

COUNTY COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY, 8 MARCH 2023

PRESENT: Councillor R.E. Evans (Chair)

Councillors (In Person):

S.M. Allen	W.R.A. Davies	T.A.J. Davies	B. Davies
G. Davies	L. Davies	L.D. Evans	N. Evans
P.M. Hughes	G.H. John	D. Jones	H. Jones
A. Lenny	D. Nicholas	D. Price	B.A.L. Roberts
E.G. Thomas	M. Thomas	J. Tremlett	A. Vaughan Owen

Councillors (Virtually):

K.V. Broom	J.M. Charles	M.D. Cranham	D.M. Cundy
S.A. Curry	A. Davies	C. Davies	H.L. Davies
K. Davies	L.M. Davies	T. Davies	M. Donoghue
A. Evans	H.A.L. Evans	W.T. Evans	S. Godfrey-Coles
A.D. Harries	J.P. Hart	T.M. Higgins	J.K. Howell
P. Hughes-Griffiths	J.D. James	M. James	R. James
J.P. Jenkins	A.C. Jones	N. Lewis	A. Leyshon
K. Madge	A.G. Morgan	D. Owen	M. Palfreman
B.D.J. Phillips	S.L. Rees	E.M.J.G. Schiavone	H.B. Shepardson
E. Skinner	R. Sparks	D. Thomas	F. Walters
P.T. Warlow	D.E. Williams	J. Williams	

Also Present (In Person):

W. Walters, Chief Executive;
C. Moore, Director of Corporate Services;
J. Morgan, Director of Community Services;
G. Morgans, Director of Education & Children's Services;
A. Williams, Director of Place and Infrastructure;
L.R. Jones, Head of Administration and Law
R. Hemingway, Head of Financial Services;
P.R. Thomas, Assistant Chief Executive (People Management & Performance);
G. Morgan, Head of Democratic Services;
A. Wood, People Services Manager;
C. Higginson, Media Manager;
L. Jenkins, Cabinet Support Officer;
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator;
M.S. Davies, Democratic Services Officer;

Also Present (Virtually):

J. Owens, Democratic Services Officer.

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen and remotely: 10.00 am - 12.30 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C. Davies, D.C. Evans, B.W. Jones, G.R. Jones, M.J.A. Lewis, E. Rees, J. Seward and G.B. Thomas.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS

Councillor	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
L.R. Bowen	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Wife works in Council's Translation Unit;
K. Broom	6 - Second Homes and Empty Properties Council Tax Premiums;	Owns a property used as a holiday let;
J.M. Charles	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	A relative works in a non-teaching capacity in a secondary school;
M.D. Cranham	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Son works for the Council;
S. Godfrey-Coles	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Partner works for the Council;
D.M. Cundy	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	A number of relatives work for the Council;
D.M. Cundy	6 - Second Homes and Empty Properties Council Tax Premiums;	A relative owns a second home;
S.A. Curry	6 - Second Homes and Empty Properties Council Tax Premiums;	Owns a holiday home;
B. Davies	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Wife works in the Community Services Department of the Council;
L.M. Davies	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Sister-in-Law works as a teaching assistant;
T. Davies	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Family member works as a Teaching Assistant;
T.A.J. Davies	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Sister-in-Law works for the Council;
A. Evans	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Mother works in the Council's Democratic Services Section;
H.A.L. Evans	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Friend works for the Council;
H.A.L. Evans	6 - Second Homes and Empty Properties Council Tax Premiums;	Relative owns a holiday home;
L.D. Evans	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Relative works as a Teaching Assistant;
L.D. Evans	6 - Second Homes and Empty Properties Council Tax Premiums;	Relative owns a holiday home;
N. Evans	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Daughter works in Council's Library Services;
R.E. Evans	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Daughter works in Council's Library Services;

J.P. Hart	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Family members work for the Council;
T.M. Higgins	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Niece works in the Council's Libraries services;
P.M. Hughes	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Family member works for the Council;
J.D. James	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Son-in-Law works for the Council;
M. James	6 - Second Homes and Empty Properties Council Tax Premiums;	Likely to own an additional property during the period in question;
R. James	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Partner works in Council's Library Services;
G.H. John	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Family member works for the Council;
A.C. Jones	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Daughter-in Law works for the Council;
H. Jones	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Family member works as a teaching assistant;
A. Leyshon	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Daughter works in Council's Library Services;
K. Madge	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Daughter works in Social Care section of the Council;
D. Nicholas	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Daughter works in the Council's Planning Section;
M. Palfreman	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Friends work for the Council;
B.D.J. Phillips	6 - Second Homes and Empty Properties Council Tax Premiums;	Owens a holiday let;
B.A.L. Roberts	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Family members work for the Council;
F. Walters	5 – Pay Policy Statement 2023/24;	Family members work for the Council;
E. Williams	6 - Second Homes and Empty Properties Council Tax Premiums;	Has a share in his late mother's house.

3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The Chair stated that he and his Consort, Cllr. Nysia Evans, had had the pleasure of attending a number of events recently including the 111th birthday celebration of Mary Kier at Awel Tywi Care Home, Ffairfach, Llandeilo;

The Chair welcomed Lili Evans, Sam Williams, Magda Smith, Olivia Smolicz, Marianna Pilichowska and Zach Davis, members of the Youth Council, who were watching the proceedings on line. They were all working towards their Local Councillor Shadowing Award and some had been present in the Chamber at the previous Council meeting;

- Councillor Tyssul Evans stated that on St. David's Day he had had the pleasure of attending celebrations at Llangyndeyrn Village Hall to commemorate 60 years since the village had been saved from being drowned in 1963. Councillor Evans recounted his own recollections from 1963.

4. **SETTING THE COUNCIL TAX FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2023/24**

The Council received a report, presented by the Cabinet Member for Resources, setting out the financial details relevant to the setting of the Council Tax for the 2023/2024 financial year together with the Council Tax amounts in respect of the different Council Tax Valuation Bands, as applicable to each of the individual Community and Town Council areas.

It was noted that the recommendations contained within the report brought together the authority's budget requirement and the precepts for the Police Authority and the Town and Community Councils into the consolidated Council Tax amounts in respect of the individual Council Tax Valuation bands.

RESOLVED that, in order for the Council to comply with legislative requirements, the report and recommendations of the Director of Corporate Services on the setting of the Council Tax for the financial year 2023/24 be adopted.

5. **PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2023/24**

[NOTE:

1. Councillors L.R. Bowen, J.M. Charles, M.D. Cranham, S. Godfrey-Coles, D.M. Cundy, B. Davies, L.M. Davies, T. Davies, A. Evans, H.A.L. Evans, L.D. Evans, N. Evans, R.E. Evans, J.P. Hart, T.M. Higgins, P.M. Hughes, J.D. James, R. James, G.H. John, A.C. Jones, H. Jones, A. Leyshon, K. Madge, D. Nicholas, M. Palfreman, B.A.L. Roberts and F. Walters had earlier declared interests in this item and, left the meeting;
2. All officers in attendance were deemed to have a personal interest in this item and left the meeting prior to its consideration with the exception of the the Democratic Services Manager, Democratic Services Officer and officers who were facilitating the webcasting of the meeting.
3. As the Cabinet Member for Organisation and Workforce had declared an interest in this item and left the meeting the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Services presented the report on his behalf.]

Prior to the departure of the aforementioned from the meeting, which included the Chair and Vice-Chair, it was moved, seconded and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that Cllr. Dot Jones be appointed to Chair the meeting for this item.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Social Services, on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Organisation and Workforce, presented the report which outlined that, under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 all Local Authorities were

required to prepare a Pay Policy Statement which must be agreed and published by 1st April every year.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Social Services stated that, unlike many Authorities, Carmarthenshire County Council had a politically balanced Pay Policy Advisory Panel, which have already considered and advised on the Pay Policy Statement. The format of the Statement was, she added, compliant with the relevant legislation and guidance including guidance issued by the Welsh Government and best practice developed by the former Public Services Staff Commission. This year's Pay Policy Statement did not differ hugely from what had been presented this time last year. The key amendments were updated introductions from the Leader, and Chief Executive, which reflected the very different demands which had been placed upon the Council, post the COVID-19 pandemic and the current economic and financial pressures that society in general was facing.

It was the Authority's wish to continue to support the lowest paid, by ensuring that the voluntary Real Living Wage threshold was met by paying the equivalent of £10.90 per hour from 1st April 2023. The 22/23 Pay Award also removed point 1 of the salary scales and therefore the lowest hourly rate would be £10.59. The Pay Advisory Panel had therefore recommended that support for the lowest paid be continued by paying a supplement to bring hourly rates up to the Real Living Wage rate of £10.90.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Social Services advised on the further support for lowest paid staff, particularly our Home Care and Residential Care Workers and Refuse Loaders and Drivers. Trade Unions had raised an issue with the pay grading of the Refuse Loaders and refuse Drivers over a year ago. As a result the job profiles for both had been revised to reflect the new and proposed duties that both sets of workers would be undertaking to deliver the expectations of the new Waste Strategy. Both had seen an increase in their grades, with the Refuse Loaders going from a Grade C to a Grade D, and the Drivers going from a Grade E to a Grade F. Comparing the salaries from April 2023 to the same period last year this represented an increase in salary of 24% for the loaders. For the drivers compared with this time last year the total increase for their pay would be 27% overall. Taking into account the 2023/24 pay award that had yet to be agreed. The trade unions had confirmed that they were still in dispute with the authority on this issue and intended to ballot their members.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Social Services commented that the Pay Panel Advisory Panel had considered a number of Pay Model Options to include one that reflected the removal of Scale Point One as this has been agreed nationally, at an additional cost of £10k. The preferred Pay Model submitted by the Trade Unions had seen the removal of all the overlapping grades and also the reduction of the number of scale points per grade to two. This option had been costed at nearly £5m. The Panel had taken into account the challenges brought about by Government economic Policies in the Autumn which had led to the Authority potentially facing a budget deficit of around £40m. It was considered, therefore, that the Council had little choice other than to use the salaries headroom budget relied on by the Trade Unions to fund their preferred model to assist in producing a balanced budget.

The Panel had also considered a Pay Model that removed all overlapping grades at an estimated cost of £2.5m, a further Pay model that removed overlapping grades up to and including Grade F, at an estimated cost of £1.25m, and, finally, a pay Model that removed overlapping grades up to and including Grade D, at an estimated cost of £200k. It had accepted the financial difficulties that the Authority, like all other Authorities, was facing, but had expressed a commitment to review the bottom end of the Payscale during the next financial year, and possibly consider a 'phased approach' to implementing any changes. Members of the Panel had requested that a review be undertaken of the Authority's current pay model within the next financial year, to take into account the statutory national living wage as well as the voluntary Real Living Wage.

Council was reminded that teachers pay did not fall within the scope of this pay policy statement as teachers had their own pay policy which school governing bodies were required to adopt.

RESOLVED that the Pay Policy Statement 2023/24 be approved in compliance with Section 38(1) of the Localism Act 2011.

[Whereupon the members who had declared an interest and had left the meeting were readmitted and Cllr. R.E. Evans took the Chair].

6. SECOND HOMES AND EMPTY PROPERTIES COUNCIL TAX PREMIUMS

Following a debate as to whether the issue of adopting a premium on second homes, referred to in the circulated report, could be considered and determined separately from the adoption of a premium on empty properties, also referred to in the circulated report, it was moved, seconded and duly

RESOLVED that the report on Second Homes and Empty Properties Council Tax Premiums be considered as circulated.

[NOTE: Councillors K.V. Broom, M. James, D.M. Cundy, S.A. Curry, H.A.L. Evans, L.D. Evans, B.D.J. Phillips and E. Williams had earlier declared interests in this item and left the meeting.] Cllr K.V. Broom having been granted dispensation to speak but not vote remained in the meeting during the debate but was placed in the waiting room during voting.

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented a report which sought approval for the adoption of premiums on second homes and empty properties. He commented that there were over 800 second homes in Carmarthenshire and 1,800 houses that had been empty for at least over a year – and a number for many years. Both categories of properties had, he stated, an adverse effect on local communities and the purpose of the report was to either encourage greater use of these properties or ensure that their owners contributed more towards local communities through a Council Tax premium.

In the case of the long-term empty houses the Cabinet Member for Resources highlighted the negative effect they had on streets, often becoming the target of vandalism and a wasted resource. Turning these into homes once more should result in less demand for new houses to be built on green fields. He commended the council for bringing 700 empty houses back into use since 2016 and

considered that a new policy was needed for further improvement. The Council, he pointed out, had consulted widely on this issue with 61% of respondents agreeing that long-term empty housing adversely effected local communities and a majority agreeing with charging a premium. It was proposed to charge a 50% premium on houses that had been empty from one to two years, rising to 100% between two and five years, and 200% after five years.

On the issue of second homes the Cabinet Member for Resources expressed the view that the answer lay, in part, in the legislation passed by the Welsh Government in 2014 and recently amended and strengthened. The legislation aimed to ensure that Second Homes which were holiday lets were either let for at least 182 days a year, which would boost the tourism industry, or that owners paid a premium on the Council Tax. This contribution could, it was suggested, alleviate the negative impact of Second Homes when they reduced the local housing stock and pushed up house prices to the extent that even essential workers like nurses and teachers were unable to afford to live in the communities in which they had been brought up.

It was therefore proposed to charge Second Homes a 50% premium to start, with a view to raising it to 100% in April 2025, and Empty Homes premium scales as noted earlier. The decision to charge a premium on Second Homes and Long-Term Empty Houses had to be made at least a full year in advance and if the recommendations were accepted the policy would come into force in April 2024.

By the year 2025/26 it was estimated that the premiums could potentially raise anything up to £3m depending on the response of owners which would greatly help the Council maintain essential services at a time of great financial pressure – although the primary aim was to encourage better use of housing. An impact assessment had also been conducted to assess the impact on the Welsh language, on the deterioration of rural living, on house prices and also on the zero carbon net agenda and other factors. Council was informed that prior to the measures being implemented any possible impact on the tourism industry would be discussed, including those who should be exempt from the premium and were not already within the current exemption classes specified.

It was moved and duly seconded that the report and recommendations be endorsed.

The following amendment to recommendation 3 in the report was proposed by Councillor R. James and duly seconded:

“The Council are requested to approve and recommend a council tax premium on long-term empty properties as follows:

- **100%** Premium for empty properties > 1 year < 2 years;
- **50%** Premium for empty properties > 2 years < 5 years;
- **200%** Premium for empty properties > 5 years”.

A number of statements were made both in support of and against the amendment and following a vote it was

RESOLVED that the amendment be not supported.

The following further amendment to recommendation 3 in the report was proposed by Councillor R. James and duly seconded:

“The following 2 additional classes of exemption from second home premiums be added to the 7 class of dwellings included in the report:

- All buildings and properties on agricultural land be exempt from the premium;
- Holiday lets and self accommodation businesses;

And that the Cross-Party Group assesses these 2 classes of exemptions ahead of their introduction in 2024.”

A number of statements were made both in support of and against the amendment and following a vote it was

RESOLVED that the amendment be not supported.

The Council then considered the original motion as moved and seconded and

FURTHER RESOLVED

6.1 that a Council Tax Premium be applied /charged on second homes and long-term empty properties as defined by Sections 12A and 12B of the local Government Finance Act 1992, as inserted by the Housing (Wales) Act 2014;

6.2 that a council tax premium of 50% be levied in 2024/25 in respect of second homes with a view to increasing the premium to 100% from April 2025;

6.3 to approve a council tax premium on long-term empty properties as follows:

- 50% Premium for empty properties > 1 year < 2 years
- 100% Premium for empty properties > 2 years < 5 years
- 200% Premium for empty properties > 5 years;

6.4 that delegated authority be given to the Director of Corporate Services to implement the changes and to notify the owners of all affected properties;

6.5 that these premiums be kept under review by the Director of Corporate Services and Cabinet Member for Resources and any changes be brought to Cabinet and Council for approval as appropriate.

7. PROPOSED COMMUNITY REVIEW IN COUNTY OF CARMARTHENSHIRE

The Council received a report setting out details for the commencement of a Community Review for all Community Councils in Carmarthenshire. Under the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 each principal council had a duty, every 10 years, to monitor the communities in its area and, where appropriate, the electoral arrangements of such communities for the purposes of considering whether to make recommend changes.

RESOLVED

7.1 to approve the commencement of a Community Review for all Community Councils in Carmarthenshire;

7.2 to approve the Terms of Reference for the Community Review as set out in the report;

7.3 that the indicative timetable contained in the Terms of Reference Community Review be noted.

8. TO RECEIVE THE REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON THE 20TH FEBRUARY 2023

RESOLVED that the report of the meeting of the Cabinet held on the 20th February, 2023 be received.

9. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

10. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS:-

10.1. QUESTION BY COUNCILLOR HEFIN JONES TO COUNCILLOR EDWARD THOMAS, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT, WASTE AND INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES

“It’s concerning to hear of the Welsh Government’s intention to remove the Emergency Bus Subsidy scheme. Despite a short extension to the scheme it’s worrying that the Welsh Government seems quite content to cut the essential travel lifeline for many. Though it’s not exclusively a rural problem, as we’ve heard by colleagues in the chamber, it’s likely that rural areas will suffer the brunt of this, and the consequences could be far reaching. Will the cabinet member responsible for transport please outline the potential impact here in Carmarthenshire please?”

Response by Councillor Edward Thomas – Cabinet Member For Transport, Waste and Infrastructure Services:-

“The Bus Emergency Scheme has provided vital support for the public transport sector throughout the pandemic and during the process of recovery. However, patronage levels on public transport networks have not yet recovered to anywhere near the pre Covid levels. This, combined with uncertainty in the sector from ongoing bus reform, critical supply chain pressures around fuel and driver shortages is leading to unsustainable pressure on the sector particularly the Small and Medium Size Enterprises [SMEs].

Public Transport in rural counties cannot operate without subsidy. Circa 78% of our routes operated require a subsidy to provide the most basic of services. The Bus Emergency Support [BES] scheme is critical whilst the sector recovers. It is helpful that the Welsh Government has announced that BES has been extended for three months which I don’t think is enough. However, wider investment into the public transport system is also vital for rural areas if the Welsh Government is to achieve the objectives on modal shift as set out in Llwybr Newydd – the Wales Transport Strategy.

Initial modelling indicates that upwards of fifty percent of our existing bus routes will be lost if the sector does not recover when funding for the Bus Emergency

Scheme runs out. Rural areas and SMEs are likely to be the hardest hit. So not good news and I do wish the Minister would review the Llywbr Newydd.”

Supplementary Question by Councillor Hefin Jones:

“Can I ask if there is an ongoing dialogue with service providers, with bus companies, and will there be a communications plan so that should the axe fall on some services and some services lost that residents and wards are informed through a process as opposed to hearing on the grapevine?”

Response by Councillor Edward Thomas – Cabinet Member For Transport, Waste and Infrastructure Services:-

“The simple answers are yes and yes.”

CHAIR

DATE