

ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22 DECEMBER 2021

PRESENT: Councillor J.D. James (Chair)

Councillors:

J.M. Charles, T.A.J. Davies, J.A. Davies, P.M. Edwards, S.J.G. Gilasbey, T.M. Higgins, B.D.J. Phillips, J.S. Phillips, D. Thomas, A. Vaughan Owen and A.D.T. Speake.
D.E. Williams - Substitute for Councillor K. Davies.

Also in attendance:

Councillor H.A.L. Evans, Cabinet Member for Environment;
Councillor P.M. Hughes, Cabinet Member for Public Protection;
Councillor J. Tremlett, Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health.

The following Officers were in attendance:

R. Mullen, Director of Environment;
N. Daniel, Head of ICT and Corporate Policy; Interim Head of Planning;
J. Morgan, Head of Homes & Safer Communities;
A. Williams, Head of Waste and Environmental Services
E. Evans, Principal Democratic Services Officer;
R. S. Waters, Highways and Transportation Services Manager;
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer;
A. Eynon, Principal Translator;
J. Owen, Democratic Services Officer;

Virtual Meeting: 2:00pm - 3:05pm

[NOTE: Councillor Aled Vaughan-Owen as Vice Chair presided the meeting for Agenda Item 7 only, due to the Chair having connection issues].

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND OTHER PERSONAL MATTERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K. Davies, E. Morgan and Councillor A. Davies, Cabinet Member for Communities and Rural Affairs.

The Chair conveyed his best wishes to Councillor Eryl Morgan who had recently been admitted to hospital following a fall. On behalf of the Committee, the Chair wished Councillor Morgan a speedy recovery and proposed that the sentiments be forwarded to Councillor Morgan by way of a letter. This was duly seconded.

The Chair acknowledged that this meeting was Mrs Ruth Mullen, Director of Environment's last meeting with the Council and wished to express his sincere thanks to her for the professional work and her support to the Committee. The Committee wished Mrs Mullen well in her future endeavours.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Chair send a letter of best wishes to Councillor Morgan on behalf of the Committee.

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

There were no declarations of any prohibited party whips.
There were no declarations of interest made.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. 2021/22 QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT (1ST APRIL TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2021)

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 Environment, Public Protection and Social Care and Health 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 comments/queries were raised in relation to the actions attributed to the Environment portfolio:-

- In reference to page 7 of the report, compliments were expressed to the cleansing teams for their rapid response to calls in removing excess waste in bottle bank areas. The Cabinet Member for Public Protection agreed that the teams were very proactive and stated that as this matter resided within the public protection portfolio, he would ensure that the Committee's compliments were forwarded to the relevant teams.
- Reference was made to action reference PAM/030 - Percentage of waste reused, recycled or composted. It was asked in relation to the significant disruption to the normal waste sorting, treatment and disposal arrangements as a result of fire at CWM's Nantycaws materials recovery facility, if the Welsh Government would be understanding with regard to targets? The Cabinet Member for Environment stated that it was hoped that the Welsh Government would be understanding of the position and explained that measures had been put in place to assist in meeting the targets whilst the challenges in relation to sorting the waste continue.

The Head of Waste and Environmental Services confirmed that the Welsh Government were fully sighted of the situation. In addition, close monitoring of the position was a priority particularly during the pandemic.

- In response to a query in relation to the cataloguing and classification of potholes throughout the County, the Cabinet Member for Environment stated that the Highways Asset Management Plan sets out the hierarchy of highway repair against the classification of road. The Director of Environment further explained that the repair of a pothole would be prioritised by considering the two 'need categorisation' criteria; 1) the nature of the road that the pothole has occurred and 2) the severity of the pothole. Based on the criteria, should a pothole meet the criteria for immediate repair it would be completed within 24hours. However, a pothole that was deemed not severe and was located on a low usage category road would not be classified for intervention and would therefore remain in place. The Director echoed the comments of the Cabinet Member for Environment regarding the Highways Asset Management Plan which considers the conditions of the highway as a whole.
- Reference was made to the promised action 'We will work with communities to submit bids to the Welsh Government to secure funding for the development of Safer Routes in Communities and Active Travel to improve walking routes to encourage more sustainable travel to assist with achieving the objective of decarbonisation – action number 14964. Whilst the action indicates to be on target, concern was raised there was only one opportunity to submit a bid to secure funding for the development of Safer Routes in Communities in rural areas in any one year. Concern was expressed that Carmarthenshire contained a vast rural area and that only one application per year would not be enough to provide the necessary funding for safer routes in a timely manner. It was asked if this could be improved upon? The Cabinet Member for Environment stated that bids were based on the available grants from the Welsh Government and in this case, it was one urban and one rural per year. The concerns were substantiated, in the confirmation that following advertisement and criteria matching, 300+ applications had been received for the provision of safer routes. The Director of Environment specified that in terms of the performance report the action was on target aligned to the available budget.

In an effort to encourage the Welsh Government to increase the opportunity to obtain funding for Safer Routes in communities, it was proposed that the Committee write a letter to the appropriate Minister within the Welsh Government to request that funding for Safer Routes in Communities is increased and that the eligibility criteria widened to support the development of more projects. This was duly seconded.

No comments/queries were raised in relation to the actions attributed to the Public Protection portfolio.

In the absence of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Rural Affairs, the Chair invited comments/queries from Committee Members in relation to the actions attributed to the Communities and Rural Affairs portfolio. No comments/queries were raised.

The following comments/queries were raised on in relation to the actions attributed to the Social Care and Health portfolio:-

- Reference was made to WBO7. Help people live healthy lives (Tackling risky behaviour and obesity) Sub-theme: D - Substance Misuse located on page 20 of the agenda pack. It was asked what the definition of 'Risky Behaviour' was in respect of this WBO? To ensure to provide an accurate definition the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health offered to forward the definition of risky behaviour in the context of substance misuse to Committee members by e-mail.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- 4.1 the 2021/22 Quarter 2 Performance Report (1st April to 30th September 2021) be received;**
- 4.2 that the Committee write a letter to the Deputy Minister for Climate Change to request that funding for Safer Routes in Communities is increased and that the eligibility criteria widened to support the development of more projects.**

5. LOCAL TOILETS STRATEGY INTERIM PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered the Local Toilets Strategy Interim Progress Report presented by the Cabinet Member for Environment.

The strategy had been developed in accordance with Part 8 of the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 which placed a duty on each Local Authority in Wales to prepare and publish a local toilets strategy for its area.

It was reported that there was no statutory requirement for Local Authorities to provide public toilets and the duty to prepare a strategy did not in itself require Local Authorities to provide and maintain public toilets themselves, however Local Authorities were required to take a strategic view across their area on how toilet provisions could be provided and accessed by the local population.

Carmarthenshire County Council published its Local Toilets Strategy during August 2019. The progress of the strategy's 10 key recommendations to enhance Carmarthenshire's long term toilet provision was included in the report.

The following comments/queries were raised in relation to the report:-

- It was asked if there would be any changes in relation to the charges? The Head of Waste and Environmental Services explained that the current charge was maintained at 20p across all units and any future consideration to change this would have to be considered as part of the budget consultation.
- In response to a query raised regarding Danfo, the Head of Waste and Environmental Services explained that Danfo, the company contracted to service and clean 9 of the toilet facilities throughout the County had around 12-18 months remaining under the current contract.

- It was commented that there had been a noticeable improvement on the cleanliness of the toilets within town centres and commended the Officers on a well written report.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO CABINET that the Local Toilets Strategy Interim Progress Report be endorsed.

6. DRAFT PLANNING ENFORCEMENT STATEMENT

The Committee considered the Draft Planning Enforcement Statement presented by the Cabinet Member for Public Protection.

It was reported that the recent Wales Audit Office review of Planning Services had highlighted the significant backlog of unresolved complaints within Carmarthenshire's Planning Enforcement service and in response to the findings of the report, the Council was reviewing how it would carry out its enforcement responsibilities. The current Enforcement Policy developed in 2015 later followed by an overarching Corporate Enforcement Policy which was adopted in April 2018. There was now a need to review the original Planning Enforcement Statement to take account of changes within both the internal and external environment and to re-establish as the Planning Enforcement Statement.

The following comments/queries were raised in relation to the report:-

- The Interim Head of Planning, in response to a query raised regarding the number of enforcement staff explained that currently there were 4 permanent staff and 2 additional staff on a 12-month contract to manage all planning enforcement cases across the County.

Furthermore, the team together with the additional staff, had in the last 7 months successfully reduced the backlog of unresolved enforcement cases by closing 428 cases. Whilst new cases had continued to come in, it was reported that the backlog had reduced from just under 1000 cases to 698 as of today.

- It was asked how unsolicited siting's of caravans on parcels of woodland were being managed? The Interim Head of Planning acknowledged that this matter was a growing concern in all rural areas across the Country and that the planning department deal with such matters in line with standard practice and enforcement procedures as and when they are brought to the attention of the planning section.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO CABINET that the Draft Planning Enforcement Statement be endorsed.

7. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

[Note: Due to the Chair having connection issues Councillor Aled Vaughan-Owen as Vice Chair presided the meeting for this item]

The Committee considered the list of forthcoming items to be placed on the agenda for the next meeting scheduled to take place on 1st February 2022 and was afforded the opportunity to request for any specific information that Members may wish to include within the reports.

The Committee noted the questions and responses that was received in relation to the Budget Monitoring Report (1st April 2021 – 30th August 2021) which was circulated to Members outside of the formal Committee process in accordance with the Forward Work Programme.

In recognising that the next meeting would be considering the budget consultation, it was proposed that the Budget Monitoring Report (1st April 2021 – 30th October 2021) be placed on the formal agenda for consideration, this was duly seconded.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- 7.1 the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on the 1st February 2022 be noted;**
- 7.2 the queries and responses included in the report in respect of the Budget Monitoring Report (1st April 2021 to 30th August 2021) be noted.**
- 7.3 the Budget Monitoring Report (1st April 2021 to 30th October 2021) be included on the agenda for the next meeting on 1st February 2022.**

8. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 25TH NOVEMBER 2021

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

CHAIR

DATE