

COMMUNITIES, HOMES & REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 1 OCTOBER 2024

PRESENT: Councillor R.E. Evans (Chair)

Councillors (In Person):

B. Davies	T. Davies	B.W. Jones	M. Palfreman
S.L. Rees	R. Sparks		

Councillors (Virtually):

W.R.A. Davies	J.K. Howell	D. Owen
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Also in attendance:

Councillor L.D. Evans - Cabinet Member for Homes and Deputy Leader

Councillor H.A.L. Evans – Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Leisure, Culture and Tourism

Councillor C. Jones – Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs, Community Cohesion and Planning Policy

Councillor A. Lenny – Cabinet Member for Resources

Also Present (In Person):

R. Griffiths, Head of Place and Sustainability

I. Jones, Head of Leisure

J. Morgan, Head of Housing and Public Protection

H. Morgan, Economic Development Manager

D. Jones, Group Accountant

K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

R.M. Davies, Investment & Development Service Manager

M. E. Pemberton, Rural Programme Co-ordinator

R. Phillips, Economic Development Area Manager

L. Roberts, Affordable Housing Lead

M. Runeckles, Members Support Officer

L. Davies, Simultaneous Translator

Also Present (Virtually):

D. Hall-Jones, Member Support Officer

Chamber - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP and remotely - 10.00 - 11.50 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H. Davies, H. Shephardson and M. Thomas.

The Chair extended a welcome to Councillor S. Rees to his first meeting following his recent appointment by the Council as a member of the Committee.

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

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

Councillor	Minute No (s)	Nature of Interest
H.A.L. Evans	4 – New Social Housing Allocation Policy	Sister is Chief Executive of a Housing Association in Carmarthenshire
H.A.L. Evans	5 – Low Cost Home Ownership Options for Carmarthenshire	Sister is Chief Executive of a Housing Association in Carmarthenshire
R. Sparks	8 – Revenue & Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2024/25	Owner of a swimming pool in Carmarthen and has dispensation to speak but not vote on swimming related matters
R. Sparks	9 – Revenue Budget Outturn Report – 2023/24	Owner of a swimming pool in Carmarthen and has dispensation to speak but not vote on swimming related matters

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. NEW SOCIAL HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY

(NOTE: Councillor H. Evans having earlier declared an interest in this item left the Council Chamber during its consideration)

The Committee was reminded that following the establishment of an Emergency Social Housing Allocation Policy, developed by its Task and Finish Group, the Cabinet, at its meeting held in April 2023 had adopted that policy and agreed a new permanent policy should be developed subject to a 12 week consultation exercise. That exercise concluded at the end of May 2024, with its findings having been presented to the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on the 8th July, 2024. Subsequent to that meeting, the Committee was presented with the proposed new Social Housing Allocation Policy for its observations, prior to its consideration by the Cabinet, with the main changes detailed below.

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

- Applicants will need to re-register every 6 months instead of 12 months, this is to ensure that the register is regularly reviewed and kept up to date,
- Direct Matching will now be made to all Bands within the Policy and not restricted to Bands A and B,
- Amendments have been made to the names of each of the priority bands to bring it in line with housing legislation,
- The matching criteria is clearly set out in order of how applicants are prioritised,
- Community Connection Areas have been amended to ensure they make geographical sense in terms of allocations,
- Delegated powers is recommended to be given to the Head of Housing to enable new Registered Social Landlords to join the housing register, and,
- The Accessible Housing Register allocation criteria has been included as an Appendix to the wider Allocations Policy.

The following questions/ issues were raised on the report:

- It was confirmed that, as with the current Emergency Social Housing Allocation Policy, regular monitoring reports of the new policy could be provided to future meetings of the committee on a bi-monthly basis. It was also confirmed that a fact sheet could be developed for elected members to help them assist their constituents on any queries they may have on the new policy.
- Reference was made to the provision of housing to residents subject to emergency Delayed Transfer Of Care (DTOC) from hospital. The Head of Housing and Public Protection advised that while the number of DTOC cases were low, the provision within the policy enabled officers to act quickly to provide suitable accommodation when required.
- With regard to a question on the rationale behind the Grouped Community Connection Areas, for example the placing of Lledi within the Llanelli North Ward, the Committee was advised its intention was to restrict community connections to smaller more manageable defined areas than currently existed eg the connection may be employment or family related issues. However, evidence would need to be provided to support that connection and in the case of employment would include proof of employment or offer of employment
- Reference was made to 2.14 within the policy where no priority would be given to applicants on the register in cases of unacceptable behaviour. Clarification was sought on whether that included waste related issues, especially in relation to the new waste blueprint currently being developed by the Council. The Head of Housing and Public Protection advised the Council had established an interdepartmental steering group on waste and that would include council tenants. However, the circumstances relating to individuals on the register would need to be treated on their merits
- With regard to a question relating to an applicant refusing a reasonable offer of accommodation, the Head of Housing and Public Protection advised that in such circumstances it was possible the applicant may not be considered for future housing unless their circumstances changed. However, he stressed that each case would be treated on its individual merits.

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

- Reference was made to the implications section of the report where it stated that an equality impact assessment had been undertaken with no negative impacts having been identified during the assessment process. In that regard, the committee's attention was drawn to the historic anti-social behaviour issues within the Tyisha and Glanymor wards of Llanelli arising from the previous allocation policies, Clarification was therefore sought on whether the new policy would prevent similar situations arising within other wards in the future.

The Committee was advised that the Council's current policies were aimed at creating sustainable communities and to support that aim it had adopted Local Lettings Policies for specific areas, such as new build estates, where appropriate, and introduced a sensitive letting policy to ensure, as far as possible, that past difficulties experienced in communities were not repeated when allocating properties.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the new Social Housing Allocation Policy for Carmarthenshire be received.

5. LOW COST HOME OWNERSHIP OPTIONS FOR CARMARTHESHIRE

(NOTE: Councillor H.Evans having earlier declared an interest in this item left the Council Chamber for its consideration)

The Committee considered a report on increasing the offer options available for Low-Cost Home Ownership within Carmarthenshire detailing both the current options, potential additional options for consideration recommendations for future actions in order to increase the supply of affordable homes for residents.

It was noted that in order to ensure the right people accessed Low Cost Home Ownership, the council would need to apply strict eligibility criteria that included:

- Applicants being able to secure a mortgage and be able to afford the repayments and costs associated with buying a home,
- Eligible persons being able to demonstrate a strong local connection to the area they were seeking to buy a home

If adopted, the policy would help local people to remain in their communities, thereby helping to protect the Welsh Language and culture and ensure the Low Cost Homes products were only available to those who needed it.

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:

- With regard to a question relating to the minimum and maximum housing income threshold bands for each of the four Affordable Housing Action Areas detailed within the report, the committee was advised those had been determined by the Welsh Government to which the Council had to adhere.
- Reference was made to the current economic climate and to the impact that may have on a person's ability to pay a mortgage on a property purchased under the policy. The Investment & Development Service Manager advised that whilst there was a need to ensure at the outset a

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person's ability to pay a mortgage, ultimate payment responsibility rested with the individual.

- It was confirmed that whilst Welsh Government funding for Homebuy Wales was only available to Registered Social Landlords, recommendation 3 within the report recommended that the Council examine funding Low-Cost Home Ownership products directly through the Housing Revenue Account on selected new build sites.
- With regard to a question relating to 'rent to own' schemes, it was confirmed that WG funding was only available to Registered Social Landlords, but that funding for the scheme had not been available for three years. It was, however, something the Council could consider offering in the future under the auspices of the Housing Revenue Account.

UNANIMOUSLY REOLVED that the Low Cost Home Ownership Options for Carmarthenshire be approved.

6. TEN TOWNS INITIATIVE - PROGRESS UPDATE

The Committee, in accordance with its Forward Work Programme, considered a progress report providing a comprehensive update on the Ten Towns Initiative, the aim of which was to support economic growth in the ten rural market towns identified within the report. The report outlined the support secured to progress various initiatives at a local level, emphasized the collaborative efforts between stakeholders while also highlighting the development of economic growth plans tailored for each of the towns focusing on enhancing local infrastructure, boosting tourism and supporting local businesses.

The following questions / issues were raised on the report:

- Reference was made to the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) scheme scheduled to finish by the end of 2024 and to whether any potential risks posed by projects not completing by that time had been identified and managed. The Economic Development Manager advised that all projects were continually monitored for risks in order to maximise spend. There was also a degree of flexibility within the scheme to allow for the completion of capital projects to extend to the end of February 2025
- With regard to a question on any successor to the SPF, the Economic Development Manager advised that whilst the current scheme expired in March 2025 confirmation, or otherwise, of a successor would not be known until the UK Government's Autumn budget at the end of October 2024. However, the Authority was working with both the Welsh Local Government Association and the UK Government on a successor scheme both for the short, and long term.
- Reference was made to the level of community engagement as part of the Ten Towns Programme and the Committee was apprised of the adopted engagement arrangements. The Committee was further advised that should any member wish to receive advice on community engagement, and the progression of schemes/proposals within their individual wards, they were welcome to contact the department.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the progress report be received.

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

**7. 2024/25 QUARTER 1 - PERFORMANCE REPORT (01/04/24-30/06/24)
RELEVANT TO THIS SCRUTINY**

The Committee received the 2024/25 Quarter 1 Performance Report for the period 1st April to 30th June, 2024 in respect of the areas falling within its remit detailing the progress made against the actions and measures within the Corporate Strategy and on the delivery of the Well-Being Objectives.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

8. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2024/25

(NOTE: Councillor R. Sparks having earlier declared an interest in this item, re-declared that interest and remained in the meeting during its consideration)

The Committee considered the 2024/25 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring reports for the Housing, Economic Development & Property, Place and Sustainability and Leisure and Recreation Services for the period up to the 30th June, 2024. It was noted that the revenue budget was forecasting a £287k overspend, the capital budget a £7,784k underspend, whilst the Housing Revenue Account was forecasting a £1,742k overspend.

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

- In response to a question relating to the level of childhood obesity within the County, the Head of Leisure advised that the Council was situated within the lower quartile of Welsh Local Authorities. However, the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee, having identified Childhood obesity as an issue within the County, had established a Task and Finish Group to examine the matter, in association with its many partners. The Group's findings and conclusions had now been finalised and a report thereon was progressing through the Council's political process.
- Reference was made to the Pendine Outdoor Education Centre income stream being off target and the Head of Leisure advised it was attributable to the partial closure of the facility early in the season to allow for essential maintenance works to be completed. He further apprised the Committee of the future proposals for the site which would see its closure at the end of Autumn 2025 and the provision of a new facility at Pembrey Country Park as part of the revised outdoor education model from the spring of 2026.
- With regard to the pause in the capital programme for the levelling up fund within Llanelli, referenced within Appendix E, the Economic Development Manager confirmed the pause was linked to the UK Government's proposals due at the end of October and that, hopefully, a new scheme would emerge as part of those proposals.

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

9. REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN REPORT 2023/24

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

(NOTE: Councillor R. Sparks having earlier declared an interest in this item, re-declared that interest and remained in the meeting during its consideration)

The Committee considered the Revenue Budget Outturn Report 2023/24 in respect of the Housing, Regeneration & Property, Place and Sustainability and Leisure & Recreation services falling within its remit. It noted that, overall, the services reported a £492k underspend, with the HRA recording a £404k overspend.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

10. COUNCILLOR MARTYN PALFREMAN - SCRUTINY AGENDA ITEM REQUEST - PLANNING CONSULTATIONS - TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Committee, in accordance with Article 6 (6) of the Council's constitution considered a Scrutiny Agenda Item Request received from Councillor Martyn Palfreman for the Committee to establish a Task and Finish Group to undertake a comprehensive review into the Council's Planning Consultation process to address current perceived deficiencies within the existing system.

Councillor Palfreman was afforded the opportunity of addressing the Committee in support of his request and advised that whilst the current process complied with minimum statutory requirements, he considered those to be inadequate in that Public notices of planning applications were not always displayed in appropriately prominent locations, and on occasions disappeared before the end of the notice period with only occupants of immediately adjoining premises being informed of proposals in writing, meaning that others in the vicinity might have no knowledge of plans which could affect them directly and materially. To address those perceived deficiencies, he felt a comprehensive review could identify improvements to provide residents with a meaningful opportunity to have a say on proposed developments in their local environment with potential improvements to address those deficiencies to include:

- Providing written notice of applications to occupants of **all** properties within a reasonable radius of proposed developments, and certainly those that will be impacted visually and be affected by factors such as reduced parking and anticipated increased traffic flows
- Ensuring that public notices are always displayed in locations reasonably accessible to the public and that these locations are monitored throughout the notice period to make certain that notices are not damaged, defaced or removed
- Enhancements to the online planning portal to rationalise information and facilitate public access to supporting documentation

Cllr Palfreman suggested that if his request for a Task and Finish review was accepted, it could consider the viability of the above improvements, and others as appropriate, whilst also taking account of:

1. Legislative requirements,

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

2. Implications of the Council's wider commitments to effective engagement with communities
3. Evidenced best practice in other areas and
4. Resource implications of suggested changes and lead to recommendations for improvement for consideration by an appropriate committee of the Council.

The Committee in considering the request, was apprised of the legal and regulatory requirements associated with the planning consultation process (which varied depending upon the type of planning application), the outcome of the recent Cullen Review (which recommended no changes to the current arrangements) and also potential cost implications of amending the current arrangements. As a result, a view was expressed that given the fact the issues raised were applicable to all members of council, it would be beneficial, in the first instance, if a member seminar could be arranged on the planning consultation process as a means of widening its understanding.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

- 10.1 **That the committee do not proceed with a Task and Finish Group on Planning Consultations.**
- 10.2 **That arrangements be made for a member seminar to be convened on the planning consultation process.**

11. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee received a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting to be held on the 11 November, 2024.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the proposed Pentre Awel report to be considered at its next meeting and to the fact a seminar on the developments current position had been arranged for the 9th October 2024. It was enquired, in view of the forthcoming seminar, whether the Committee wished to defer the report to its January meeting

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on the 11th November, 2024 be approved subject to the Pentre Awel report being deferred to the meeting to be held on the 20th January 2025.

12. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 8TH JULY 2024

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 8th July, 2024 be signed as a correct record.

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.