

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 5 October 2017

PRESENT: Councillor J.K. Howell (Chair)

Councillors:

D.M. Cundy, S.A. Curry, W.R.A. Davies, H.L. Davies, B.W. Jones, H.I. Jones, H.B. Shepardson, G.B. Thomas, A.Vaughan Owen and W.T. Evans (In place of C.A. Davies)

Also in attendance:

Councillor P. Hughes-Griffiths, Executive Board Member for Culture, Sport and Tourism
L.M. Stephens, Deputy Leader of the Council

The following Officers were in attendance:

R. Staines, Head of Housing and Public Protection
I. Jones, Head of Leisure
H. Morgan, Economic Development Manager
L. Quelch, Head of Planning
S. Walters, Economic Development Manager
A. Thomas, Senior Accountant
G. Ayres, Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager
J. Davies, Senior Cultural Services Manager
M Mason, Museum Development Manager
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

Chamber, 3 Spilman Street, Carmarthen - 10.00 am - 12.40 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sharen Davies, Betsan Jones and Shirley Matthews.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS

Councillor	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
Aled Vaughan Owen		Licence Holder for Gwendraeth Sports Hall

3. DECLARATION OF PROHIBITED PARTY WHIPS

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

No public questions had been received.

5. CARMARTHENSHIRE MUSEUMS STRATEGIC PLAN 2017-2022

The Committee received the Carmarthenshire Museums Strategic Plan for the period 2017-2022, superseding the previous Carmarthenshire Museums Service

Forward Plan 2013-18 approved by the Executive Board member on the 15th March 2013 .

The Head of Leisure, in introducing the report, advised the Committee that whilst the Council's normal reporting procedures would have required its consideration by the Committee prior to submission to the Executive Board, the external museums accreditation timetable which required its submission by the end of October 2017 had necessitated its approval by the Executive Board on the 31st July 2017. That approval, had enabled the Department to progress the accreditation process to comply with the required timescale. As a consequence, the report was being presented to the scrutiny committee for information and comment.

The Committee thereupon received a presentation on the Plan, which identified the following 5 key objectives to deliver the vision of providing an excellent service by 2022:

- Strategic Aim 1 – Manage and develop our resources, facilities and workforce to become more resilient and build a stronger economy;
- Strategic Aim 2 – Become recognised for our innovative approach to developing and using museum collections;
- Strategic Aim 3 – Create a great visitor experience through excellent services and programs
- Strategic Aim 4 – Deliver inspiring and creative learning opportunities for all people;
- Strategic Aim 5 – Support opportunities to promote health and well-being

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:

- Reference was made to the work of the Museums Service and to whether it supported/linked in with other private/community museums in the county.

The Museums Development Manager advised that the service had previously established Hanes Sir Gar that brought together various historic societies and private museums which regularly met at the County Museum in Abergwili. Additionally, the service operated an open door policy providing assistance and guidance to the private/community sector wherever possible.

- Reference was made to the Plan's ambition of providing a central collections storage facility to replace the current storage arrangements spread across a number of facilities countywide. As additional funding would be required for that facility, clarification was sought on whether that was in place.

The Head of Leisure confirmed that external funding had been identified to enable scoping work to be undertaken to examine the council's collections and collecting policies to assess the extent of future storage facilities. Following completion of the scoping work, the next step would be for the Authority to undertake an assessment of its property portfolio to identify any facilities that may be capable of conversion e.g. old/vacant warehouses. With regard to funding, bids had been made via the Council's capital programme with the exact level required being dependent upon the suitability of any properties for conversion to the required standard.

- Reference was made to the work of the museums service and clarification sought on whether it collaborated with the education department on the type of exhibitions/displays provided. The Museums Development Manager confirmed that was a key element of the learner programme and, historically, the service had worked closely with the education department in that regard. However, there was scope for enhancing the service's role in the programming of exhibitions to closely link with the curriculum.
- In response to a question on the service's ability to be financially self-sustaining, the Head of Leisure reminded the Committee that the service was not able to levy an admission charge for visitors. However, it was able to examine other sustainable avenues to attract revenue. Those could include making better use of its facilities for example holding weddings at Parc Howard and Abergwili and closely linking the museums with other local attractions such as linking Abergwili with the Towy Valley Cycle Trail and by providing enhanced refreshment facilities.

The Head of Leisure also commented upon the cost of operating the service, particularly the considerable maintenance costs associated with the Abergwili and Parc Howard Museums which were subsidised by other activities within the Leisure services portfolio. He confirmed that whilst every endeavour would be made to maximise all revenue raising opportunities, it was possible the service may never achieve financial self-sustainability.

- Reference was made to the perceived lack of marketing of the museums service and to whether there were any proposals to enhance its promotion within the community and at other tourism venues. The Head of leisure advised that although the service had always operated on the premise of waiting for visitors to come to its facilities work was on-going to address that situation by adopting a similar approach to the Library service which had seen its visitor numbers increase significantly. That included liaising with the council's communications and tourism divisions to improve the status of the museums branding, initially on-line.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (PLANNING)

The Committee received for consideration the Planning Division's Annual Performance Report (APR) for the period April 2016 – March 2017. It was noted that production of the APR was a requirement of the Planning Performance Framework Table and had to be submitted to the Welsh Government by the 31st October each year for evaluation against set indicators and targets.

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

- Reference was made to the Planning Division's workload against the background of diminishing staff resources and clarification sought on its ability to continue to provide the range of services against that background.

The Head of Planning assured the Committee that continual assessment was undertaken of staffing resources in response to changing demands and legislation to future proof those resources to meet the AMR's requirements. An example of that continual assessment was the recent restructuring of the planning and enforcement sections. The impact of that

restructuring would be evaluated, and should it prove necessary a business case would be made to address any identified need for additional staff resources.

- Reference was made to pages 79 and 82 of the report and the correlation of the tables therein detailing a reduction in both income levels and planning applications over recent years. Clarification was sought on whether there was a reason for the reduction.

The Head of Planning confirmed that whilst the Planning Division endeavoured to establish anticipated income levels against historic data, actual income levels and planning applications received was outside of its control being dependent upon a range of factors with the economic climate being the primary driver. The Division had however seen an increase in planning applications for the first quarter of 2017/18 compared to the previous year and it was anticipated further planning applications arising from the City Deal would increase income levels.

- In response to a question on managing the impact of reducing income levels, the Head of Planning advised that there were a number of options available to the division in that regard which included deferment on the filling of vacant posts/restructuring to fund any potential deficit. To date, any potential for a deficit budget to occur had been managed.
- References were made on the limitations of current national and local planning policies on the granting of new homes for farmers and the need to ensure sufficient provision was made to accommodate their requirements to remain on the farm holding and as part of the local community.

The Head of Planning reminded the Committee that the Council, at its September 2017 meeting, had agreed to review the Local Development Plan and the above issue would need to be raised as part of the review process.

- Reference was made to page 87 of the report to the concern identified by members in relation to the delivery of the Council's enforcement roles and activities. The Head of Planning advised that whilst the report identified planning enforcement as presenting particular and specific challenges, a debate was being undertaken on enforcement throughout the county incorporating planning, highways, environment and public protection with the aim of improving the enforcement process. That included how the authority could progress specific site problems and which division would be best placed in light of existing protocols and legislative/regulatory powers to address those issues.
- Reference was made to the designation by Natural Resources Wales of flood areas, the perceived impact of those as a barrier to growth and if it was possible to change those designations.

The Head of Planning advised that whilst the flood maps could be challenged, there were cost implications associated therewith. She advised that as the Council had recently agreed to review its Local Development Plan an opportunity existed to examine the inclusion of specific sites therein and it was intended plans would be issued in the New Year for consultation providing the public/developers with the opportunity of requesting the inclusion of specific sites within the revised plan. However, should any of those sites be located within the designated flood maps, the

developers would have to prove their development potential and that could include challenging the flood map.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received and forwarded to the Welsh Government by the 31st October Deadline.

7. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2017/18

The Committee considered the 2017/18 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring reports for the Housing, Regeneration, Planning and Leisure and Recreation Services for the period up to the 30th June, 2017. It was noted that the revenue budget was forecasting a £376k overspend, the capital budget a £15,727k underspend, whilst the Housing Revenue Account was forecasting a £226k underspend.

The following issues were raised during consideration of the report:-

- In response to a question on the projected £442k income shortfall in the Development Management Division, the Head of Planning reminded the Committee of her earlier comments on the increase in planning applications received for the first quarter of 2017/18 compared to the previous year and on a number of large planning applications anticipated to be submitted to the authority in the near future which would have a positive effect on income generation levels.
- In response to a question on the 2018/19 budget for leisure services, the Head of Leisure advised that preparatory work was continuing thereon and any budgetary proposals for the future provision of leisure facilities countywide would form part of that report for the council's consideration.
- In response to a question relating to the £26k underspend on homelessness, the Head of Housing and Public Protection apprised the Committee of the authority's revised approach to homelessness introduced several years previously and the switch in emphasis from a re-active to prevention service delivery. That change had, via the utilisation of both the Council's and the private rented sectors housing stock, resulted in a reduction in emergency bed and breakfast placements from 50 per week to approximately four per quarter together with a reduction in the emergency bed and breakfast budget from £600k to £10k over the past ten years.
- Reference was made to recent press coverage on the possibility of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council not signing up as a partner in the City Deal. Clarification was sought on the potential impact that could have upon the Deal's future viability particularly, any proposed schemes for Carmarthenshire e.g. Delta Lakes.

The Economic Development Manager advised that the recent press article referred to Neath Port Talbot not being in a position, at the present time, to sign off the Joint Governance arrangements for the City Deal. Discussion on those arrangements were ongoing and hopefully, should be finalised by the end of the year.

- Reference was made to the projected £331k overspend on planned maintenance works for the public housing stock being partly attributable to a higher level of boiler break downs and replacements. Clarification was sought on whether a particular problem had been identified with the boilers.

The Head of Housing and Public Protection confirmed whilst no specific problem had been identified, the unusual level of breakdowns may purely be attributable to normal wear and tear arising from a housing stock in excess of 9,000 properties. However, the Environment Department was examining the profiling of boiler breakdowns and to whether their replacement should be cyclical or as failures occurred. It was anticipated a report on revised budgetary arrangements with regard thereto would be submitted to the Committee in the New Year as part of the budgetary process

- The Head of Housing in response to a question on rent arrears confirmed the authority did make provision to write off former tenant rent arrears where recovery procedures had failed to recover the debt or it was no longer economically viable to pursue. However, existing tenant debt was not written off and every effort was made to work with the tenants to settle/reduce any debt.

He also referred to the recent benefit changes introduced by the U.K. Government via Universal Credit and advised that the Authority had increased the debt provision within its business plan from £300-£500k to address the anticipated increase in arrears which could arise from those changes. The introduction of Universal Credit within Carmarthenshire had seen the average level of debt/arrears incurred by tenants amounted to £700 compared to the previous £200. He advised that as it was anticipated the full roll-out of Universal Credit could have a major impact on the Housing Business Plan, officers were currently endeavouring to identify measures to mitigate that impact. Those could include requesting rent payments to be made direct to the Authority. However that request could only be made after the tenant had been on the new system for two months. That position could be further compounded by the fact new applicants for universal credit would have to wait a period of six weeks before receiving any payments.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring report 2017/18 be received.

8. DRAFT - CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2016/17

The Committee considered the Council's draft Annual Report for 2016/17 incorporating the second year progress report on the Corporate Strategy 2015-20, (including the Summary Annual Report 2016/17) and the full Annual Report which had to be published by the end of October each year as a requirement of the Local Government (Wales) Measure

It was noted that when the Corporate Strategy had been published in 2015/20 the authority had undertaken to produce an annual progress setting out 24 outcome measures against which performance would be judged. The Corporate Strategy would be subject to review in 2018/19 to incorporate the Council's Well-being objectives as required by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The following observations/questions were raised on the report:-

- References were made to the 0.7% increase in sickness absence levels within the authority from 10.1% to 10.8% and views expressed that the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, which had the remit for staff absence levels, should take urgent action to examine the reasons for that increase possibly, by re-visiting the work of its previous task and finish group on staff sickness levels.
- In response to a question relating to the action to reduce referrals to adult and children's social services, the Head of Housing and Public Protection advised that generally, referrals were reducing via use of Information, Advice and Assistance. Previously, the position was that referrals would automatically be directed to Social Services. That was no longer the case as now, following a basic assessment, service users would be signposted, as early as possible, to the most appropriate care service whilst ensuring the sign posting was accurate and relevant.
- Reference was made to the theme of 'Building a Better Council' and the action to 'increasing public communication, consultation and engagement. The Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager advised that the Council was currently revisiting its corporate consultation and engagement strategy in light of the provisions of the Well-being and Future Generations Act. A report on the outcome of the review would be submitted to Council via the normal reporting procedures.
- In response to a question on responsibility for undertaking a countywide assessment under the provisions of the Well-being and Future Generations Act on the level of support for communities, the Committee was advised that whilst that lay with the Public Services Board, the council would need to contribute to undertaking more localised work thereon in the future.
- Reference was made to page 17 of the report and the statement made to the use of renewable energy having more than doubled. Clarification was sought on whether that total usage, representing less than 1% of the total energy consumed was as a consequence of the authority increasing its own electricity generation or, increasing the quantity purchased. A view was expressed that the Committee could be provided with a report on the level of electricity generated and purchased and what percentage of that was green energy.

The Committee was advised that whilst that subject came within the remit of the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee, arrangements could be made for the information to be shared with the Community Scrutiny Committee.

The Head of Housing and Public Protection reported that the Housing Services Division would shortly be tendering for the procurement of photo voltaic cells where appropriate on its 9,000 properties which could significantly increase the council's electricity generating potential.

