

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 20 June 2016

PRESENT: Councillor D.M. Cundy (Chair)

Councillors:

J.M. Charles, J.K. Howell, G.B. Thomas, J. Thomas, T. Devichand, S. Matthews, H.I. Jones, H.B. Shepardson and E.G. Thomas

Also Present:-

Councillor L.D. Evans – Executive Board Member for Housing

Councillor M. Gravelle – Executive Board Member for Regeneration and Leisure

The following Officers were in attendance:

I. Jones, Head of Leisure

W. Walters, Assistant Chief Executive (Regeneration & Policy)

H. Morgan, Interim Economic Development Manager

S. Walters, Interim Economic Development Manager

L. James, Housing Services Manager

J. Davies, Senior Cultural Services Manager

G. Williams, Team Leader

K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen - 2.00 - 3.25 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S.L. Davies, W.R.A. Davies and J.Owen

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS

Councillor	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
T. Devichand	5 – National Licensing of Landlords and Agents	Landlord
H.B. Shepardson	5 – National Licensing of Landlords and Agents	Secretary of a Social Club in Burry Port that rents out properties
G.B. Thomas	5 – National Licensing of Landlords and Agents	Owns a property he rents out

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. NATIONAL LICENSING OF LANDLORDS AND AGENTS

The Committee considered a report on the progress being achieved on the National Licensing of Landlords and Agents, as legislated for within the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, that placed a legal requirement on all landlords and agents who managed or let private sector homes in Wales to register and obtain a licence with regard thereto by the 23rd November, 2015 being the operative date from which the new provisions would come into force.

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

Reference was made to the scheme's requirement for all landlords and their agents to attend, and complete, an approved training course to demonstrate they were a fit and proper person/company and were competent to manage their properties effectively. In response to a question with regard thereto, the Committee was advised that if landlords were to delegate responsibility for managing their properties to an agent, whilst they would still need to be licensed, they would not need to attend a training course.

Reference was made to the approximate 8,000 landlords nationally currently registered and to what action was available to local authorities and Rent Smart Wales (RSW) to ensure the registration of all landlords. The Committee was advised that whilst the new legislation came into force on the 23rd November, 2015 landlords and agents had been afforded a grace period of up to 23rd November 2016 to comply with the legislation. If landlords had not registered by that time, checks, where appropriate, could be made with other Council Departments and the Department of Work and Pensions to ensure compliance with the legislation. Additionally, when complaints were received from tenants against their landlord, RSW could be contacted to ascertain whether the landlord was licensed.

In response to a question relating to the 12 training programmes for landlords arranged by the County Council, the Committee was advised that with approximately 3,000 landlords within the County it would not be possible to provide sufficient training courses for them all by the November registration deadline. However, other training providers would be available and training could also be undertaken electronically 'on line'. Rent Smart Wales had also recognised the difficulties in registering all landlords by November, 2016 and would exercise fair play if landlords and agents had shown intent to attend a training course and register.

In response to a question on the level of fines that could be imposed on landlords / agents for failure to register or be licenced, the Committee was advised that the Authority could impose Fixed Penalties of between £150 and £200. Persistent non-compliance would be referred to RSW for the institution of legal proceedings. Fixed Penalty Notices could also be levied with regard to other landlord functions not properly carried out, with the income derived from all Notices being retained by the Authority.

Reference was made to the fact only 1265 of the estimated 3,000 landlords within Carmarthenshire were currently registered, and a view expressed that a progress report on their registration be submitted to the September meeting of the Committee

RESOLVED

- 5.1 That the report be received,
5.2 That a progress report on the registration of landlords/agents within Carmarthenshire be submitted to the September meeting of the Committee

6. DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW CARMARTHENSHIRE ARCHIVE SERVICE (CAS)

The Committee received for consideration a report on proposals for the provision of a new £2m combined Archive and Library facility for the County via the relocation of the Archive from its existing base at Parc Myrddin to land at the rear of Carmarthen Library.

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

Reference was made to the options being considered as part of the proposals to incorporate other services within the new building i.e. community education centre, customer service centre, automated cash desk and Un Sir Gar. Clarification was sought on the current position with regard to those options and the potential their relocation could have for releasing other assets.

The Head of Leisure informed the Committee that the main priority at the current time was to facilitate the provision of a new purpose built Archive and Library service within both the £2m allocated budget and the space required for that provision. Whilst consideration had been given to incorporating the above additional services within the new build, the level of space available at the rear of Carmarthen Library meant that could only be achieved by demolishing the existing Community Education Facility thereby increasing the project cost to in excess of £4m.

In response to a question on proposals for digitising archive records, the Committee was advised that whilst it would not be possible for the whole of the collection maintained by the County to be digitised, priority would be afforded to those records most used by the public and of most interest. Consideration was also being given to digitising elements of the local history collection from the libraries and museum artefacts within the Heritage 6 project thereby making the Council's collections more accessible.

In response to a question on the level of damage occasioned to the records, the Committee was advised that as far as could be ascertained no documents had been permanently damaged, with nothing being beyond repair.

Reference was made to the potential additional £2.5m cost of incorporating the community education centre, and other services, within the new build and to see whether there was a possibility additional funding could be identified to facilitate the provision of the whole scheme.

The Committee was advised that the current priority was to facilitate the provision of a new purpose built facility within the allocated £2m capital budget. The

incorporation of the other services within the project would considerably exceed that allocation and, given the current economic climate, it would not be possible for the Authority to fund the additional cost. With regard to the new build, whilst the facility would be one of the best in Wales, it may not be able to provide the full range of archive services such as digitisation and specialist renovation and it would be more beneficial for the Authority to work collaboratively with other local authorities/partners regionally for the provision of those facilities. The Welsh Government had also emphasised the need for collaborative working which could result in the region being able to draw down additional funding.

Reference was made to a statement by the Head of Leisure that a planning application for the new facility would be submitted in the near future and clarification sought on whether that application would be for the Archive and Library Service alone or, if it would include the other services mentioned above.

The Head of Leisure advised that whilst the main priority at the current time was to ensure the provision of the new Archive and Library, it may be possible for the scheme to be designed to allow for the future inclusion of the other services by way of extending the building in the future and that would be discussed further with the design team.

The Head of Leisure, in response to a question confirmed that he would update members on progress with the scheme at future meetings of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT (2015/16) AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN (2016/17)

The Committee received for consideration the Draft Annual Report (2015/16) and Improvement Plan (2016/17) in line with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure that placed a duty on all local authorities to publish an Improvement Plan as soon as reasonably practicable after the start of the financial year and to also publish an Annual Report on past performance by the end of October each year.

The Committee was advised that the Authority combined these two documents which enabled the previous year's results to be evaluated and future outcomes to be agreed. Combining both in a single document was seen as good practice by regulators.

The Committee proceeded to consider a report which included extracts relevant to the Community Scrutiny Committee.

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

In response to a question relating to Outcome G - Carmarthenshire has a stronger and more prosperous society – re Opportunity Street, Llanelli, the Committee was advised that the Executive Board Member for Regeneration and Leisure had recently approved a scheme to provide financial support for shop owners in Llanelli to improve their properties via a £750k loan fund provided by the Welsh Government, and a press release thereon would be issued shortly. The Committee was also advised that the purpose of Opportunity Street was to increase footfall within the area by creating ground floor commercial properties with residential

accommodation above, incorporating residential car parking. With that in mind, the Authority had already purchased properties in the area and planning applications were being sought for their redevelopment.

Reference was made to the investment being undertaken within the three main town centres of Ammanford, Carmarthen and Llanelli and on the need to ensure investment was also made within the rural areas. The Committee was reminded that the Authority had previously set aside the sum of £2m as part of the Property Development Fund for investment within the County's rural areas, as defined under both Welsh Government and European Union grant criteria. Additionally, grants were available under the Rural Development Programme to facilitate job creation in rural areas.

Reference was made to the work being undertaken to bring empty residential properties within the County back into use. The Committee having been advised that it was anticipated an appointment would be made in the near future to support the officer currently undertaking that work, requested that details of that appointment be communicated to the members of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

8. COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2016/17

The Committee, in accordance with Article 6.2 of the Council's Constitution considered its Forward Work Programme for 2016/17 which had been developed following the Committee's informal planning session held in April 2016.

RESOLVED that the Forward Work Programme for 2016/17 be endorsed.

9. MINUTES - 24TH MARCH 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 24th March, 2016 be signed as a correct record.

10. MINUTES - JOINT MEETING - 24TH MARCH 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Joint Meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee and Planning Committee held on the 24th March, 2016 be received.

CHAIR

DATE