

COMMUNITIES, HOMES & REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 15 MAY 2023

PRESENT: Councillor D.M. Cundy (Chair)

Councillors (In Person):

B.W. Jones B. Davies H.B. Shepardson R. Sparks
M. Thomas

Councillors (Virtually):

W.R.A. Davies R.E. Evans H.L. Davies J.K. Howell
M. Palfreman

Also in attendance:

Councillor L. D. Evans – Cabinet Member – Deputy Leader and Homes
Councillor G. John – Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Leisure, Culture and Tourism
Councillors J. James in connection with Minutes 4 and 5
Councillor S. Godfrey-Coles in connection with Minutes 4 and 5

Also Present (In Person):

J. Jones, Head of Regeneration
I. Jones, Head of Leisure
J. Morgan, Head of Housing and Public Protection
A Bowen, Housing Hwb Manager
R. Parkinson, Team Leader - Housing Advice
T Peregrine, Economic Development Co-ordinator
R. Morris, Members Support Officer
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

Also Present (Virtually):

J. Fearn, Head of Housing Property and Strategic Projects
S. Hendy, Member Support Officer

Chamber - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP and remotely - 10.00 am - 12.15 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no declarations of personal interest.

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. BURRY PORT HARBOUR PETITION TO FULL COUNCIL - UPDATE POSITION

The Committee received an update report in response to a petition submitted to Council on the 25th January, 2023, by the Friends of Burry Port Marina (FBPM), expressing their dissatisfaction with the operation and condition of Burry Port Harbour, prior to the report being considered by Cabinet in June. The harbour is operated on a 150 year lease by Burry Port Marine Limited (BPML).

The report unequivocally stated that the County Council shared the stated aim of FBPM in wanting a safe, functioning, attractive facility that is of genuine benefit for both the harbour users and the whole community.

The report specifically referenced issues and concerns flagged by the FBPM including:

- An acknowledgement that the lack of dredging in the harbour over recent years had led to a build-up of silt and mud hindering its operation and access and egress for vessels in the harbour. The report notes that a documented mixed-methodology dredging plan (to include regular sluicing and water injected dredging) had been submitted by BPML and posted on their website. However, a verbal update by the Head of Leisure, confirmed that timebound actions within this plan were slipping and were not currently being met.
- Confirmation that CCC, as landlord, had formally written to BPML to put them on notice of breaches against the terms of the lease, and specifically with regards to their obligation to dredge the Harbour to a depth of no less than 1.0 metre at impound level.
- That Council officers regularly met with the Managing Director of the Marine Group where operational concerns had and were continued to be raised as well as with local members and the Chair of the Friends of Burry Port Marina to regularly apprise on the situation at the harbour.

The report also referenced:

- The accumulation of debt to the Council in respect of rates, rental and other charges (and the Council's position in terms of recovery), set against, the challenging financial environment highlighted by BPML, along with the impact of Covid, and the financial and cost of living crises on the wider economy

Several references had been made by a local member, Cllr John James, and the wider Committee to the declining condition of the harbour over the previous 5 years, since the award of the Lease by the Council to the Marine Group, and to broken pledges and breaches of lease conditions made by the company over that time. Those, together with other concerns included:

- the lack of dredging in the harbour to the point where it now seriously affected harbour operations for boat users,

- lack of repair and maintenance including the harbour gates which had been inoperative for the past few months with oil leaking into the water.
- pontoons breaking free in the harbour and floating into the bay.
- While the harbour had 450 berths, only 49 were occupied.
- The company's financial position
- The current condition of the harbour could deter any interest by potential future operators.

Concerns were also expressed in relation to a list of other improvements around the harbour not progressing, including an upgrade of the commercial pontoons, a re-commencement of work to the old RNLI building into a new Harbour Masters' Office and improved changing and showering facilities for harbour users.

In view of the above, the Committee expressed serious concerns for the future viability of the harbour to the point where unless conditions were to improve in the near future, the Council should consider options available in respect of potentially terminating the lease agreement and finding an alternative operator.

Both the Head of Leisure Services and the Head of Regeneration confirmed that the Council recognised the ongoing difficulties at the Harbour and that regular discussion was ongoing with the operator, the Director of Resources, local members, the Chair of the FBML, and legal services to try and resolve the current unsatisfactory position. It was also stated that due legal process had to be followed given the status of the long-term lease agreement and that unfortunately, such matters would inevitably take time to fully address and resolve. Members were re-assured that matters would continue to be progressed as quickly as possible and were reminded that the Council had initiated a legal process to ensure its assets were safeguarded whilst all future options were considered.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Committee's concerns at the current situation at Burry Port Harbour be conveyed to the Cabinet and the Cabinet be requested to:

1. Undertake a site visit to Burry Port Harbour at low tide,
2. Consider terminating the lease agreement with Burry Port Marine Ltd if no improvements had been achieved by the end of the current legal process.

5. BURRY PORT PLACEMAKING PLAN

The Committee considered a report on the proposals for the adoption of a Placemaking Plan for Burry Port prior to its consideration by the Cabinet at its June meeting. The Plan had been developed with key stakeholders in the area to identify opportunities that aligned with the recovery proposals for the town centre with the regeneration aspirations of the harbourside to ensure Burry Port maximised the impact of planned regeneration in the local area. It was noted the themes that emerged from the Plan would guide and support future funding applications with its main aims being to:

- Grow existing business,
- Maximise job creation,
- Support the development of a knowledge economy,

- Developing distinctiveness of the area,
- Identify current and future role of service provision in the community,
- Support opportunities for sustainable energy provision,
- Establish sustainable income generation for future growth,
- Increase resilience, sustainability and future growth of the town and surrounding feeder communities.

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:

- Reference was made to the planned 250 home development on the former Grillo Site, together with other recent housing provision, and to whether any consideration had been given to the impact those developments could have on dental and GP services, especially as there was now only one GP surgery serving the whole of the area.

The Head of Regeneration advised that the proposed development currently had the benefit of outline planning permission. As the development progressed through the formal planning process, any potential impact on health provision in the area would be considered as part of that process

- In response to a question on section 4 of the report on 'movement', and to whether the existing free parking provision on Seaview would be retained, the Head of Regeneration advised that it would not be possible at the present time to guarantee its continued provision. That would be dependent upon any future discussions by the Council as part of its car parking strategy.
- The Head of Regeneration in response to several questions on various aspects of the Plan advised the Committee that it had been commissioned in 2021 and completed in May 2022. The Plan was therefore reflective of a given point in time. If the Plan was adopted by Cabinet, the next step would be for the Stakeholders to form a group to take forward and that group would have regard to changing data etc and formulate priorities accordingly. The Regeneration Division would then work with the Group to facilitate the Plan's provision and to explore funding opportunities.
- With regard to a question on the provision of the planned new Co-op store, the Head of Regeneration advised the development had been granted planning consent and it was anticipated construction would commence in the near future.
- Reference was made to the plan, together with future development proposals for Burry Port and to the potential impact that could have on traffic levels for Sandy Road in Llanelli.

The Head of Regeneration advised that developments at Burry Port were being undertaken as part of a Joint Venture with the Welsh Government and any planning consent for future developments would take into consideration the potential impact of increased traffic.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. SHARED PROSPERITY FUND - TACKLING TOWNS

The Committee considered a report on the Shared Prosperity Fund – Tackling Towns Project prior to its consideration by the Cabinet. It was noted the project

sat within the Place Anchor element of the Shared Prosperity fund that aimed to improve Carmarthenshire's town centres by targeting support projects and interventions to respond to the on-going challenges faced by Town centres. The fund would be available to support the direct delivery of the key actions identified within the Council's regeneration masterplans for Carmarthen, Llanelli and Ammanford together with the 11 other town plans listed within the report. The Committee noted that Appendix A to the report detailed a list of priorities for each of the 14 towns and that subject to the Cabinets approval, the project delivery teams would work to deliver the projects by the September 2024 deadline.

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

- Clarification was sought on whether there was any firm detail on the projects detailed within the report or whether they were indicative with detailed work having to be undertaken and to how the funding would be allocated to the projects.

The Committee was advised that the projects listed were in various stages of development whereby some were well developed with feasibility studies being at various stages, others required more work e.g. planning consent and some were able to progress at a quicker pace as they were relatively minor schemes.

The Head of Regeneration advised that all the proposed projects were fluid at the current time with the primary aim being to ensure their deliverability by September 2024. Should it become apparent some projects may not be deliverable within the time frame, there was flexibility within the system to progress with alternatives. Similarly, in terms of funding, there were other funding streams could be available to progress projects.

- In response to a question on the availability of different funding programmes the Head of Regeneration confirmed arrangements would be made for members to be provided with a list, by ward, of the various projects being undertaken as part of those programmes.
- With regard to a question on the process of identifying projects for progression it was confirmed they had been chosen by the forums in each of the towns.
- In response to a question on the limited time available for the completion of the projects by September 2024, the Head of Regeneration advised that was dictated by the Funding Regime.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. EMERGENCY SOCIAL HOUSING ALLOCATION UPDATE REPORT ON THE OPERATION OF THE NEW ALLOCATION POLICY (MONITORING)

The Committee, in accordance with the decision made at its meeting on the 26th January 2023, received a monitoring report on the effectiveness of the new Emergency Social Housing Allocation Policy developed by its Task and Finish Group. It was noted the content of the report included data for the previous period relating to:-

1. Proportion of properties directly matched and those advertised,
2. Band if clients directly matched,
3. Number of properties directly matched and advertised by each community area, type of property and landlord,
4. Proportion of direct matches that were successful,
5. Number of direct matches where the client requested a review of the allocation and the outcome of those reviews,
6. Number of direct matches where the client refused the allocation but didn't request a review.

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

- In response to a question on the reduction in the proportion of properties matched in the first and second quarters, the committee was advised that could be attributable to a number of factors including the type of properties becoming available, their location and if they were in areas people wanted to live. The authority did however try to match properties to people in areas to which they had a connection, but they may not always be suitable.

The Committee was also advised that the data detailed within the report related to the period October 2022 to March 2023 where the Head of Housing had been granted powers to directly match properties in certain circumstances. The new Policy, introduced in April 2023, would allow the service to directly match all tenants in Bands A and B which would see a reduction in the level of housing being advertised.

- It was confirmed that all 4,500 on the Housing register had received communication detailing the change to the new Emergency Allocation Policy.
- It was confirmed that, currently, the housing division had sufficient resources to administer the new system following an increase in the numbers on the housing register from 4412 in October 2022 to 4551 on the 12th April 2022. Should circumstances change and additional resources were considered necessary, then a bid for those resources would be submitted in accordance with normal practice.
- With regard to the commissioning of rooms in hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation, it was confirmed that would be reduced wherever possible. The Committee was also assured that at the time of the report's preparation no family with children were placed in such accommodation.

The Committee was also informed that where possible, the service would be moving away from the larger type hotels / Bed and Breakfast accommodation to smaller providers and the local member would be informed of that provision within their ward.

- Reference was made to an expectation by the Task and Finish Group for a reduction to occur in the number of people presenting as homeless. As that reduction had not occurred, an explanation was sought on whether there were any specific reasons for the current increase.

The Committee was advised there were a number of reasons for the increase which could be attributable to Welsh Government Regulations,

the Renting Homes (Wales Act) together with the cost-of-living crisis. With regard to the Renting Homes Act, protection for existing tenants had been extended to the end of June 2023. Therefore, landlords could still issue Section 21 Notices up to the end of May. There was also a four-month backlog in the courts for Section 21 Notices which would see further notices being issued and people presenting as homeless.

- With regard to an increase in the number of people in Band A, that was attributable to those in Band B at risk of being made homeless being moved to Band A to facilitate their rehoming as soon as possible.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the monitoring report be received.

8. COMMUNITY AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2023/24

The Committee, in accordance with Article 6.2 of the Council's constitution, considered its draft 2023/24 Forward Work Plan detailing issues and reports to be considered during the course of the municipal year. It was noted that as the Plan was a 'living document' it would continually evolve throughout the Municipal year as the Cabinet Forward Plan evolved and from requests by the Committee.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the draft 2023/24 Forward Work Plan be approved.

9. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 5TH APRIL 2023

Reference was made to the Minute 8 relating to the Place and Sustainability business Plan and to a discussion undertaken at the meeting on a communication being sent by the HEAD OF Place and Sustainability to all elected members outlining the Section 106 process and their involvement in that process. It was suggested the minutes of the meeting be amended to reflect that.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 5th April 2023 be signed as a correct record subject to the minute 8 being amended to reflect that a communication was to be sent to all elected members on their involvement in the Section 106 process.

CHAIR

DATE