- Reference was made to the recent changes introduced to the Council's garden waste collection service and information requested on the impact of those changes in relation to any difficulties encountered, take up figures and any financial impact. The Committee was advised that whilst that subject came within the remit of the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee, arrangements could be made for the information to be shared with the Community Scrutiny Committee.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

- 8.1 That the Draft Carmarthenshire County Council's Annual Report for 2016/17 be received.
- 8.2 That the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee be requested to give consideration to the increase in staff sickness levels within the Authority, possibly, by revisiting the work of its previous task and finish group thereon.

9. 2017/18 WELL-BEING OBJECTIVES PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT QUARTER 1 - 1ST APRIL TO 30TH JUNE 2017

The Committee received for consideration the 2017/18 Well-Being Objectives Performance Monitoring Report for Quarter 1 in respect of the period 1st April to 30th June, 2017.

The following issues were raised on the report:-

- In response to a question relating to the percentage of empty private properties brought back into use, the Head of Housing and Public Protection confirmed that staffing levels within the unit had decreased by one and, as a consequence, the Division was only able to concentrate its resources on addressing high risk cases. However, a business case was being prepared to support the appointment of an additional officer which would be considered as part of the forthcoming budget preparations.
- Concerns were raised in relation to the imminent U.K. rollout of the new Universal Credit Benefit system and to whether the Council had/were considering any avenues available to it to offer assistance to those affected by the new system.

The Head of Housing and Public Protection advised that there was general concern regarding the impact of the new system, and Executive Board Members for Housing from across Wales had recently met with the Welsh Government to place political pressure on the U.K. Government to reconsider its proposals.

Whilst representations were being made nationally, the Authority was adopting a pro-active approach in an endeavour to minimise the impact of Universal Credit both on its tenants and the potential for the level of rent arrears to increase. Those included the establishment of a pre-tenancy team to assist prospective new tenants to ensure they could viably enter into a tenancy agreement together with the appointment of an officer to examine the impact countywide.

The Head of Housing and Public Protection further advised that as it had been anticipated rent arrear levels could rise by between 20-30% the Housing Services Business Plan would need to be re-visited to address that potential increase which could impact on council policy to increase the provision of affordable homes within the Council.

In response to a question on the impact on the private rented sector, the Head of Housing and Public Protection stated that private landlords may be less inclined to accept tenants on Universal Credit and there was research to suggest that and any of their tenants falling into arrears would be evicted and become reliant on the public sector for re-housing. In an attempt to

alleviate that situation, the Council was offering its services to manage landlord properties.

- Reference was made to the Council's efforts to dispose of its estate at Bryn Mefys, Llanelli on the open market and clarification sought on the current position. The Head of Housing and Public Protection confirmed that four bids had been received and negotiations were progressing on appointing a preferred developer to redevelop the estate.
- Reference was made to the recent stock condition survey undertaken on the council's seven care home and information was requested on its outcome. The Head of Housing and Public Protection advised that the results were varied as some of the homes had recently been completely/partially rebuilt to a high standard whereas others were in need of modernisation and funding bids were being made in the capital programme to facilitate those improvements. The Division was also endeavouring to develop a Home Standard for its Care Homes, similar to that for its housing properties, with a wide range of issues being considered for example the provision of en-suite facilities.
- In response to a question on the production of a long term digital service plan to enable tenants to undertake their business on-line, the Head of Housing and Public Protection confirmed that investigations were on-going to replace the existing software and would include provision for business to be transacted via smart phones.
- Reference was made to the measure for leisure services to promote healthier eating and drinking options for consumers and information requested on what measures were being introduced to achieve that.

The Head of Leisure advised that a range of options were being considered to achieve a consistency of service provision across leisure services including speaking with existing franchisees, examining procurement policies, and liaising with the voluntary sector. Additionally, work was on-going to examine how the authority, with its various partners could address childhood obesity levels which could include working with sports clubs in an attempt to influence them to provide healthy after match/training refreshments.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

10. COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17

The Committee received for consideration its Annual Report on the work undertaken during the 2016/17 municipal year. It was noted that the report had been prepared in accordance with Article 6.2 of the Council's constitution and provided an overview of the work programme and the key issues addressed, whilst also incorporating any issues referred to or from the Executive Board, Task and Finish reviews and development sessions.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

11. COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

The Committee, in accordance with Article 6.2 of the Council's Constitution considered its Forward Work Programme for 2017/18 which had been developed following its informal planning session in July, 2017.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the 2017/18 Forward Work Programme be endorsed.

12. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 20TH JULY 2017

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 20th July, 2017 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE