

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Friday, 16 February 2018

PRESENT: Councillor S.L. Davies (Chair)

Councillors:

C.A. Davies, W.R.A. Davies, J.K. Howell, B.W. Jones, H.I. Jones, M.J.A. Lewis (In place of H.L. Davies), B.A.L. Roberts, H.B. Shepardson, G.B. Thomas and A.Vaughan Owen

Also in attendance:

Councillor P. Hughes-Griffiths, Executive Board Member for Culture, Sport and Tourism

The following Officers were in attendance:

I. Jones, Head of Leisure
L. Quelch, Head of Planning
S. Walters, Economic Development Manager
J. Morgan, Acting Head of Homes & Safer Communities
A. Thomas, Group Accountant
R. Elms, Civil Contingency Manager
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer
P Emlyn, Member Support Officer
S. Griffiths, Graduate Trainee - Civil Contingency

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D. Cundy, H. Davies and S. Matthews.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS

There were no declarations of personal interest.

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. LOCAL RESILIENCE FORUM BUSINESS PLAN

The Committee received a presentation on the operation of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) providing an overview on its operation, via the business planning process, together with an understanding of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and its implications on Carmarthenshire County Council and Dyfed Powys Police. It included an explanation of the Dyfed Powys Local Resilience Forum and the role of the council therein, whilst also examining the risks and threats that could affect the Dyfed Powys area and how the LRF aimed to mitigate against those.

The Civil Contingencies Manager outlined the background to the Civil Contingencies Act and advised that it defined an emergency in three ways:-

- An event which threatened serious damage to Human Welfare in a place within the U.K.
- An event or situation which threatened serious damage to the Environment in a place within the U.K.
- War or Terrorism which threatened serious damage to the security of the u.k.

As a consequence of that Act, responding agencies must form LRF's based on police force boundaries. Within Carmarthenshire, the Dyfed Powys LRF had been established comprising representatives at a senior level from all of the responding authorities.

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:

- Reference was made to Carmarthenshire being a farming county and to what measures were in place to protect the production and distribution of food in an emergency situation.

The Civil Contingencies Manager advised that the Civil Contingencies Act came in two parts. Part 1 focussed on local arrangements for civil protection, establishing a statutory framework of roles and responsibilities for local responders. Part 2 focussed on emergency powers, establishing a modern framework for the use of special legislative measures that might be necessary to deal with the effects of the most serious emergencies. These would be introduced to protect issues such as food provision and infrastructure.

- With regard to a question on engaging local communities as part of the process, the Committee was advised that whilst efforts had previously been made in that regard, it was proving difficult. As a rule, communities only became involved when an emergency arose, with that waning following the incident and as aftermath issues were resolved.
- In response to a question on pre-emptive emergencies such as acts of terrorism, the Committee was advised that the LRF's were informed of potential risks within their areas and held training events examining different scenarios and preparing post incident responses thereto.
- In relation to the LRF's Command structure and their location, there were three distinct command structures of Strategic (Gold), Tactical (Silver) and Operational (Bronze). Gold Command was based in Dyfed Powys Police Headquarters in Carmarthen. Silver (Technical) Command centres were based within a police station in each local authority area. Local authorities also had silver centres, with Carmarthenshire's being based in Parc Myrddin. Bronze centres were operational and, by their very nature, were based at the location of any incident.
- Reference was made to the 2001 outbreak of Foot and Mouth in the County and views expressed for a preference for such incidents to be dealt with at a local level, as opposed to the position in 2001 where responsibility lay with the Welsh Government. The Civil Contingencies Manager confirmed that whilst the Authority had plans in place to deal with such incidents, which fell within the remit of the Council's Public Protection Division, overseeing responsibility therefor lay with the Welsh Government.

The Interim Head of Homes and Safer Communities advised that he could arrange for officers to provide members with details of how the authority would respond to a foot and mouth incident and how that response linked in with other national agencies.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the presentation be received.

6. 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 31st December, 2017. It was noted that the revenue budget was forecasting a £407k overspend, the capital budget a £4,167k underspend, whilst the Housing Revenue Account was forecasting a £162k underspend.

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

- With regard to the projected £50k underspend on Homelessness, the Interim Head of Homes and Safer Communities advised there were a number of reasons attributable to that position. Firstly, the Department's pro-active prevention arrangements had resulted in the provision having reduced significantly from the position 10 years previously where the budget returned a £0.5m deficit. Secondly, a £35k grant from the Welsh Government to support the provision of housing for the homeless had meant the Authority did not have to incur expenditure on the bond scheme. As a result of that funding, the budget would be re-profiled in the next financial year.
- With regard to the £40k overspend at Pembrey Country Park, the Head of Leisure advised that agency staff costs had been incurred due to the introduction of new structures within the park and the need to employ agency staff on a temporary basis while the appropriate recruitment process was followed. The park was now fully staffed.
- With regard to the operation of the Pembrey Country Park, clarification was sought on its future profit making projections. The Head of Leisure reminded the Committee that the park had increased its income by approximately £0.25m over recent years, mainly attributable to the operation of the caravan park. In order to maintain and increase that income generating potential, investment would need to be made at the park to improve and enhance existing facilities for example, new showers and café facilities. Accordingly, a masterplan had been developed, and approved, for the park and provision made within the Council's capital programme to fund those improvements.
- The Interim Head of Homes and Safer Communities confirmed that in relation to homelessness, whilst the Authority did not provide a dedicated overnight homeless shelter, it had a range of measures available to assist persons presenting themselves as homeless. Those included, being able to access emergency temporary accommodation and the operation of a bond scheme.
- The Head of Leisure in response to a request for an explanation on the combined £274k net cost of services for the St Clears Leisure Centre (£177k) and the St Clears Craft Centre (£97k) advised that a significant contributing factor thereto related to the element of non-controllable costs. Those amounted to £82k and £50k respectively and included corporate

costs and repayment of capital loans to fund improvements to the facilities. The department was acutely aware of the need to generate income/reduce costs for the facilities, and a meeting had recently been held with local members to discuss avenues to achieve that aim. However, it had to be recognised that whilst the leisure facilities in the larger urban towns were more cost effective, the rural facilities provided an important community role for example the craft centre included a library and police station.

- In response for an explanation on the projected £17k income underachievement at the Llanelli Leisure Centre, the Head of Leisure advised that whilst the position was disappointing it should be viewed in context against a budgeted target income of £958k and in that regard it was not significant. One of the reasons for the projected underachievement could be due to competition within the Llanelli area from private leisure/fitness providers.
- Comments were expressed on the subsidisation of facilities such as libraries and museums and it was acknowledged they may always require an element of subsidy to ensure they remained opened to, and contributed to the cultural viability of the county.

The Head of Leisure in response to the issue of subsidies stated that the council in setting its pricing policies recognised the diverse economics of the county and had to ensure those policies did not prove to be a disincentive to the financially disadvantaged within society. However, whilst venues such as libraries, theatres and museums may require subsidy, officers continually explored alternative ways of income generation for example, the promotion of museums as wedding venues.

- In response for clarification on the projected £469k overspend within the Development Management Section of the Planning Division, the Head of Planning advised that was attributable to a shortfall in income against projections based on the previous year's income levels. Subsequent to the reports preparation at the end of December, the Sections income had increased by £124k with additional income anticipated over the coming months which would further reduce the deficit. Other factors impacting on income generation included the fact that across Wales the level of cost recovery for planning services was below 50% of the cost in delivering the service and representations were being made to the Welsh Government to increase that percentage. The Division was also examining the potential of introducing pre-application fees which, if approved, would assist in meeting income targets.
- Reference was made to the issue of retrospective planning applications and to whether planning application fees could be increased to offset the increased costs in their processing, which normally arose as a result of enforcement action. The Head of Planning confirmed that representations had been made to the Welsh Government for local authorities to increase the fees. However, it did not accept there was a justifiable case for adopting that approach.

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

7. SCRUTINY ACTION UPDATE

The Committee received a report detailing the progress achieved in relation to actions, requests or referrals emerging from previous meetings.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

8. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee received a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its meeting to be held on the 29th March, 2018.

Reference was made to the Llanelli Town Regeneration Report to be submitted to the next meeting and a suggestion made that a similar report be presented on both Carmarthen and Ammanford Town Centres. The Committee was advised that a similar question had been raised at the meeting of the Council held on the 14th February where it had been informed that a full status report on the progress of all developments within the County would be presented to a future meeting of the Council

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items for the meeting of the Committee to be held on the 29th March, 2018 be received.

9. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

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

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the non-submission report be noted.

CHAIR

DATE