

COMMUNITY & REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 14 December 2021

PRESENT: Councillor F. Akhtar (Chair)

Councillors:

S.M. Allen (In place of H.B. Shepardson), W.R.A. Davies, H.L. Davies, D.C. Evans, S.J.G. Gilasbey, J.K. Howell, B.W. Jones, H.I. Jones, M.J.A. Lewis (In place of G.B. Thomas) and D. Thomas

Also in attendance:

Councillor L.D. Evans, Cabinet Member for Housing
P. Hughes-Griffiths, Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport and Tourism
D.M. Jenkins, Cabinet Member for Resources

The following Officers were in attendance:

I. Jones, Head of Leisure
J. Jones, Head of Regeneration
J. Morgan, Head of Homes & Safer Communities
J. Fearn, Head of Property
N. Daniel, Head of ICT and Corporate Policy; Interim Head of Planning
A. Thomas, Group Accountant
C. Daniels, Senior Sports and Leisure Manager
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator
J. Owen, Democratic Services Officer
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

Virtual Meeting - 10.00 am - 12.23 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R. Evans, S. Matthews, H. Shepardson and G. Thomas together with Cabinet Members Councillors A. Davies and E. Dole.

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

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

Councillor	Minute No (s)	Nature of Interest
J. Gilasbey	5 – 2021/22 Quarter 2 – Performance Report (1 st April to 30 th September 2021) relevant to this scrutiny	Trustee and Secretary of Kidwelly Tinline Museum – Has dispensation to speak but not vote

J. Gilasbey	6 – Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2021/22	Trustee and Secretary of Kidwelly Tinsplate Museum – Has dispensation to speak but not vote
J Gilasbey	12 – Forthcoming Items	Executive Board Forward Work Programme – School in her ward is detailed in the report – Has dispensation to speak but not vote

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. AUDIT WALES REPORT: REGENERATING TOWN CENTRES IN WALES

The Committee received a report presented by the Head of Regeneration, on behalf of the Leader of the Council, on Audit Wales' National Report on Regenerating Town Centres in Wales. The report made 6 recommendations and called for all levels of government in Wales to help make town centres sustainable. Recommendations 4 and 6 related to local government and stated:-

“Recommendation 4

The Welsh Government has provided all 22 local authorities with training on how best to use existing enforcement, financial assistance and debt recovery powers, but they are not being consistently nor effectively utilised to support regeneration. We recommend that local authorities take appropriate action, using these existing powers and resources available to achieve the best possible outcome for town centres by:

- using alternative methods of enforcement before using Compulsory Purchase Orders as a last resort;
- integrating enforcement strategies with wider departmental strategies across housing, environmental health, planning and regeneration teams to make more effective use of existing skills and resources; and
- ensuring there is capacity and the right expertise to use the full range of powers, working in collaboration with other councils to achieve good outcomes

Recommendation 6

Town centres are changing, and local authorities need to be receptive to these changes and plan to manage these shifts. We recommend that local authorities use our regeneration tool to self-assess their current approaches to identify where they need to improve their work on town-centre regeneration”.

The Head of Regeneration advised that the Council had prepared an Action Plan in response to the Audit Wales report, as detailed in the report for the Committee's

consideration and approval.

The following issues were raised on the report:-

- Reference was made to the low level of business participation at a recent meeting of the 10 Town's Initiative for Cross Hands. It was confirmed the low level was not reflective within the other town centres and officers were working with businesses in the area to encourage increased participation and engagement.
- The Committee was informed the 10 Town's initiative involved the Council working in partnership with the Joint Ventures, Welsh Government and local businesses in a focussed and co-ordinated approach. While each town would have an independent approach on what it considered would be of benefit to its town e.g. provision of business units, car parking, increased retail provision etc, which would be examined individually for each town, there would also be an inter-dependence between the towns. Accordingly, officers would be co-ordinating the initiative between the towns to maximise its impact.
- With regard to funding, although the County Council had set a sum aside within its capital programme, there was no other set funding available but, work was on-going to draw down funds from other sources to help support the initiative and implement the Audit recommendations. Those included, for example, working with the Welsh Government on Town Centre Funding, accessing U.K Government 'levelling up' funding and community renewal. Other avenues to increase town centre viability and vibrancy could come in the form of intervention in skills and training etc being provided as part of the Swansea Bay City Deal together with providing more residential properties thereby increasing the level of disposable income and assisting with the night time economy.
- It was recognised that one of challenges facing town centres was in attracting shoppers away from internet shopping.
- An endorsement was made to recommendation R3 of the Audit report for the Welsh Government to 'consolidate funding to replace bureaucracy by streamlining processes and grant conditions and keeping requests for information and supporting materials to a minimum'.
- In response to recommendation R1 of the Audit report for the Welsh Government's consideration relating to National Non Domestic Rates, the Head of Regeneration confirmed that while local authorities were charged with the collection of business rates, responsibility for their setting lay with the Welsh Government. Although the NNDR payment holiday introduced as part of the Covid regulations expired in March 2022, no indication had been received from the Welsh Government on any proposals beyond that date.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Audit Wales report be received and Carmarthenshire's Action Plan in response thereto be approved.

5. 2021/22 QUARTER 2 - PERFORMANCE REPORT (1ST APRIL TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2021) RELEVANT TO THIS SCRUTINY

(NOTE: Councillor J Gilasbey, having earlier declared an interest in this item, re-declared that interest and remained in the meeting during the reports consideration)

The Committee received the 2021/22 Quarter 2 Performance Report for the period 1st April to 30th September 2021 presented by the Cabinet Members for Housing, Culture, Sport and Tourism, Communities and Rural Affairs, Resources and by the Head of Regeneration and Interim Head of Planning in respect of the areas falling within their portfolios and the Committees remit.

The report detailed the progress made against the actions and measures within the Corporate Strategy and on the delivery of the 13 Well-Being Objectives. The Committee noted that 2021/22 was the first year the Council would self-evaluate and report on under the terms of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, especially Part 6 relating to Performance and Governance.

The following issues were raised on the report:-

- A reference was made to the impact current NRW regulations on the impact of phosphates on water quality were having on development / regeneration not only within Carmarthenshire but Wales wide. Clarification was sought on what measures, if any, were being introduced to address their consequential detrimental impact on the construction industry.

The Interim Head of Planning advised that presently, the authority had 72 planning applications held in abeyance pending a resolution on the position with 50 of those being directly linked to phosphates and the remaining 22 being partially attributed. While discussions were being undertaken across Wales, an early resolution was not anticipated.

The Committee was further informed that the Welsh Local Government Association would be meeting in January 2022 to discuss the position

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2021/22

(NOTE: Councillor J Gilasbey, having earlier declared an interest in this item, re-declared that interest and remained in the meeting during the reports consideration)

The Committee considered a report presented by the Cabinet Member for Resources on the 2021/22 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring reports for the Housing, Regeneration, Planning and Leisure and Recreation Services for the period up to the 31st August, 2021. It was noted that the revenue budget was forecasting a £131k underspend, the capital budget a £39,703k underspend, whilst the Housing Revenue Account was forecasting a £1,159k underspend.

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

7. ACTIF SPORT & LEISURE'S 'ACTIF ANYWHERE' PLATFORM

The Committee received a report presented by the Cabinet Member for Culture Sport and Tourism, together with a power point presentation, on Actif – the Council's Sport and Leisure Section – on the way the 'Actif Anywhere' developments were leading the way in terms of digital development in the leisure

sector by enabling the population to access and participate in activity across the life course and health spectrum.

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

- The Head of Leisure confirmed that subject to community halls having the necessary spatial requirements and appropriate I.T. equipment there was no reason why those facilities could not be used as venues for digital exercises. Whilst the digital platform was not intended to replace physical buildings, its primary aim was to provide a greater mix and flexibility of choice/provision for people to become more active.
- It was confirmed that while £25k funding had been secured for the operation of the model scheme within three communities, additional finance would be required to facilitate its further roll out.
- With regard to the pilot platform for schools, the Head of Leisure confirmed it had been completed and discussions were ongoing with the Education Department on its roll out to schools in the new year. While the platform would largely operate on an extra curricula basis it could be used for breakfast and lunch clubs. The potential gain of the platform would be to make children fitter.
- It was noted that one of the platform's main exponents was that it could be offered in Welsh and English across Wales, the U.K and the world with any resulting revenue income being used to underpin other service provision

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

8. UPDATE ON THE OUTDOOR EDUCATION OFFER IN CARMARTHENSHIRE

The Committee considered an update report presented by the Cabinet Member for Cultural Sport and Tourism, on the Outdoor Education offer within Carmarthenshire, following a previous site visit by the Scrutiny Committee to the Pendine Outdoor Education Centre. The report provided a backdrop to the current offer, including a review of assets, financial resources, staffing activity and purposes together with highlighting the impact and challenges of dealing with Covid -19 and to how the service would need to re-model and evolve both in the short to medium and medium to long term within existing resources. The report also contained 8 recommendations for the Committee's consideration.

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

- The Committee referred unanimously to the value of the existing facility at Pendine to the whole of the County and to the experience it provided for school children. It whole heartedly supported its continued operation and the need to identify capital, and other funding sources, to secure its provision for future generations

The Head of Leisure referred to the report presented to the Committee and to one of the options being to examine the purpose of its provision. The centre at Pendine was clearly defined as an education resource for children within Carmarthenshire which, in turn, provided its own difficulties and challenges in accessing grants and external funding. There were potential commercial opportunities for people to use its facilities outside of school terms which may provide an avenue to access tourism and regeneration

grants. An assurance was provided that all potential sources of grant funding were pursued when an opportunity arose.

- With regard to the centre's re-opening post covid, a consultation exercise had been undertaken with users providing a positive feedback who valued its provision and supported its continued operation. While it was hoped the centre may be able to reopen from April 2022, that was reliant on Welsh Government regulations and the schools having confidence to use the facility. Any such re-opening could also be different to previous operations at the site with single school use as opposed to multi school use.
- While recognising the centre as a valued asset, the Committee was reminded that it was an ageing resource and a previous condition survey had estimated works in the region of £5-6m would be required to meet modern requirements. It was therefore essential the Council explored other options to provide facilities off site and not limit its use to purely educational. The next step required an agreed asset plan and in the long term examining its potential re-purposing and potential partnership arrangement, possibly with the new hostel at Pendine. It was anticipated the asset plan would be completed over the coming months with a view to finalising the centre's future direction as soon as possible thereafter

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

- 8.1 that the report and recommendations for the Outdoor Education Offer in Carmarthenshire be adopted.**
- 8.2 that every effort be made to identify alternative funding / grant sources to assist with funding improvements to the Pendine Outdoor Education Centre and if, appropriate, that include examining the centre's definition as a purely educational resource.**

9. ST CLEARS LEISURE CENTRE

The Committee received an update report presented by the Cabinet Board Member for Culture, Sport and Tourism on developments that had taken place at the St Clears Leisure Centre and those planned to occur which would improve the business unit performance, customer experience and service delivery.

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:

- In response to a question on a potential partnership approach to draw in additional funding to the centre, the Head of Leisure advised on a previous arrangement where it had been managed by a voluntary group in the 1990's but had returned to council control in the 2000's. It was accepted that attracting external funding/ partnering was a key factor and, in that regard, discussions were being undertaken with the Health Board to fund the delivery of preventative activities at the centre. However, while, it may be possible to attract grant funding from the Board, that would not include ongoing revenue funding. The more funding the council could attract would assist in making the centre a valuable resource.
- In response to a question on the NERS scheme (National Exercise Referral Scheme), the Head of Leisure confirmed an annual grant of £150K was received from the Welsh Government towards its cost. However, if that funding could be for a set period of years that would assist in better scheme management. The scheme was also limited to the type of conditions that

could be supported and provided in leisure centres. There was a therefore a call nationally for the scheme parameters to be extended and for the health boards to provide additional funding to facilitate it becoming a more preventable than reactionary resource.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the update report be received.

10. Y GAT, ST CLEARS

The Committee considered an update report presented by the Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport & Tourism on the current position regarding the future operation of Y Gât, St Clears following a previous site visit by the Scrutiny Committee. The report noted the current operational position, the latest position on dialogue with St Clears Town Council over a potential asset transfer together with future options. It was further reported that a decision on the transfer was anticipated from the Town Council in the near future.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the update report be received.

11. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

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

- Empty Properties in Carmarthenshire

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

12. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

(NOTE: Councillor J Gilasbey, having earlier declared an interest in this item, re-declared that interest and remained in the meeting during the reports consideration)

The Committee received a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting to be held on the 31st January, 2022. Reference was made to the number of proposed agenda items detailed in the report and a suggestion made they be reduced, and an additional meeting be arranged, if necessary, to facilitate their consideration

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on the 31st January, 2022 and be noted but that consideration be given to reducing the number of proposed items and that, if necessary, an additional meeting of the committee be arranged to facilitate their consideration

13. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30TH SEPTEMBER 2021

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 30th September, 2021 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE