

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15th JANUARY 2016

Present: Councillor D.M. Cundy (Chair)

Councillors: J.M. Charles, J.K. Howell, J. Owen, G.B. Thomas, J. Thomas, S.L. Davies, T. Devichand, W.R.A. Davies, H.I. Jones, H.B. Shepardson, E.G. Thomas

Councillor D.J.R. Bartlett – Substitute for Councillor S. Matthews

Also present:

Councillor L.D. Evans – Executive Board Member (EBM) Housing

The following officers were in attendance:

Mr. C. Moore – Director of Corporate Services;
Mr. R. Staines – Head of Housing and Public Protection;
Mr. J. Willis – Housing Services Manager (Advice & Options)
Ms. R. Parkinson – Team Leader (Housing Advice)
Mr. S. Williams – Senior Accountant
Mr. M.S. Davies – Democratic Services Officer

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen (10:00 – 11:45am)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor S. Matthews.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS

Councillor	Minute Item(s)	Nature of Interest
Councillor T. Devichand	Item 7 – Review of the Access to Social Housing Policy	Landlord
Councillor G.B. Thomas	Item 7 – Review of the Access to Social Housing Policy	Landlord

3. DECLARATION OF PROHIBITED PARTY WHIPS

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

None were received.

5. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee was provided with a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting scheduled for the 12th February 2016.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items be noted.

6. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT AND HOUSING RENT SETTING 2016/17 (REVENUE AND CAPITAL)

The Committee considered the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget and Housing Rent Setting for 2016/17 which was being presented as part of the budget consultation process. The report, a revised version of which was circulated, reflected the latest proposals contained in the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, which was the primary financial planning tool for delivering the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard *Plus* (CHS+).

The following issues were raised in relation to the report and its appendices:

- The Committee was advised that under the original Carmarthenshire Homes Standard programme all work requested by tenants had been completed;
- In terms of sewage charges it was pointed out that where properties were not connected to the mains sewage, and this was particularly the case in rural areas, tenants could apply for assistance to ensure appropriate arrangements were in place. The Head of Housing and Public Protection agreed to check that no tenants were paying Welsh Water excessively for any arrangement;
- It was clarified that service charges primarily related to sheltered housing schemes and flats and the Head of Housing and Public Protection agreed to circulate Members with a breakdown of the service charges. Tenants automatically received a breakdown;
- Concerns were expressed over the possible impact of the rent increases proposed particularly where tenants were not in full time employment and/or had to pay for school transport;
- Rents charged by Housing Associations were currently in the region of £8.00-10.00 per week above the Council's charges but the Welsh Government wished to see a move towards one level charge over about 5 years;
- The Director of Corporate Services, in response to a query, agreed to circulate members with details of the long term loans raised to fund the exit from the HRAS [Housing Revenue Account Subsidy];
- It was agreed that a more appropriate description of Table 2 in the report would

be 'Properties achieving target rents per year'. Officers agreed to circulate Members with a more detailed explanation of Table 2;

- The Committee was advised that income from the sale of any Council houses was crucial in meeting the need for housing throughout the County.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to endorse the report and the following proposals to the Executive Board:

- **To increase the average housing rent by 2.97% (£2.27) per dwelling per week as per WG Social Housing Rents Policy. This will produce a sustainable Business Plan and continue to achieve & maintain CHS+ and is supported by DCHS Steering Group;**
- **To continue with maximum progression of £2, for rents below target, until target rents are achieved;**
- **To increase garage rents to £8.75 per week (from £8.50 in 2015/16) and garage bases to £2.20 per week (from £2.15 in 2015/16);**
- **Apply the service charge policy to ensure tenants who receive the benefit from specific services pay for those services;**
- **To increase charges for using our sewerage treatment works by 2.97%.**

7. REVIEW OF THE ACCESS TO SOCIAL HOUSING POLICY

The Committee considered a report which:

- outlined the results of the members' consultation sessions with relation to the Access to Social Housing policy[commonly known as 'The Allocations Policy'];
- outlined the results of the operational review of the Access to Social Housing policy;
- sought views and comments on an amended draft Access to Social Housing policy;
- outlined proposals for a full consultation exercise.

The following issues were raised in relation to the report and its appendices:

- The Head of Housing and Public Protection commented that the consultation would be well publicised, including local radio, to ensure the widest possible response, including from people outside;
- It was acknowledged that out of county applicants for social housing were only likely to be considered for hard to let properties;
- The view was expressed that when letting such properties the knock on effect for established local communities should be considered;
- The Head of Housing and Public Protection commented that a system would

be put in place to ensure members were made aware of empty council properties.

Officers were thanked for all their work in connection with the Review.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED:

- 7.1 That the report be endorsed as the basis for consultation subject to the term 'Homeless but not in priority need' being amended to 'Homeless with special requirements';**
- 7.2 That a further review of the lettings process be commissioned as part of the consultation process to investigate ways to ensure lettings are conducted in a timely and efficient way.**

8. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee considered the explanation for the non submission of a report on EU and externally funded programmes.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the explanation for the non-submission be noted.

9. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10th DECEMBER 2015

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 10th December 2015 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE