

# COMMUNITIES, HOMES & REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 26 JANUARY 2023

**PRESENT:** Councillor D.M. Cundy (Chair) (Virtually)

**Councillors (Virtually):**

B.W. Jones	W.R.A. Davies	B. Davies	T. Davies
N. Evans	R.E. Evans	H.L. Davies	J.K. Howell
A. Leyshon	H.B. Shepardson	R. Sparks	

**Also in attendance (Virtually):**

Councillor L. Evans Cabinet Member for Homes and Deputy Leader  
Councillor A. Davies – Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs and Planning Policy  
Councillor A. Lenny – Cabinet Member for Resources  
Councillor G. John – Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Leisure, Culture and Tourism

**Also Present (Virtually):**

R. Hemingway, Head of Financial Services  
J. Jones, Head of Regeneration  
J. Fearn, Head of Housing Property and Strategic Projects  
I. Jones, Head of Leisure  
J. Morgan, Head of Homes & Safer Communities  
C. Daniels, Senior Sports and Leisure Manager  
J. Davies, Senior Cultural Services Manager  
H. Morgan, Economic Development Manager  
A Bowen, Investment and Income Manager  
A. Jones, Procurement & Contracting Officer  
R. Parkinson, Team Leader - Housing Advice  
J. Williams, Rapid Rehousing Policy Lead  
A. Eynon, Principal Translator  
E. Evans, Principal Democratic Services Officer  
S. Hendy, Member Support Officer  
E. Bryer, Democratic Services Officer  
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

**Virtual Meeting - 10.00 am - 12.05 pm**

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor M. Palfreman.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST 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
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H. Shepardson	4 – Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2023/24 – 2025/26	Ticket Holder for the car parks within the Millennium Coastal Park and Season Ticket Holder for Pembrey Country Park
R. Sparks	4 – Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2023/24 – 2025/26	Has a swimming business and has dispensation from the Standards Committee to speak and make written representations but not vote

### 3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

### 4. REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2023/24 to 2025/26

(NOTE: Councillors H. Shepardson and R. Sparks having previously declared an interest in this item redeclared that interest and remained in the meeting )

The Committee considered a report on the Council’s Revenue Budget Strategy 2023/24 to 2025/26, as endorsed by the Executive Board for consultation purposes at its meeting held on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2023. The report provided Members with the current view of the Revenue Budget for 2023/2024 together with indicative figures for the 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 financial years based on officers’ projections of spending requirements and took account of the provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government on the 14<sup>th</sup> December 2022.

The Committee was informed that the announced provisional settlement represented an average increase of 8.0% across Wales on the 2022/23 settlement, with Carmarthenshire’s increase being 8.5% (£26.432mm) thereby taking the Aggregate External Finance to £338.017m for 2023/24. While the settlement was significantly above the initial indicative figure of a 3.4% increase and provided some £15.5m more than the Council’s original assumption, the Welsh Government had recognised the increased figure would still not be sufficient to meet inflationary pressures facing councils, pay awards and fuel price increases and difficult decisions would need to be made.

Whilst the budget proposals assumed the full delivery of all savings proposals, it was noted further work would be required to develop the cost reductions for the 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years to be able to maintain the current Budget Strategy and level of Council tax.

It was noted that given the current risks around the Budget Strategy and the ongoing inflationary backdrop, together with other budgetary pressures, the

proposed Council Tax increase for 2023/24 had been set at 7% to mitigate reductions to critical services. In years 2 and 3, the financial picture remained uncertain and, as such, modelled indicative Council Tax rises of 4% and 3% had been made purely for planning purposes and sought to strike a balance with budget reductions. Those proposals would be considered by the Council in setting the Council Tax level for 2023/24 at its meeting on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2023. Additionally, as the Welsh Government final settlement figure was not due to be announced until the 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2023 any amendments required to be considered to the budget strategy as a result of that announcement would need to be considered by Council.

The Committee thereupon considered the following detailed budget information appended to the Strategy relevant to its remit:

- **Appendix A(i)** – Efficiency summary for the Regeneration, Leisure, Place and Sustainability and Non HRA Housing Services;
- **Appendix A(ii)** – Growth Pressures summary for the for the Place and Sustainability Services, - none for the Regeneration, Leisure and Non HRA Services;
- **Appendix B** – Budget monitoring report for the Regeneration, Leisure, Place and Sustainability and Non HRA Housing Services;
- **Appendix C** – Charging Digest for the Regeneration, Leisure, Place and Sustainability and Non HRA Housing Services;

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

- With regard to the recent budget seminars held for county councillors, it was confirmed no changes had been made to the Strategy following the seminars. However, the outcome of the formal budget consultation exercise, that included the Council's Scrutiny Committees and the public, would be collated and incorporated within the budget consultation report to Cabinet and Council as part of their considerations on the Budget Strategy.

**RESOLVED THAT IT BE RECOMMENDED TO THE CABINET/COUNCIL THAT: -**

- 4.1 The 2023/24 – 2025/26 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation be received.**
- 4.2 The Charging Digests for the Regeneration, Leisure, Place and Sustainability and Non HRA Services, as detailed in Appendix C to the report, be endorsed.**

## **5. COMMUNITIES, HOMES AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH GROUP - EMERGENCY SOCIAL HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

The Committee considered the report of its Task and Finish Group established to develop an Emergency Social Housing Allocations Policy for Carmarthenshire to address the unprecedented situation where the Council, as with all Welsh Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords, was facing increased demand over supply for social housing.

The report detailed the Group's work, incorporating a proposed Emergency Allocations Policy, where it was proposed that future allocations for social housing in Carmarthenshire would be via 'direct matching' whereby the Council would allocate all available properties according to set criteria to those presenting as homeless and in greater housing need. If the proposal was adopted, it was further proposed the emergency policy would be in place for approximately one year to enable a full review to be undertaken of the 'Common Allocations Policy' which would need to be suspended whilst the emergency policy was in operation. It was also noted that if the policy were to be adopted, and not all available properties could be allocated at a given point, those unallocated would be made available via 'Canfod Cartref – Home Finder' for people to bid for, as at present.

The Committee's appreciation was extended to the Task and Finish Members and the officers involved in the review for their work in developing the proposed Emergency Allocations Policy

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

- It was confirmed that should an available property not be directly matched, in accordance with set criteria, it would be advertised on 'Canfod Cartref – Home Finder' for those on the Housing Register to bid for as at present.
- Reference was made to the current bidding system whereby properties were advertised at midnight on a Thursday until midnight the following Monday and to the fact some people were staying up until midnight on the Thursday to lodge their bid early. It was suggested the start time be amended to say 6.00 a.m. on the Friday morning.

The Committee was advised that whilst that was possible, the window for people to submit a bid was open for four days, and a bid could be submitted at any time within that window. It was also confirmed that allocation of a property was made on need and not the time a bid was submitted. The Head of Homes and Safer Communities advised that he would examine the wording on Canfod Cartref to clarify the bidding process.

- With regard to a question on the level of temporary accommodation being provided to the homeless, the Head of Homes and Safer Communities advised that whilst the allocation of properties was a tool to address homelessness, there were other avenues available to the Council in that regard including, building more properties, use of the private rented sector and buying properties.

He further confirmed while the Council always endeavoured to house those presenting to the department as homeless in areas close to their home / families etc, that was not always possible. Currently, the Council had 146 people housed in temporary accommodation at a cost of up to £100 per night. The Welsh Government, in accepting the homeless pressures faced by local government at the current time, had allocated additional funding to help meet those costs, with Carmarthenshire's share amounting to £0.5m.

- Reference was made to the introduction of the Emergency Policy being a temporary measure for approximately one year. It was suggested the

members of the Task and Finish Group should meet with officers every two months to evaluate its implementation

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that it be recommended to Cabinet/Council that:**

- 5.1 the Emergency Interim Social Housing Allocation Policy be approved;**
- 5.2 the current Choice Based Lettings Policy be suspended for approximately one year, and the Emergency Interim Social Housing Allocation Policy be implemented;**
- 5.3 the Communities, Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee receive updates at every meeting on the effectiveness of the change;**
- 5.4 the content of the update reports include data for the previous period referring to:**
  - Proportion of properties directly matched and those advertised;**
  - Banding of clients matched;**
  - Number of properties directly matched and advertised by each community area, type of property and landlord;**
  - Proportion of direct matches that were successful;**
  - Number of direct matches where the clients requests a review of the allocation and the outcome of those reviews;**
  - Number of direct matches where the client refuses the allocation but doesn't request a review**
- 5.5 UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that members of the Task and Finish Group meet every 2 months to monitor the Emergency Policy's implementation**
- 5.6 RESOLVED that the current system of advertising properties on 'Canfod Cartref – Home Finder' commencing at midnight on Thursday be retained.**

## **6. HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRAMME (HSP) STRATEGY 2022-2026**

The Committee considered a report on the Housing Support Programme (HSP) Strategy 2022-2026, produced in accordance with Welsh Government requirements, detailing the strategic priorities of the Council, and its partner agencies, on homelessness prevention and housing related support services over the coming 4 years (2022-26). The Strategy refreshed earlier priorities included within the Local Authority's former homelessness strategy and the Housing Support Grant (HSG) Delivery Plan for 2021-22 with the development of the priorities having been informed by a comprehensive need assessment exercise that included direct engagement with stakeholders within the Local Authority providers of support services and service users.

The following questions /issues were raised on the report:

- Reference was made to the issue of funding sources identified within the report and clarification sought on how that would support the actions detailed in the reports action plan.

The Head of Homes and Safer Communities advised that the use of funding sources was dependent upon whether the action related to capital or revenue expenditure. He assured that every effort was made to maximise availability of funding including, joint funding, Housing Revenue Account together with Welsh Government Funding.

- In relation to the £8.8m Housing Support Grant from the Welsh Government, that was an indicative allocation up to March 2025. Accordingly, it was assumed the grant would be forthcoming up to that time. However, future funding levels beyond that date would be dependent on Welsh Government priorities,
- Reference was made to the Actions in the Plan being up until March 2023 and clarification sought on how the plan would be refreshed after that time. It was confirmed the Housing Support Grant terms and conditions required the Action Plan to be refreshed every two years and, in accordance with that requirement, work thereon would take place this year.
- With regard to the serving of Section 21 Notices by private landlords, it was reported there had been a slight reduction in the level of notices served since the implementation of the Renting Homes (Wales) Act in December 2022. However, tenants on rolling contracts could continue to be served with notices up to June 23. It was hoped the new allocations policy would enable the authority to house persons presenting as homeless without having to place them in temporary accommodation

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Housing Support Programme (HSP) Strategy 2022-2026 be endorsed.**

## **7. RAPID REHOUSING TRANSITION PLAN 2022 - 2027**

The Committee considered the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan 2022-27, produced in accordance with Welsh Government Requirements, containing a series of High-Level Actions to enable the Council to transition to a Rapid Rehousing approach to help make homelessness in Carmarthenshire rare, brief and unrepeatable.

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

- It was confirmed that whilst the length of time spent by the homeless in temporary accommodation within Carmarthenshire varied, the average length of time was 3 – 4 months. However, every effort was made to place people within emergency accommodation as soon as was possible.
- The Head of Homes and Safer Communities advised the length of time people spent in temporary accommodation could be monitored as part of the monitoring of the Emergency Allocation Policy
- Reference was made to the work of the homeless teams and the Committee expressed its appreciation to them for all their hard work

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan 2022-2027 be endorsed.**

## **8. UPDATE ON UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND (UKSPF)**

The Committee considered an update report on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) within Carmarthenshire which had received a total sum of £37m out of the total fund sum of £138m. It was noted the report also contained, for information, an application form and assessment criteria for the Anchor and Standalone projects and that a guidance document to assist applicants was currently being prepared and would be made available shortly.

The Committee was advised that the Cabinet at its meeting held in October 2022 had approved the delivery model for implementation of the fund between Anchor, Standalone and Commissioned Projects with the following themed anchor projects having been approved:

**Community Anchor** – providing a third party grant to support the development and creation of activities aligned to the following themes.

- Poverty
- Circular Economy
- Wellbeing / Leisure
- Access to Services
- Environment and Green
- Tourism, Culture / Heritage
- Community Engagement

**Rural Anchor** - consisting of 3 elements:

- Ten Towns Initiative
- Rural Innovation Fund
- Hwb Fach y Wlad

**Place Anchor:** - supporting town centres through a Vacant Property Fund, a Town Centre Events Fund and a package of support to deliver key projects identified in our Town Centre Recovery Plans to address the ongoing challenges.

**Supporting Local Business Anchor:** offering financial support to local businesses to support them in all stages of their development through Business start-up and Growth Grants, a Business Renewable Energy Fund and also a Property Development Fund.

In addition, a key focus will be supporting Carmarthenshire businesses to benefit from public procurement spend

**Employability & Skills Anchor:** New streamlined employability programme was being developed and there would be a focus on activity outside the remit of the RLSP and the Swansea Bay City Deal Skills and Talent project.

The working budgets for the themes in Carmarthenshire were as detailed below. However, those may change as the programme commenced and flexibility would

be required to enable virements both within and amongst each of the themes to deliver the Investment Plan's requirements

<b>UK SPF Theme</b>	<b>Working Budget (4% administrative budget removed from figures below)</b>
Community & Place	£10,240,933.76
Supporting Local Businesses	£10,240,933.76
People & Skills	£10,240,933.76
Multiply	£6,413,012

The following questions/issues were raised on the report;

- It was confirmed the Multiply theme related to the new adult numeracy programme whereby the Council was working with Coleg Sir Gar and wider stakeholders on its delivery. Consideration was also being given to whether the theme could be extended to include digital skills.
- It was confirmed the Shared Prosperity Fund was currently progressing through the democratic process of the four constituent authorities of the Swansea Bay City Deal being, Carmarthenshire, Neath Port Talbot, Powys and Swansea and it was hoped to have a co-ordinated launch in the week commencing 27<sup>th</sup> February.
- Reference was made to the requirement for 2022/23 funding to be utilised by March 23 and to whether there were any risks associated therewith. It was confirmed that whilst previous reports had indicated spending would occur in the current financial year, delays by the UK Government had meant it would not be possible to achieve the required spend by March. Accordingly, the UK Government had allowed for flexibility to move the funding to the next financial year, subject to justification, and no funding would be lost. It was also confirmed funding would be up to March 2025.
- It was confirmed the Ten Towns Initiative formed part of the Rural Anchor and that any projects for funding would need to be submitted via the approved application process. Officers from the department would also be liaising with the ten towns teams on the submission of projects for funding.
- It was confirmed that in addition to the ten towns initiative, there were opportunities for all town and community councils within Carmarthenshire to apply for funding and engagement thereon would be made with the clerks of those authorities

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund update report be received.**

## **9. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT**

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

- Business Plans

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



**10. FORTHCOMING ITEMS**

The Committee received a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting to be held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2023.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2023 be noted.

**11. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 19TH DECEMBER 2022**

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 19<sup>th</sup> December, 2022 be signed as a correct record.

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**CHAIR**

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**DATE**