

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Friday, 23 November 2018

PRESENT: Councillor S.L. Davies (Chair)

Councillors:

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

Also in attendance:

Councillor L.D. Evans, Executive Board Member for Housing
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:

I. Jones, Head of Leisure
L. Quelch, Head of Planning
J. Morgan, Acting Head of Homes & Safer Communities
H. Morgan, Economic Development Manager
S. Walters, Economic Development Manager
A. Thomas, Group Accountant
I.R. Llewelyn, Forward Planning Manager
R. Parkinson, Team Leader - Housing Advice
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

Chamber, - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP. - 10.00 - 11.15 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H. Davies and B.A.L. Roberts

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

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

The following declarations of personal interest were made:-

Councillor	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
G.B. Thomas	4 – Revised Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan 2018-2033 – Draft Preferred Strategy	Rural Areas in general
A Davies	4 – Revised Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan 2018-2033 – Draft Preferred Strategy	Has submitted an application for inclusion of a site within the revised Local Development Plan 2018-2033

A Vaughan Owen	4 – Revised Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan 2018-2033 – Draft Preferred Strategy	Relative has submitted an application for inclusion of a site within the Revised Local Development Plan 2018-2033
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3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

No Public questions had been received.

4. REVISED CARMARTHESHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2018 - 2033 DRAFT PREFERRED STRATEGY

(NOTE:

1. Councillor G.B. Thomas had earlier declared an interest in this item and had been granted dispensation by the Council's Standards Committee to speak, but not vote on matters relating to farming
2. Councillors A. Davies and A. Vaughan Owen had earlier declared interests in this item).

The Committee received for consideration the Revised Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan (LDP) 2018-2033 Draft Preferred Strategy identifying the Council's land use vision, strategic objectives and strategic growth requirements for the County to 2033. It was noted the Strategy had been approved by Council on the 14th November, 2018 for formal consultation for a minimum statutory period of six weeks, which would commence the week of the 10th December, 2018 for a period of 8 weeks (to allow for the Christmas and New Year Holiday periods), with a report on the outcome thereof anticipated to be ready for submission to the Committee in March 2019.

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

- The Committee's attention was drawn to a recent meeting of the Council's Rural Affairs Task Group where discussion had been undertaken on the Strategy with the following three issues having been raised as areas of concern set against the need to protect and rejuvenate rural areas:-
 1. There was no provision in the plan to address difficulties encountered in obtaining planning consent for small dwellings on plots of land, especially small holdings, where the owners had resided in the areas all their lives;
 2. Traditional farm houses were old and small and difficulties were encountered in obtaining planning consent to facilitate their extension in excess of 20-30% of their original footprint. That policy was considered to be restrictive, especially when large new build properties located within settlement areas were granted planning consent;
 3. Existing planning policies made it difficult for the farming community to diversify their business to maximise income potential, for example the provision of camping/tourism facilities

The Forward Planning Manager reminded the Committee that the current document detailed the Council's land use vision, strategic objectives and

strategic growth requirements for the County to 2033 and did not contain specific policies. Those would form part of the Draft Deposit LDP which would detail Development Management Plan Policies and be prepared over the next twelve months as part of the statutory consultation process.

- References were made to Housing site allocations within the existing LDP and whether some, or all, of those would be included within the new Plan, having regard to proposals to reduce the allocation over the plan period.

The Forward Planning Manager advised that one of the aims of the new Plan would be to ensure its deliverability and, as the current level of housing allocation would reduce, the department would need to critically examine all sites submitted for inclusion. If the owners of those sites were unable to provide evidence based facts to support deliverability, there was a possibility they may not be included.

- The Committee was reminded that it had established a Task and Finish Group to examine the provision of affordable bungalows within Carmarthenshire. Clarification was sought on how the outcome could inform the review process.

The Forward Planning Manager advised that the timing of the Task and Finish Group was opportune in that consideration was currently being afforded to the content of the Draft Deposit LDP which would incorporate specific development site opportunities. Whilst that would include the allocation of land for housing development purposes, it would not categorise the type of dwellings to be constructed on each site. That would be determined as part of the normal planning process, via the submission of a planning application.

- Reference was made to the Community Led Option and clarification sought on how that could impact on rural communities.

The Forward Planning Manager advised the Option's intent was to change the focus of the existing LDP away from the three main urban growth centres (which would still be the focus of the majority of growth) and seek to have greater provision for rural areas by adopting a more balanced and deliverable approach to growth for the whole of Carmarthenshire.

- Reference was made to the scale of development being undertaken in some parts of the County where the emphasis by developers was to build large housing estates with no thought given to creating communities and providing community facilities such as shops etc. A question was raised as to whether the revised LDP could influence developers to include community facilities within their estates.

The Forward Planning Manager advised that the revised LDP would be used as a vehicle to influence that aim via the introduction of policies to create a 'sense of place', promote the Health and Well-being agenda by encouraging access to facilities, open space and a connection to community services such as health facilities. That would be part of a step approach whereby the LDP would introduce policies and the authority, via for example the issue of Supplementary Planning Guidance, would seek to facilitate debate with developers on the design of their developments.

- In response to a question on the promotion of sustainable developments, the Forward Planning Manager confirmed the revised plan would seek to introduce mechanisms to facilitate their provision, whilst having regard to deliverability and the department would work with developers to achieve that provision.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Draft Preferred Strategy (and supporting documents) for the Revised Local Development Plan 2018-2033 be endorsed.

5. REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

The Committee was reminded that at its meeting held on the 11th May, 2018 it had endorsed the preparation of a Regional Homelessness Strategy and the report presented to it that day outlined the key themes and priorities on how Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Powys would prevent homelessness over the coming years.

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

- The Interim Head of Homes and Safer Communities in response to a question on the average time scale for rehousing people presented as emergency homeless advised that was approximately 3-4 months. He assured the Committee that, in such circumstances, bed and breakfast accommodation was only used as an emergency, with the majority of presenters being housed in quality temporary homes.
- The Interim Head of Homes and Safer Communities in response to a question on the introduction, in December 2018, of Universal Credit for all new benefit claimants within Carmarthenshire, advised the authority was aware of the potential impact that could have on its housing tenants and would be monitoring the situation on a weekly basis.
- Reference was made to the Council's Housing Lettings Agency and to whether its services were being sufficiently promoted to the private sector having regard to the fact the 160 properties currently managed was less than the previous 180.

The Interim Head of Homes and Safer Communities advised that having regard to the fluidity of landlords entering and leaving the social lettings environment, the number of properties managed by the authority had remained relatively stagnant over the previous year. He assured efforts were continually being made to encourage private landlords to take advantage of its service, which was offered as a Bronze, Silver and Gold package. Discussions were also on-going as to how those packages could be made more attractive countywide.

- Reference was made to the use of Information Technology to prevent homelessness, and the database operated by some English local authorities to monitor and identify individuals at risk and to share information with other housing providers and the third sector. The Housing Advice Lead advised that discussion on adopting the English model had

been undertaken with the Welsh Government which had agreed to its roll out across Wales.

- The Interim Head of Homes and Safer Communities in response to a question on the provision of single person accommodation advised whilst the current model sought to concentrate single person accommodation in specific areas, such as Station Road, Llanelli, it was recognised that approach could adversely impact on vulnerable persons. In light of that recognition, examinations were being undertaken on the feasibility of moving away from larger concentrations to providing more manageable smaller dispersal units that were still situated close to services.
- Reference was made to the proposal within the report for the authority to adopt community based support provision to help prevent homelessness. Clarification was sought on the format of that provision and if it would include community based engagement officers.

The Interim Head of Homes and Safer Communities advised that prior to the introduction of community based support, an audit would be undertaken to assess current levels of provision and how it could be best utilised.

- Reference was made to the statement within the report that 'landlords are reportedly leaving the market' for various reasons. Clarification was sought on whether that was a contributory factor to the 444 increase in Carmarthenshire in the numbers of households triggering homeless duties between 2015-16 and 2017-18.

The Interim Head of Homes and Safer Communities confirmed that landlords were leaving the market and the rental market varied across the county making it difficult to assess trends or future market direction. The authority did however liaise with the landlords via the Landlord Forum as part of its approach to preventing homelessness. Whilst some landlords were leaving, it was stressed that overall, the rental market within the county was operating from a relative position of strength.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Homelessness Strategy be endorsed and recommended to the Executive Board for approval

6. 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 £300k overspend, the capital budget a £362k underspend, whilst the Housing Revenue Account was forecasting a £237k underspend.

The following questions/issues were raised on the report.

- The Head of Planning in response to a question on the projected £326k overspend within the Planning Division advised the position was not expected to change in the near future and that mirrored the trend across Wales where planning services were recovering an average 60%. The

Division, through existing targets was expected to recover 80%, but in reality was recouping around 60% in line with the Wales average. The Division was examining alternative ways of increasing its income stream which could, for example, include charging for pre-planning advice. However, it should also be noted there were some services for which it was not allowed to charge for such as enforcement duties.

- The Head of Leisure in response to a question on increased revenue at Pembrey Country Park, advised there was potential for that trend to increase over the next few years especially having regard to the Council's investment proposals which included new infrastructure, wi-fi, amenity block and restaurant. However, there would come a time when income levels would plateau.
- Reference was made to the operating deficit at the Pendine Outdoor Education Centre and whether the Council had a strategy to address the deficit.

The Head of Leisure confirmed whilst there was a strategy in place, which was achieving a deficit reduction, the site was in need of investment with some of the buildings having been on site in excess of 50 years, and consideration was being given to addressing that position, which may result in the submission of a capital funding bid.

- The Head of Leisure referred to a question on the £10k cost to the museums budget for employing a documentation assistant and confirmed the post had been created on a one year fixed contract to assist with the backlog in recording artefacts held by the service, which was a requirement to achieving accreditation.

He also advised that with regard to the level of artefacts held by the Museums Service there was an adopted collections and disposals policy in place.

- Reference was made to the £494k variance in the authority's housing rental income with clarification being sought on the reason for the 0.8 % increase in the level of void properties and the resultant increased loss of rental.

The Interim Head of Homes and Safer Communities advised that every year, as part of the budget setting process, an assumption was made on the level of voids during the year. For 2018/19 that had been estimated as being 2.1% of rental income, but was now projected to be 2.9%. The main reason for the variance was a number of voids requiring extensive works prior to returning to the housing stock. However, finance was available to undertake those works. Additionally, a number of properties were being held back to accommodate tenants decanted whilst renovations were undertaken to their properties.

- Reference was made to the recent contract entered into by the Authority with Burry Port Marine Ltd for the management of Burry Port Harbour and its £100k contribution towards the cost of a dredger. Clarification was sought on the terms of the contribution and to whether the authority would receive income from the dredger's use at other harbours.

The Head of Leisure confirmed a profit share arrangement was in place, with any income re-invested into the harbour

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

7. COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

The Committee received for consideration its Annual Report on the work undertaken during the 2017/18 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.

8. SCRUTINY ACTION UPDATE

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

The Committee was advised that with regard to CS031 – 17/18 the member seminar on regeneration activity within Carmarthenshire had been arranged for the 30th January, 2019.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the 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 13th December, 2018. It was advised that subsequent to the despatch of the agenda for the meeting the proposed report on the Universal Credit Action Plan had been withdrawn and would now be submitted to its meeting on the 23rd January, 2019.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that subject to the report on the Universal credit Action Plan being rescheduled for the Committee's meeting on the 23rd January 2019, the remaining list of forthcoming items be agreed and presented to the next meeting of the Committee to be held on the 13th December, 2018.

10. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

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

With regard to the delay in the submission of the Affordable Homes Standard Report, reference was made to a recent press article alleging the provision of such homes in Wales was being adversely affected by the lack of staff within local authority planning departments. The Head of Planning confirmed the allegation was not applicable to Carmarthenshire.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the non-submission report be received.

11. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE FOLLOWING DATES

11.1. 21ST SEPTEMBER 2018

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 21st September, 2018 be signed as a correct record.

11.2. 4TH OCTOBER 2018

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 4th October, 2018 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE