

COMMUNITY AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 12 April 2021

PRESENT: Councillor F. Akhtar (Chair)

Councillors:

C.A. Davies, W.R.A. Davies, H.L. Davies, D.C. Evans, R.E. Evans, S.J.G. Gilasbey, B.W. Jones, H.I. Jones, S. Matthews, H.B. Shepardson, D. Thomas and G.B. Thomas

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
D.M. Jenkins, Executive Board Member for Resources
L.M. Stephens, Deputy Leader of the Council and Leader of the Independent Group
H.A.L. Evans, Executive Board Member for Environment

The following Officers were in attendance:

L. Quelch, Head of Planning
J. Jones, Head of Regeneration
I. Jones, Head of Leisure
R. Hemingway, Head of Financial Services
J. Morgan, Head of Homes & Safer Communities
J. Fearn, Head of Property
J. Davies, Senior Cultural Services Manager
M. Jewell, Library Services Manager
H. Burns, Archives Transformation Manager
M. Evans Thomas, Principal Democratic Services Officer
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator
J. Corner, Technical Officer
R. Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer
A. Kenyon, Senior Performance Management Officer
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

Virtual Meeting - 2.00 - 3.30 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, expressed condolences to the Royal Family on the death of Prince Phillip, the Duke of Edinburgh. It was noted the Chair of Council had written a letter of condolence to Her Royal Highness, Queen Elizabeth, on the Council's behalf.

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 Number	Nature of Interest
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J Gilasbey	6 – Revenue & Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2020/21	Trustee of Kidwelly Tinplate Museum- Has dispensation to speak but not vote
J Gilasbey	6 – Revenue & Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2020/21	Rent - Family member is a council tenant
J. Gilasbey	10 – Forthcoming Items	Executive Board Forward Work Programme – School in her ward is detailed in the report
R. Evans	5 – Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020	Daughter works for the library service

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. CARMARTHENSHIRE ARCHIVES FORWARD PLAN

The Committee received a report presented by the Executive Board Member for Culture Sport and Tourism on the Draft Carmarthenshire Archives Forward Plan detailing the services' aims and objectives for the period 2021-24, which included submitting an application in 2023 for accreditation under the National Archives Accreditation Scheme. The Plan's key objectives were to:-

- Collect, care for, document and develop the country's archives in whatever format and provide access to them in imaginative, innovative and inclusive ways;
- Ensure the service was accessible, sustainable and friendly, reaching beyond its visiting audiences, and all with the highest standards of customer care;
- Offer visitors and volunteers engaging and informative experiences, as well as creating new and compelling opportunities for learning.

The following issues were raised on the report:-

- Clarification was sought on the reference within the SWOT analysis on the service operating with reduced staffing levels and to what measures, if any, were being taken to address that weakness.

The Head of Leisure advised that while staffing levels had been kept low due to the closure of the archives, discussions were being undertaken with the library service on how its staff could supplement the archives thereby increasing staffing resilience. The service would be able to utilise volunteer staff / friends to assist with its operation. He was confident resources would be available to operate the service

- In response to a question on there being no digital preservation or systematic digitisation within the service, the Executive Board Member advised that while that had not been undertaken over recent years, its provision was now being progressed

The Head of Leisure confirmed digitisation was one of the key elements of

future service provision with the aim of making more services digitally available to schools not just for the archives service but also the libraries and museums. Digitisation would also assist in making Carmarthenshire's records/information available worldwide

- The Senior Cultural Services Manager referred to a question on the creation of a link to the National Library of Wales' National Broadcast Archive portal for accessing film archives. Although work on the project had been delayed due to re-profiling, she confirmed it was expected that a CLIP centre would be available towards the end of 2021/early 2022 at Carmarthen Library and Archives

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Draft Carmarthenshire Archives Forward Plan be received.

5. WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS 2017-2020

(NOTE: Councillor R. Evans declared an interest in this item)

The Committee considered a report presented by the Executive Board Member for Culture, Sport and Tourism on Carmarthenshire Library Services' Annual Assessment 2019/20 produced in accordance with the requirements of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 that placed a Statutory Duty on all Public Library Authorities 'to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service' and on Welsh Ministers 'to superintend and promote the improvement' of public library services in Wales. In accordance with that requirement, the Welsh Government had completed its assessment of Carmarthenshire's Library Services Annual Return for 2019/20 against the 6th Quality Assessment Framework, with Carmarthenshire meeting all 12 core entitlements in full. Of the nine quality indicators which had targets, Carmarthenshire had achieved seven in full, with one having been partially met and one not achieved.

The following issues were raised on the report:

- Reference was made to the 85% increase in children's book issues since 2018/9 and the service was congratulated on that increase
- It was confirmed although the library service was now open to the public, visitor numbers were restricted to comply with social distancing measures which included allowing the public to browse the book collection. Although browsing was not permitted within the mobile library service, operatives could assist the public with making book choices. Books could also be ordered via 'click and collect' for delivery by the mobile service.
- With regard to the Makerspace project, the Library Services Manager confirmed that in addition to the original provision in Ammanford Library, the facility had also opened in Carmarthen Library and would shortly be extended to Llanelli Library thereby completing its provision in the three regional libraries. It was also noted that Carmarthenshire was the first local authority in Wales to provide the service

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Welsh Public Library Standards Report 2019-2020 be received.

6. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2020/21

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

The Committee considered a report presented by the Head of Financial Services on the 2020/21 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring reports for the Housing, Regeneration, Planning and Leisure and Recreation Services for the period up to the 31st December 2020. It was noted that the revenue budget was forecasting a £201k underspend, the capital budget a £27,092k underspend, whilst the Housing Revenue Account was forecasting a £2,937k underspend.

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

- The Head of Regeneration in response to a question on the forecasted £143k variance for the livestock markets due to an income shortfall at Nant Y Ci Mart, reminded the Committee the Council had recently sought tenders for the operation of that Mart. Those tenders were now being evaluated and it was anticipated an announcement on the mart's operation would be made in the near future.
- Reference was made to the projected £88k variance in commercial property income and to there being no immediate prospect of re-letting. The Head of Regeneration confirmed that was attributable to loss of income arising from the covid pandemic with some businesses having ceased trading and others having been granted a rent freeze. He advised while the current situation continued it was hoped the authority would be able to retain as many of its business tenants as possible
- With regard to the operation of the St Clears Leisure Centre, the Head of Leisure advised that a number of areas were being pursued to increase its usage and reduce the current subsidy level. Those included ongoing discussions with the St Clears Community Council on a partnering arrangement,(for Y Gat specifically, but which also linked to the wider review of community assets in the locality) investment in new fitness equipment, the use of S106 money from an adjoining housing development to invest in the centre, and discussions with existing tenants and users. A capital scheme had also been developed but required additional funding to proceed. He reminded the Committee that although there was the intent to reduce the subsidy level, it should be mindful such facilities in rural areas were more likely to require some subsidy due to lower population densities and largely fixed asset charges such as rates and energy costs for large buildings such as leisure centres.
- The Head of Leisure in response to a question on the projected £200k variance for works to the Carmarthen Museum at Abergwili advised that it related to additional unforeseen works to deal with dry rot, as part of the agreed scheme to replace the roof of the museum. Although the project had included an element of contingency funding, that had been insufficient to cover the additional capital costs thereby requiring a revenue contribution. Those works had now been completed and the building was watertight.

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

7. DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES DEPARTMENTAL BUSINESS PLAN 2021/22

The Committee considered the Communities Departmental Draft Business Plan

2021/22. The Deputy Leader of the Council advised the Committee that each of the Business Plans being presented to it that day provided a summary of the key actions and measures required to support the delivery of the Corporate Strategy and the Council's Well-being Objectives. Each plan was supported by detailed divisional plans and subject to regular review.

The following issues/questions were raised on the report:

- With regard to a question on recovering membership and user numbers within Leisure facilities to pre-covid levels and beyond by 31/3/22, the Head of Leisure advised a number of avenues were being pursued to achieve that aim. Those included targeting existing members, via the members' database, increased use of social media and marketing and liaising with other council departments, such as social care and education, to attract new users to the facilities post pandemic

He commented that one of the difficulties in achieving the measure was the uncertainty of how the public would react post covid. It was anticipated use of outdoor facilities such as Pembrey Country Park would increase during the summer months especially for the camp site and catering. The leisure centres are scheduled to re-open from the 1st May, and although no date had yet been provided for the opening of theatres any lost income from their continued closure was being met from the Welsh Government's hardship fund.

- With regard to the refurbishment works for Park Howard, Llanelli, the Head of Leisure advised they had been delayed while listed building consent was obtained. That consent had now been received and discussions were being held with the appointed contractors to commence works as soon as possible. Those would include repairs to the roof in the main, with the aim of progressing to addressing electrical and mechanical works as the next phase and then more cosmetic work as resources allowed over the coming months and years

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Communities Departmental Business Plan 2021/22 insofar as it related to Housing and Leisure Services be received.

8. REGENERATION EXTRACT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DEPARTMENTAL BUSINESS PLAN 2021/22

The Committee considered a report providing an extract of the Chief Executive's Departmental Business Plan 2021/22 for Regeneration Services. It was noted that as outlined in minute 7 above by the Deputy Leader of the Council, the Business Plan provided a summary of the key actions and measures required to support the delivery of the Corporate Strategy and the Council's Well-being Objectives and was supported by a detailed divisional plan subject to regular review.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Regeneration Services element of the Chief Executive's Business Plan 2021/22 be received.

9. ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENTAL BUSINESS PLAN 2021/22

The Committee considered the Environment Departmental Draft Business Plan

2021/22 in relation to those services falling within its remit i.e. Property and Planning. It was noted that, as outlined in minute 7 above by the Deputy Leader of the Council, the Business Plan provided a summary of the key actions and measures required to support the delivery of the Corporate Strategy and the Council's Well-being Objectives and was supported by detailed divisional plans subject to regular review.

The following issues/questions were raised on the report:

- The Head of Planning in response to a question on addressing Ash Die Back disease within the County, confirmed most tree felling works were being contracted via the Ash Die back Contractor framework. However, consideration is being undertaken on the feasibility of training council staff to undertake felling works on its own land, no outcome of that consideration as yet. She further confirmed the current budget allocation was sufficient to enable works to be undertaken at this point in time.
- The Head of Planning confirmed outside consultants had been engaged to help reduce the current backlog of planning applications awaiting determination and that site visits were being undertaken by officers, subject to compliance with current covid regulations.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Environment Departmental Business Plan 2021/22 insofar as it related to Property and Planning Services be received.

10. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

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

The Committee received a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting to be held on the 17th May 2021.

RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on the 17TH May 2021 be noted.

11. MINUTES

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 25th February, 2021 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE