

COMMUNITY & REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 1 July 2021

PRESENT: Councillor F. Akhtar (Chair)

Councillors:

W.R.A. Davies, H.L. Davies, R.E. Evans, S.J.G. Gilasbey, B.W. Jones, S. Matthews, H.B. Shepardson, D. Thomas, G.B. Thomas, J.K. Howell and D.E. Williams (In place of D.C. Evans)

Also in attendance:

Councillor 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

C.A. Davies, Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs

The following Officers were in attendance:

J. Jones, Head of Regeneration

I. Jones, Head of Leisure

J. Morgan, Head of Homes & Safer Communities

G. Ayers, Corporate Policy and Partnership Manager

S.E. Watts, Environmental Protection Manager

M. Evans Thomas, Principal Democratic Services Officer

S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator

J. Owen, Democratic Services Officer

R. Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer

K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

Virtual Meeting - 10.00 - 11.25 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D.C. Evans and H.I. Jones

2. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE 2021/22 MUNICIPAL YEAR

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that Councillor F. Akhtar be appointed Chair of the Committee for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

3. 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 declarations of interest were made

Councillor	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
J Gilasbey	7 – Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2020/21	Item 2.10 within the report – Family Member is a council tenant

J Gilasbey	8 – Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme 2020/21	Executive Board Forward Work Programme – School in her ward is detailed in the report
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4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

5. CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee received a report presented by Councillor A Davies (Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs) on the Council's Annual Report for 2020/21, produced in accordance with the requirements of both the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. It was noted the impact of Covid-19 on council services had meant it had not been possible this year for the report to act either as a progress report on performance or as a comparator with other local authorities. It therefore reflected on the actions the Council had taken to support its residents, communities and businesses throughout the pandemic

The report referenced in turn each of the Council's 15 Well Being Objectives and assessed the progress and adaptations made during the year. Members focussed on the following sections within the document relevant to the Committee's remit:

- Overview of the Covid 19 year incorporating key responses and impacts
- **WBO 2.** Help children live healthy lifestyles
- **WBO 6.** Creating more jobs and growth throughout the county
- **WBO 7.** Increase the availability of rented and affordable homes
- **WBO 8.** Help people live healthy lives (tackling risky behaviour and obesity)
- **WBO 14.** Promoting Welsh language and Culture
- Appendices

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

- Reference was made to the recorded increase in childhood obesity from 26.8% in 2017/18 to 30.4% in 2018/19 and clarification sought on the reasons for the disappointing increase.

The Head of Leisure confirmed that whilst the increase was disappointing, it should be recognised that it related to the 2018/19 reporting period, with the production of more up to date statistics having been impacted by the Covid pandemic and therefore the current position was unclear. Although there was no clear definable explanation for the increase, it was attributable to a broader combination of factors than just leisure and the authority, in conjunction with its partners, was working to reduce those rates.

- Reference was made to the provision of outdoor classrooms/learning areas within new schools constructed by the authority and to whether the Council provided financial assistance towards their provision in existing smaller rural schools.

The Head of Leisure advised that any direct funding for school improvements was provided for under the auspices of the Council's

Modernising Education Programme. That was a rolling programme with improvements being undertaken as finances became available. However, schools were innovative in their approach to outdoor learning that included for example visits to parks and farms etc.

He also provided an update on the work being undertaken by Leisure Services on the provision of outdoor leisure activities by taking facilities such as the climbing wall to individual schools/ areas to complement the facilities provided at the Pendine Outdoor Education Centre. Alongside that provision, a pilot scheme was being undertaken with approximately a dozen schools for an on-line bilingual service to facilitate both indoor and outdoor activity (subject to appropriate risk assessment).

- Reference was made to the increase in walking and cycling activity during the pandemic and to the lack of pavements on public highways in many rural areas to facilitate safe walking, with there being over 300 applications for pavements currently outstanding. A view was expressed that the Authority should examine this position, possibly via a Task and Finish Group, with specific regard to the safety of walkers on non-pavemented highways. The Committee was reminded that as the provision of pavements fell within the remit of the Environmental and Public Protection Committee, the matter would need to be referred to that Committee for its consideration
- Reference was made to the £46m of financial assistance provided to over 4,000 businesses throughout the County via the Welsh Governments business rates grant payments in response to the Covid pandemic. Whilst that provision was welcomed, attention was drawn to the fact some businesses had not been able to access the grant.

The Committee was assured the Authority had widely advertised the grant payments and the intention was that every qualifying business entitled to the grant had received that assistance and would continue to do so. However, as the Authority operated the scheme on the Welsh Government's behalf, any grant awarded would have to comply with the Government's criteria. It had been recognised that some businesses would not have met that criteria and the council had tried to supplement the grant with its own schemes and via rent relief for its business tenants. It was also noted the previously referred to £46m of financial assistance had now increased to over £80m of Welsh Government assistance that the authority had administered during the pandemic to date

- In relation to the provision by the Council of over 1,000 affordable homes since 2016, clarification was sought on the level of provision prior to that date. It was confirmed that, with the exception of the provision of approximately 14 new build bungalows at two locations within the county, the council had not built any new properties since the early 1990's, in accordance with government legislation prohibiting local authorities undertaking any new builds.
- In response to a question on refurbishment costs for older council houses, the Head of Homes and Safer Communities confirmed the condition of some of those had brought into question the economic viability of undertaking refurbishment works to facilitate their return to the Housing stock. In such instances, an options appraisal was undertaken to assess viability with the options being to either proceed with refurbishment, disposal or demolition.

- In response to a question on Welsh in Business and the forthcoming Urdd Eisteddfod in Llandovery in 2022, the Executive Board Member confirmed the Authority would be looking closely to maximise the opportunities for business both local, and countywide from the Urdd's presence
- In response to a question on the provision of bilingual signage by private businesses, the Committee was advised that where businesses occupied council owned properties, the lease agreement required bilingual signage with its provision being enforceable. Although the Council did not have a specific grant for signage, it would shortly be launching a new Business Support Fund and, possibly, that may be able to assist with the cost, provided the main grant criteria had been met. As part of the promotion of the Welsh Language, the council was also looking to promote a 'show and tell' principle demonstrating to new and existing businesses clear examples of where the language had benefited businesses within the County.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

- 5.1 That Carmarthenshire County Council's Draft Annual Report for 2020/21 be received.**
- 5.2 That the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee be requested to examine the provision of pavements in rural areas possibly, via a Task and Finish Group.**

6. POLICY FOR ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND BREACHES OF TENANCY 2021

The Committee considered a report presented by the Executive Board Member for Housing on proposals for the Council to adopt a Policy for Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and Breaches of Tenancy Conditions for the processing of ASB complaints by the Neighbourhood Team within Environmental Protection. The report provided examples of anti-social behaviour and their prioritisation into the following three categories:-

- Category A – Urgent or serious cases -to be dealt with as quickly as possibly (aim to contact within 24 hours)
- Category B – Serious Issues- aim to contact within 5 working days
- Category C – Low Level – aim to contact within 10 working days

The following issue was raised on the report:-

- The Head of Homes and Safer Communities, in response to a question, assured the Committee that where tenants were anti-social, it was important every effort was made to engage with and support them to address any issues they may have. However, if all avenues failed to address the issues eviction may be the only course available, but that could then result in the tenants presenting themselves to the Council as homeless.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to recommend to the Executive Board/Council that the Policy for Anti-Social Behaviour and Breaches of Tenancy 2021 be approved.

7. COMMUNITY AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

(NOTE: Councillor J Gilasbey had earlier declared an interest in this item)

The Committee received its Annual Report on the work undertaken during the 2020/21 municipal year in respect of the reduced committee cycle from November 2020 to April 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic. 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 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. COMMUNITY AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2021/22

(NOTE: Councillor J Gilasbey had earlier declared an interest in this item)

The Committee, in accordance with Article 6.2 of the Council's constitution, considered its draft 2021/22 Forward Work Programme detailing issues and reports to be considered during the course of the municipal year.

The Committee was reminded that it had previously undertaken site visits to the Pendine Outdoor Education Centre, St Clears Leisure Centre and Y Gât, St Clears. It was suggested that update reports on the current position regarding those facilities be provided to either of the Committee's scheduled meetings in November or December 2021

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the draft 2021/22 Forward Work Programme be endorsed subject to the inclusion of update reports on the above to either its November or December meetings.

9. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee considered a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting to be held on the 30th September 2021.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on the 30th September, 2021 be noted.

10. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12TH APRIL 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 12th April 2021 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE