveness.

Community Scrutiny Committee requested a report on general fire safety management of the Council's housing stock and this report has been prepared to provide information on general fire safety, incorporating issues raised by Councillors in relation to the installation of sprinklers and tilt and turn windows.

Carmarthenshire County Council's Housing Stock

Carmarthenshire Council has in the region of 8,500 general needs homes. The vast majority of these are one and two storey houses and bungalows.

The Authority does not have any high rise blocks. The maximum height is four storeys, and we have confirmed that no over-cladding works have been carried out to these blocks.

The Authority has 9 three-storey blocks (95 homes in total), and 3 four-storey blocks (45 homes in total). These represent a mix of bedsits, flats and maisonettes.

The Authority also has 21 sheltered schemes (approximately 500 flats) of a maximum height of 2 storeys. The Authority has confirmed to WAG that none of these properties have had over-cladding or re-rendering works.

The Authority has five 2-storey blocks, and a significant number of individual dwellings, where Exterior Wall Insulation (EWI) has been carried out to improve the energy efficiency of the dwellings. This has no similarity with the over-cladding undertaken at the Grenfell flats in London. The specification is a Parextherm product comprising insulation material mechanically and chemically fixed to the existing masonry walls which is then coated with two coats of render, the final coat incorporating a mineral aggregate. These materials are similar to those already found on the interior and exterior of the dwellings during their construction and represent no additional fire risk.

Our 'General Needs' stock has been brought up to the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard. This standard includes the installation of hard-wired heat, smoke and carbon-monoxide detectors, however there are a small number of tenants who have refused these works. We are currently working with tenants to insist on the installation of these detectors. Whilst access is being arranged through the enforcement team, there is a 10 year, battery operated alarm fitted which are checked annually as part of a Property Maintenance service regime.

Specific Fire Management Measures for Sheltered Housing

From January 2013 inspections, meetings and wide-ranging discussions took place around Sheltered Housing, where new technologies, processes and policies were developed to support vulnerable tenants, and ensure the Authorities legal duties were discharged. This has resulted in what the Fire and Rescue Service recognises as a robust fire management system, which seeks to reduce the risks from fire to as low as is reasonably practicable. In summary:

- All schemes have had intrusive surveys with any required remedial works undertaken.
- Two Schemes (Yr Hafan and Waddles Court) have been fitted with Sprinkler Systems as part of their remodelling.
- The numbers of non-ambulant tenants have been significantly reduced.
- A Sheltered Scheme Officer (SSO) Handbook has been prepared outlining the Fire Arrangements adopted within Schemes.
- Risk management systems have been adopted which will take account of tenants' needs in the event of an outbreak of fire.
- An £800,000 fire alarm and emergency lighting upgrade programme to standardise alarm configuration and monitoring has been completed. This was over and above what was required, and the Fire Service is currently highlighting Carmarthenshire County Council as 'Best Practice' in the way the Authority manages sheltered schemes.
- The Fire and Rescue service is invited into schemes on an annual basis to provide assessments for all tenants; fire safety talks; and safety in the home advice.
- Fire Crews have access to updated digital information on the status of tenants and can identify the most vulnerable before they arrive on site.

Independent 3rd Party Risk Assessments on our Schemes have also been undertaken and provided the following comments:

- "The sheltered housing each had officers (SHOs) available during day time hours. It must be said that without fail, these SHOs were very positive in their approach to fire safety within their accommodations, and were very helpful in arranging and carrying out the visits."
- Staff were knowledgeable in the application of the emergency plan and all had attended training courses in 2018. "It must be said that we feel that there was a lot that was good about the sheltered housing and the number of actions raised within the reports is relatively small, when considering that these are usually quite large and well used buildings".

- The policy within the SH schemes is a mixture of evacuation and stay put, i.e. evacuate to a place of safety within the premises, usually a lounge. Remain there until advised otherwise. In the event that this area is affected by a fire, evacuation is direct to outside.
- There is a system whereby persons who may not be able to evacuate are identified to the Fire Service at the entry point to the building. There is liaison with Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service (MWWFRS) which is party to the plan that is in place, and accepts that evacuation may need to be assisted by them. Normally a Fire Service would not agree a plan that at its outset involved them with evacuation, as here.
- Means of escape routes were all looked at, and were available and clear at the time of visits.
- Housekeeping was usually to a very good standard.
- A number of flats were visited within the complexes, many of which were similar in layout, mostly single bedroom, with risk rooms (lounge and bedroom) off a lobby to the front door.
- Flats all have fire alarms in line with BS 5839 Part 6 in place in the kitchen, lounge and bedroom, and the communal BS 5839 Part 1 detection in the hallway and linked to the Tunstall - Warden Call System
- Layouts were as designed and generally acceptable, having regard for the fact that rooms have fire detection installed, and substantial doors will provide a level of protection, if kept closed, to allow escape, provided that the alarms alert the occupants and that they are mobile.
- “Generally, we found the Sheltered Housing to be in good order.”

General Needs Blocks of Flats (Independent Living)

Fire statistics show that a fire in a bungalow is more likely to result in a fatality than a fire in a high-rise block of flats (because of the age demographic of those living in bungalows).

Therefore, as in all dwelling types, the risk to people from fire (i.e. risk of death or injury) in a block of flats is governed primarily by the likelihood of fire occurring and whether smoke alarms are installed, rather than the type of dwelling in which people live, the height of the dwelling above ground or the architectural design of the block.

Key points

- People living in flats experience more fires than people living in houses. However, a fire in a flat is no more dangerous than a fire in a house.
- To keep fire risk to a minimum, it is just as important to prevent fires as to provide measures to protect people when fire occurs.
- The most significant influences on fire risk are social and lifestyle factors and advanced age, not the type of dwelling in which people live.
- All dwellings should have working smoke alarms.
- Very few people die as a result of a fire in a neighbour’s flat or the common parts. Nearly all fire deaths occur in the flat in which fire starts.
- In blocks of flats, each flat is designed to be a fire-resisting ‘box’. It is important to maintain the integrity of this compartment, particularly when building work and alterations take place.

- It is important to ensure that fires cannot start in the common parts or common facilities by making sure these areas remain sterile.

General Principles

(Reference: Local Government Association: Fire Safety in Purpose Built Blocks of Flats)

- While escape within flats is based on similar principles to those for houses, reaching ultimate safety relies on using the common parts.
- Most blocks of flats are designed on the 'stay put' principle. Although this relies on there being effective compartmentation, it is a principle that should be adopted wherever possible.
- Provided there is effective compartmentation and means of escape, 'general needs' blocks of flats will not normally require a communal fire alarm system.
- Communal fire alarm systems should not be installed unless it can be demonstrated that there is no other practicable way of ensuring an adequate level of safety. If such a system is provided, it must be possible to manage it.
- However, it should not automatically be assumed that constructional standards will be inadequate in the absence of evidence to that effect.
- Proposals to upgrade fire protection in an existing block should aim to ensure, or restore, a satisfactory standard of compartmentation in order to maintain the original 'stay put' policy.
- More generally, application of current benchmark standards to an existing block of flats is not normally appropriate.
- Certain developments in fire safety technology and practice (e.g. smoke alarms within flats) should be adopted. However, other developments such as automatic suppression systems (Sprinklers) will only be appropriate if the cost and effort of adopting them is proportionate to the risk.

Specific queries raised by Councillors and CCC's approach

The use of Windows as escape routes

Above first floor level, escape via windows is impossible, and, above the third floor, rescue by fire and rescue service ladders is unlikely to be possible; even high reach appliances have their limits. However, this is taken into account in the design, layout and means of escape in modern blocks of flats. They are designed so that escape or rescue via windows should not be necessary.

Provision of Fire Extinguishers

It is rare for there to be a need for fire-fighting equipment to be used by people present in the common parts of blocks of flats. In Sheltered Housing, equipment is usually provided in plant rooms and other such rooms, for use by staff and contractors. The provision of fire extinguishers and other forms of fire-fighting equipment in common parts for use by residents is problematic. It is not expected that residents should tackle a fire in their flats to make their escape. Indeed, to obtain a fire extinguisher located in the common parts for this purpose would involve the person leaving their flat in the first place. This does not preclude residents from providing their own fire extinguishers and fire blankets. Indeed, it may be appropriate for landlords, and others responsible for the common parts, to encourage this as part of the process of engaging with, and educating residents on, fire safety.

Single Escape Routes

Design of communal means of escape in purpose-built blocks of flats is based on certain assumptions. These include:

- The most likely place of origin of a fire will be in a flat itself
- That there is a high degree of fire separation between flats and the common parts and, therefore, the likelihood of fire and smoke spread beyond the flat of origin is low
- The materials used in the construction of the building or the protection afforded to them are such that fire is unlikely to spread through the fabric of the building
- The use of the common parts, and the nature of any combustible items present, is such that any fire originating in the common parts is unlikely to spread beyond the immediate vicinity.

Sprinkler Systems

- Although more commonly associated with other types of buildings (Commercial Properties, Schools, etc), systems specifically intended for domestic and residential premises have been recently developed, along with appropriate standards to govern their use. Since 2016 guidance under the Welsh Building Regulations requires all new homes to be fitted with sprinkler systems. Sprinklers have been installed in the Hafan and Waddles Court Schemes as part of their remodelling, and will be installed in all new and remodelled Housing schemes.
- Water mist systems are also now available. These too have been developed for domestic and residential applications and these systems are currently utilised when the need is assessed, particularly with vulnerable tenants.
- Whilst historically general consensus considered it unlikely that retrofitting sprinklers systems would be reasonably practicable for existing blocks, this does not preclude their use where there is clear justification and appropriate consideration of the practicalities of their installation and subsequent maintenance, as is currently being considered and possibly recommended (or potentially enforced) following the current Grenfell Enquiry.

The extent to which such developments in technology should be taken into account when assessing existing blocks of flats needs to be considered carefully. It is important that the cost, practicality and benefit gained are all taken into account.

Strategies to address shortcomings in fire safety should be proportionate to the risk and this is a key principle of fire risk assessment, and to this end Property has undertaken a prioritised cyclical programme of Fire Risk Assessments, initially on our 3+ storey blocks of flats. Where required, subsequent recommendations were made to enhance the current provisions and to further reduce risks, particularly where risk profiling data has highlighted arson trends.

These recommendations have included:

- Consideration of the potential to retrospectively install sprinkler systems as part of any future wider repairs programmes;
- A review of fire procedural information disseminated to tenants

- The conducting of periodic inspections of communal areas of flats by officers of the Communities Department together with enforcing Authorities to ensure housekeeping standards are maintained, and anti-social behaviour is tackled.
- The potential introduction of technology such as thermographic imaging linked to CCTV systems. This is currently being evaluated
- A review of the allocations policy to the 'Ty' Blocks, which has subsequently been implemented as part of the wider regeneration scheme of Station Road.

Conclusion

In conclusion, CCC does not have the 'High Rise' Housing stock profile of typical urban Authorities, and our stock has been evaluated as not to have any Aluminium Composite Cladding fitted, which was the significant factor of the Grenfell Tower block fire.

The Authority regularly assesses and monitors the effectiveness of our fire safety strategies, in line with evolving legislation and technological innovations for continued compliance, and ultimately our moral duty as a Housing Landlord.

Recommendations highlighted as part of undertaking fire risk assessments are continually reviewed and implemented accordingly.

We provide our tenants with appropriate fire safety information relevant to their housing type.

The Property Division is currently piloting new fire safety software, which will provide better oversight of the Authority's estate in relation to fire safety. This will involve Premises Responsible Persons (PRPs) undertaking and completing a log of fire safety actions (such as fire alarm testing, evacuation drills and premises checks) to reduce the risk of a fire, or the impact from a fire.

**Property Division
February 2019**

EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORTS

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE : COMMUNITY

DATE OF MEETING : 14TH FEBRUARY, 2019

ITEM	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	EXPLANATION	REVISED SUBMISSION DATE
<p>WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS 2017-2020</p>	<p>IAN JONES, HEAD OF LEISURE</p>	<p>Additional information is required for inclusion in the report. The report will therefore be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.</p>	<p>28TH MARCH, 2019</p>

This page is intentionally left blank

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 14TH FEBRUARY 2019

FORTHCOMING ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING TO BE HELD ON 28TH MARCH 2019

In order to ensure effective Scrutiny, Members need to be clear as to the purpose of requesting specific information and the outcome they are hoping to achieve as a consequence of examining a report. Limiting the number of agenda items may help to keep meetings focused and easier to manage.

Proposed Agenda Item	Background	Reason for report
Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Report 2017/18: Carmarthenshire	The report covers the Annual Assessment for 2017/18 by the Museums, Archives & Libraries Division of Welsh Government of the Annual Return submitted by Carmarthenshire Libraries under the Welsh Public Library Standards	To monitor the performance of the Library Service against the 6 th Quality Assessment Framework of the Welsh Public Library Standards, as contained in the Annual Return for 2017/18.
Q3 Corporate Strategy Performance Management Report 2018/19	This is the standard Performance Management report on our progress in delivering the objectives/actions and targets set out in the New Corporate Strategy. It covers those elements of the strategy that fall under the remit of this Scrutiny.	To enable the committee to undertake its monitoring role.
Budget Monitoring Report 2018/19	This is a standard quarterly budget report covering the revenue and capital budgets for the Communities and Environment Departments which fall within the remit of the Community Scrutiny Committee	To enable the committee to undertake its monitoring role of the Community and Environment Department budgets which fall within its remit

This page is intentionally left blank

Wednesday, 23 January 2019

PRESENT: Councillor S.L. Davies (Chair)

Councillors:

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

Also in attendance:

Councillor E. Dole, Leader of the Council
 Councillor L.D. Evans, Executive Board Member for Housing
 Councillor D.M. Jenkins, Executive Board Member for Resources

The following Officers were in attendance:

C. Moore, Director of Corporate Services
 J. Morgan, Director of Community Services
 W. Walters, Director of Regeneration & Policy
 I. Jones, Head of Leisure
 J. Morgan, Acting Head of Homes & Safer Communities
 L. Quelch, Head of Planning
 L.R. Jones, Head of Administration and Law
 A Bowen, Investing in Homes Lead
 S Burford, Project Manager
 L. James, Partnership and Engagement Manager
 H. Morgan, Economic Development Manager
 S. Walters, Economic Development Manager
 S. Williams, Senior Accountant
 M.S. Davies, Democratic Services Officer

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen: 10.00 am - 12.20 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D. Cundy and H. Shepardson.

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

Councillor	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
S. Davies	4 – Update – Llanelli Life Science and Well-Being Village;	Employed by NHS;
J. Edmunds	5 – Housing Revenue Account Budget and housing rent setting for 2018/19;	He is private landlord;
A. Vaughan Owen	7 – Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2018/19;	Licence holder for Gwendraeth Sports Hall.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

4. LLANELLI LIFE SCIENCE AND WELL-BEING VILLAGE - UPDATE

With reference to the Chief Executive's position statement on the Llanelli Well-Being Village to Council on the 12th December 2018 [Minute 3 thereof refers] the Committee considered a report which aimed to provide further assurance on the governance of the Village Project both during the procurement process and following the signing of the Collaboration Agreement with Swansea University and Sterling Health Security Holdings Limited. The report included:

- Progress of the City Deal Business Case;
- The status of four reviews which had commenced and the delivery of the Village project;
- Assurances, through legal review, that a robust procurement process had been undertaken;
- Assurance around the governance of the project;
- Termination of the Collaboration Agreement.

The Committee was advised that the findings of the four reviews would be shared once completed. In addition, whilst the Collaboration Agreement had been terminated, a working relationship with Swansea University was required, and continued, to ensure that the optimal benefits could be achieved. Project progress continued to be maintained with the aim of completing phase one of the Village in 2021.

The following issues were raised on the report:

- In response to a question it was emphasised that the Wales Audit Review was being undertaken at the *Council's* request;
- It was noted that following the recent granting of planning permission for the Wellness and Life Science Development the value of the land had increased and therefore the Authority's investment to date was secure;
- Concern was expressed that the estimated 700 undergraduate places likely to be in place by 2020 in related fields might be jeopardised should Swansea University reconsider its involvement in the scheme. The Committee was advised that officers hoped that Swansea University's role in the project would continue. The Authority would, however, be prepared to discuss alternative project delivery should Swansea University reconsider its position;
- Members were reassured that there was no flooding risk associated with the site;
- The Director of Corporate Services commented that a number of financial institutions had expressed interest in the project and these would be followed up once the independent review of the Business Case had been concluded and published;
- The Committee was reminded of the leisure and assisted living components included in the project for which provision had been made in the capital programme;
- The Director of Regeneration and Policy, in response to a comment, spoke

of the possible benefits of what was considered to be a project of national importance to the whole of Carmarthenshire and beyond.

Officers were thanked for the comprehensive update.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

5. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET AND HOUSING RENT SETTING FOR 2019/20

[NOTE: Councillor J. Edmunds had previously declared an interest in this item.]

The Committee considered, as part of the budget consultation process, a report prepared by the Director of Corporate Services, in conjunction with officers from the Communities Department, which brought together the latest proposals for the Revenue and Capital Budgets for the Housing Revenue Account 2019/2020. The report would be presented to the Executive Board on the 4th February 2019.

Whilst the County Council had approved the implementation of the Social Housing Rents Policy in 2015, providing consistency for 5 years, this had ended in 2018/19. Welsh Government had, however, provided an interim policy for 2019/20 pending the results of the Affordable Housing Supply Review. This should result in the development of a new policy due for implementation in 2020/21. The interim policy allowed local authorities within their target rent band to increase rent by CPI only (the County Council was currently marginally within the target rent band). The increase in target rent for 2019/20 had been notified as 2.4%. The ability to progress rents for those properties below the target rent, a maximum of £2 per week increase until the target rent was reached, had been removed, unless current average rent was below the target rent band.

In response to a comment regarding the need to help people avoid getting into debt the Acting Head of Homes and Safer Communities referred to the development of a pre-tenancy service so that tenancies could be better managed. Members were assured that every effort was made to maintain a tenancy and the eviction rate had reduced considerably

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report and the following proposals be endorsed for submission to the Executive Board:-

5.1 To increase the average housing rent as per the WG Interim Social Housing Rents Policy:

- **Properties at target rents to increase by 2.4%;**
- **Those rents above target be frozen until such time that they meet the target;**

thereby producing an increase on the average housing rent of 2.4% or £2.05 which will produce a sustainable Business Plan, maintain CHS+ and resource the Affordable Homes programme as supported by the CHS+ Steering Group;

5.2 To maintain garage rents at £9.00 per week and garage bases at £2.25 per week;

5.3 To apply the service charge policy to ensure tenants who receive the benefit from specific services pay for those services;

5.4 To increase charges for using our sewerage treatment works in line with rent increases.

6. THE CARMARTHENSHIRE HOMES STANDARD PLUS (CHS+) BUSINESS PLAN 2019-2022

The Committee received for consideration the Carmarthenshire Homes Standards Plus (CHS+) Business Plan 2018-21 the purpose of which was threefold. Firstly, it explained the vision and detail of the CHS+ over the next three years and what it meant for tenants. Secondly, it confirmed the financial profile, based on current assumptions for delivery of the CHS+ over the next three years and, thirdly, produced a business plan for the annual application to the Welsh Government for Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) for 2018/19 equating to £6.1m.

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:

- The Acting Head of Homes and Safer Communities, in response to a comment, advised that the number of void properties should reduce over the next 6-12 months;
- It was commented that the purchasers of affordable homes to be made more aware of the conditions

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED THAT IT BE RECOMMENDED TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD THAT:

- **the vision of the CHS+ and the financial delivery programme over the next three years be confirmed;**
- **the submission of the plan to the Welsh Government be confirmed.**

7. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2018/19

[NOTE: Councillor A. Vaughan Owen had previously declared an interest in this item.]

The Committee considered the 2018/19 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring reports for the Housing, Regeneration, Planning and Leisure and Recreation Services for the period up to the 31st October, 2018. It was noted that the revenue budget showed a net variance of £243k and the HRA Housing Service showed a £269k variance against the 2018/19 approved budgets. The capital programme showed a variance of -£1,580k against the 2018/19 approved budget.

The Head of Leisure, in response to reiterated concerns over the operating deficit for the St Clears Leisure Centre, again advised that the department was developing an options appraisal for the centre with a view to increasing revenue/participation rates though the facility was in need of significant investment.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report be received.

8. OUR APPROACH TO TENANT INVOLVEMENT.

The Committee considered a report outlining the development of a fresh approach to involving tenants in challenging the way the Authority delivered services and

making it easier for them to become involved. To assist in developing the new tenant participation plan TPAS [Tenant Participation Advisory Service] Cymru had been commissioned to carry out a fundamental review of tenant participation and resident engagement. The review had looked at the Authority's existing approach and challenged whether existing plans were in line with best practice and if participation activities had been successful in encouraging tenants to become involved. As part of the review TPAS had been asked to consult and seek tenant's views and to suggest areas the Authority needed to focus on.

The Committee was advised that communication with tenants would always be in their preferred format whether digital or printed.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO EXECUTIVE BOARD that the Tenant Involvement Plan be approved.

9. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORTS

The Committee considered the explanations provided for the non-submission of three scrutiny reports.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the non-submission report be received.

10. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee received a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting to be held on the 14th February 2019.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items for the meeting of the Committee to be held on the 14th February 2019 be received.

11. MINUTES

11.1. 23RD NOVEMBER, 2018

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 23rd November, 2018 be signed as a correct record.

11.2. 13TH DECEMBER, 2018

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 13th December, 2018 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE

This page is intentionally left blank