

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 4 October 2018

PRESENT: Councillor S.L. Davies (Chair)

Councillors:

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

Also in attendance:

Councillor L.D. Evans, Executive Board Member for Housing
L.M. Stephens, Deputy Leader of the Council

The following Officers were in attendance:

I. Jones, Head of Leisure
L. Quelch, Head of Planning
J. Morgan, Acting Head of Homes & Safer Communities
H. Morgan, Economic Development Manager
L. James, Partnership and Engagement Manager
S. Walters, Economic Development Manager
A. Thomas, Group Accountant
R James, Performance Planning & Business Officer
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen. - 10.00 - 11.00 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor H. Davies.

The Chair referred to the Council's recent Transform, Innovate and Change Awards and extended her congratulations to the staff within the Library service for receiving an award for its 'Make a Space' project in Ammanford Library.

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

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

The following declaration of personal interest was made:-

Councillor	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
J. Gilasbey	6 – Quarter 1 – 1 st April to 30 th June 2018 Performance Monitoring Report	Trustee of Kidwelly Industrial Museum

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

No public questions had been received.

4. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (PLANNING)

The Committee received for consideration the Planning Division's Annual Performance Report for the period April 2017 – March 2018, produced in accordance with the Planning Performance Framework Table for submission to the Welsh Government by the 31st October each year and evaluation against set indicators and targets. Following evaluation, each local planning authority's performance would be categorised into one of three performance bands of: Improve (red), Fair (amber), Good (Green) assessed across the following five key aspects of planning service delivery as set:-

- Plan making;
- Efficiency;
- Quality;
- Engagement;
- Enforcement.

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

- Reference was made to Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) and to whether the Planning Division had any proposals to issue additional Guidance in the near future, for example in relation to mixed usage.

The Head of Planning advised that although the Division had, over recent years, issued a number of SPG's any future guidance would, form part of the Local Development Plan (LDP) review process. If, members had any areas they felt could warrant consideration for production of an SPG, they should inform the Forward Planning Section which would examine the feasibility of addressing those within the revised LDP.

- Reference was made to page 21 of the report on the Planning Division's operating budget over the period 2012/13 to 2017/18. Clarification was sought on the reasons why actual income accrued consistently fell short of the budgeted income, and if that warranted an examination of the budget target to more accurately reflect actual income levels.

The Head of Planning advised there were a number of factors which impacted on income levels, the most obvious being the numbers and categories of planning applications received for example minor domestic and large industrial/commercial and the level of fees which could be levied against each category.

The level of fee charges was also an issue for Welsh Local Authorities as they were not permitted to process planning applications on a full cost recovery basis, as was the case with English authorities. Whilst the Welsh Government recognised that gap, it expected Welsh local authorities to increase their income levels before it would give consideration to raising planning fees. Consideration was therefore being given to the Authority introducing a schedule of fees for services currently provided free of charge e.g. pre-planning advice. If introduced, the increased income would also assist in reducing, but may not make up the shortfall actual. However, the submission of a few large schemes would assist in reducing the shortfall.

A third aspect related to the costs incurred by the Planning Division in undertaking the Authority's planning enforcement role which were non-

rechargeable. As such, that element of the division's remit, under current legislation, would never become self-financing.

- The Head of Planning in response to a question on the decline in the number of planning applications received over the 2012/13 to 2017/18 period advised the primary driver in that regard was the economic climate.

Although the report recorded a decline, it should be recognised the authority dealt with other forms of applications not included within the Annual Monitoring Report to the Welsh Government. Those included applications submitted under Permitted Development Rights (PDR) and also Prior Notifications which it is not allowed to charge for e.g. installation of telecommunication equipment. Consideration was also being given nationally to extending the range of applications to be determined under PDR's which, if introduced, could further adversely impact on future planning application figures and income levels.

- Reference was made to page 22 of the report and the risks identified from the loss of skilled personnel within the minerals/waste and building control teams. Clarification was sought on whether that loss could impact on the progression of the revised LDP.

The Head of Planning confirmed progression of the revised LDP took priority over any other work undertaken by the Forward Planning Team. Whereas previously, the team had liaised closely with other sections in the planning division, and other council departments, providing advice and support on such things as the development of planning briefs, its scope to continue that level of involvement was being affected by the LDP's prioritisation. Having regard to that priority, she was examining the possibility of identifying additional funding to continue support on an in-house basis wherever possible in lieu of engaging external consultants, at increased cost.

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

5. HOME CHECKER VISITS TO HOMES

The Committee considered a report on the Home check visits undertaken to the Council's Housing Stock to ensure it was maintained at the standard set under the Carmarthenshire Home Standard Plus (CHS+) and which enabled the Authority to:-

- Identify any rechargeable repairs the tenant was responsible for
- Provide preventative maintenance advice
- Identify any well-being issues and agree next steps
- Provide money advice if needed
- Assess whether the homes met future household needs
- Report outstanding repair issues
- Identify any tenancy breach

It was noted the approach adopted in undertaken the visits were two-fold. Firstly, they involved a basic annual check undertaken by housing officers, repair

operatives, technical inspectors or service contractors. Secondly, any issues arising from the basic check in terms of tenancy and/or welfare were reported back to the engagement team to undertake more in-depth visits to tenants' homes. For the period 1st January to 1st September 2018 a total of 7,611 basic checks had been undertaken to council homes, out of a stock of 9,000, with 322 homes (5%) having been referred for a more in-depth visit by a housing officer.

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

- In response to a question relating to tenant feedback on the more in-depth visits, the engagement and Partnership Manager reminded the Committee this was the Home Checker's first year of the operation. It was hoped that as time progressed, future feedbacks would provide valuable information on the tenants' views on the housing service.

It was also noted future proposals involved the division undertaken a 'star survey', in addition to the home checker visit feedbacks, seeking the views of all tenants on the service being provided together with any areas they felt could be improved/provided to ensure continuous service improvement.

The Acting Head of Homes and Safer Communities advised that an important factor arising from such surveys was the development of a preventative maintenance programme to ensure appropriate resources were in place to target repairs such as rainwater goods to prevent future problems arising. Additionally, as the surveys developed the authority would be able to gather greater intelligence on its tenants' views.

- Reference was made to the 7,611 basic checks undertaken and a request made for members of the committee to be provided, by e-mail, with a breakdown thereof by ward and whether they had been undertaken by housing officers, service contractors, during repair visits or in response to tenancy support calls etc.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Home Checker Visits to Homes report be received.

6. QUARTER 1 - 1ST APRIL TO 30TH JUNE 2018 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

(NOTE: Councillor J. Gilasbey declared an interest during this item as a Trustee of Kidwelly Industrial Museum)

The Committee received for consideration the Quarter 1 – 1st April to 30th June 2018 Performance Monitoring Report detailing the progress made against the actions and measures in the New Corporate Strategy 2018/19 on the delivery of the Well-Being Objectives within its remit.

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

- In response to a question on the percentage of households successfully prevented from becoming homeless (indicator PAM/01), the Acting Head of Homes and Safer Communities advised one of the greatest barriers to the

indicator was the late presentation to the housing department by persons in imminent danger of becoming homeless. He stressed the importance for persons in threat of becoming homeless to contact the department at the first sign of that potentiality to enable it to assist identify a resolution to their difficulty. The department, in partnership with the third and voluntary sectors, was endeavouring to increase the awareness of the service it provided and also emphasising the need for early intervention.

- Clarification was sought on indicator PAM/039 and why agency staff were being appointed reduce the number of void properties.

The Acting Head of Homes and Safer Communities advised that resources had been set aside to undertake repairs to the Councils' void properties of which there were approximately 70 requiring major works. The Authority's Property Division was responsible for the design/scheduling of those works and in order to facilitate their completion at the earliest possible date it had been necessary to appoint agency staff to assist with the workload in the short term. It was anticipated significant progress could be made over the next 6-12 months to reintroduce those properties to the housing stock.

- The Economic Development Manager, in response to a question relating to Action 13165 and the Transformations Document, advised it related to the Council's Regeneration Strategy for the period 2015-2030 to create employment in the three major centres of Ammanford, Carmarthen and Llanelli, the coastal belt, rural areas and Cross Hands. He also advised that a review was currently being undertaken of employment 'candidate sites' for submission to the planning department as part of the review of the Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2018/19

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, 2018. It was noted that the revenue budget was forecasting a £331k overspend, the capital budget a £246k underspend, whilst the Housing Revenue Account was forecasting a £98k underspend.

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

8. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

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

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the non-submission report be received.

9. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee received a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting to be held on the 23rd November, 2018.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items for the meeting of the Committee to be held on the 23rd November, 2018 be received.

CHAIR

DATE