

COMMUNITY AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 25 February 2021

PRESENT: Councillor G.B. Thomas (Chair)

Councillors:

J.M. Charles (In place of H.L. Davies), C.A. Davies, W.R.A. Davies, D.C. Evans, R.E. Evans, S.J.G. Gilasbey, G.H. John (In place of D. Thomas), B.W. Jones, H.I. Jones and H.B. Shepardson

Also in attendance:

Councillor C.A. Campbell, Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs
G. Davies, Executive Board Member for Education & Children
E. Dole, Leader of the Council
L.D. Evans, Executive Board Member for Housing
P. Hughes-Griffiths, Executive Board Member for Culture, Sport and Tourism

The following Officers were in attendance:

J. Jones, Head of Regeneration
L. Quelch, Head of Planning
J. Morgan, Head of Homes & Safer Communities
I. Jones, Head of Leisure
R.M. Davies, Strategic Housing Delivery Manager
N. Daniel, Head of I.C.T. and Corporate Policy
M. Evans Thomas, Principal Democratic Services Officer
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator
J. Corner, Technical Officer
R. Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer
E. Bryer, Democratic Services Officer
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

Virtual Meeting - 10.00 - 11.30 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors F. Akhtar (Chair), H. Davies and D. Thomas and from Councillor L.M. Stephens (Deputy Leader of the Council).

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee extended his condolences to Councillor Dole following the death of his mother.

The Chair welcomed Mr Jason Jones to the meeting following his appointment as the Council's Head of Regeneration.

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

There were no declarations of any prohibited party whips.

Councillor	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
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J Gilasbey	7 – Forthcoming Items	Executive Board Forward Work Programme Re: Housing Rent Setting - Family Member is a Council Tenant -
J. Gilasbey	7 – Forthcoming Items	Executive Board Forward Work Programme – Re school closures - Family member is a Teacher in one of the affected schools

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. CORPORATE STRATEGY 2018/23 - UPDATE APRIL 2021

The Committee received a report presented by Councillor C. Campbell (Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs) providing an update on the Council’s Corporate Strategy for 2018-23, as at April 2021. The report detailed the progress being achieved against the Council’s Well Being objectives adopted in June 2018, as amended to reflect developing priorities and the impact of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, Brexit and climate change. The Committee noted that while it was considered good practice to ensure the Corporate Strategy was up to date and resources allocated to priorities, the Improvement Objectives must be published annually in accordance with both the Local Government (Wales Measure 2009) and The Well-being of Future Generations Act.

Supporting presentations were also made by Executive Board Members Councillors E. Dole (Leader of the Council with responsibility for regeneration) L. Evans (Housing), P. Hughes Griffiths (Culture Sport and Tourism) and G. Davies (Education) in relation to their specific portfolios

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

- Reference was made to improvement point ‘A’ in Well Being Objective 2 “to increase the range of physical activity opportunities available for children and to target those at greater risk of inactivity”. Clarification was sought on how that might be achieved without separating children from their class cohort.

The Executive Board Member for Education advised that as activities were not suitable for all pupils, the authority was working with schools, and pupils, to identify, develop and increase the range of physical activities available for children. Encouragement would be provided to children, where needed, but no child would be separated from their class cohort.

- Reference was made to the recent announcement by the U.K. government of additional funding for schools and on whether that could be used to measure activity within schools as identified within the report.

The Executive Board Member for Education advised that while the extra money was welcomed, as with other grant awards recently received, it

would be allocated to support children's wellbeing and education through these difficult times.

- The Executive Board Member for Education in response to a question on the increased uptake in Free School Meal Provision subsequent to the start of the pandemic, confirmed the cost was being met by the council and no child in need would go without. He also referred to those who had lost their job or placed on furlough due to the pandemic and stressed the importance for parents affected by those, or other circumstances, to contact the authority/school if they required assistance.
- Reference was made to the estimated 3,000 job losses throughout Carmarthenshire since the start of the pandemic and whether the authority had set any time scale to redress those losses.

The Leader of the Council reminded the Committee that the Authority had developed a recovery plan to help redress the pandemic's impact on Carmarthenshire (being the first local authority in Wales to prepare such a plan) and made provision within its budget strategy to invest in the recovery and meet the plan's objectives within as short a timescale as possible. In that regard, he referenced approval for the Pentre Awel development was shortly anticipated from both the U.K. and Welsh Governments which, when fully implemented, would create some 2,000 jobs over a 10year period.

The Head of Regeneration advised that although the plan's initial time frame sought to achieve a return to pre-pandemic employment levels within two years, the Authority would seek to accelerate the timescale by drawing on additional funding and exploiting all opportunities as they arose.

- The Leader in response to a question on support for business during, and beyond, the current pandemic confirmed the Authority was committed to providing that support wherever possible. Funding had been made available within the budget strategy to support existing and start-up businesses and all opportunities would be explored to attract funding from other sources to enhance that provision. In that regard, the Authority would be making representations to the Welsh Government for the continuation of the Arfor Programme for the next two years from which it had been able to provide £500k of grant funding to businesses within the county.

The Head of Regeneration advised that one of the recovery plans main themes revolved around localism by upskilling the local workforce and using the Council's procurement Strategy to help local businesses

- Reference was made to the potential impact the U.K.'s departure from the European Union could have on Carmarthenshire's economy and whether that had been factored into the Council's Covid recovery plan. The Leader advised that the Authority had established a Brexit Working Group that met fortnightly to consider issues arising from the departure, which may impact on the county
- Reference was made to the time in which pupils had missed school during the pandemic and the potential impact that could have for children learning Welsh living in non- Welsh speaking homes. The Executive Board Member for Culture, Sport and Tourism confirmed that concern had been raised across Wales. He also referred to the recent announcement by the U.K. government of additional funding to help pupils catch up with their studies

and hoped some of that could be utilised to help affected pupils with their Welsh.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Corporate Strategy 2018/23 Update April 2021 report be received.

5. SCRUTINY ACTION UPDATE

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

The following issue was raised on the report:-

- Reference was made to the Committee's decision to convene a member seminar on Universal Credit and the Head of Homes and Safer Communities confirmed arrangements were being made for it to be held in May 2021

The Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs advised the Committee that the Authority would shortly be providing a dedicated telephone line to provide help and advice for all benefit related enquiries

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee received an explanation for the non-submission of the following scrutiny report(s)

- Departmental Business Plans
- Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Report 2019/20

The Committee was informed that with regard to the Departmental Business Plan reports those would now be presented to the Committee's next meeting on the 12th April, 2021.

RESOLVED that the explanation for the non-submissions be noted.

7. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

(NOTE: Councillor J Gilasbey had earlier declared an interest in this item and had left the meeting prior to its consideration)

The Committee considered a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting to be held on the 12th April 2021 and noted that as reported in Minute 6 above, the Departmental Business Plans would be presented to that meeting.

RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on the 12th April, 2021, together with the Departmental Business Plans, be noted.

8. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 2ND FEBRUARY 2021

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 2nd February, 2021 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE