

COMMUNITIES, HOMES & REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 5 APRIL 2023

PRESENT: Councillor D.M. Cundy (Chair)(In Person)

Councillors (In Person):

B. Davies M. Palfreman R. Sparks

Councillors (Virtually):

B.W. Jones W.R.A. Davies T. Davies H.L. Davies
J.K. Howell D. Owen H.B. Shepardson

Also Present (In Person):

J. Morgan, Director of Community Services
J. Jones, Head of Regeneration
J. Fearn, Head of Housing Property and Strategic Projects
J. Morgan, Head of Housing and Public Protection
R. Griffiths, Head of Place and Sustainability
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator
N Hellier, Senior Built Heritage Officer
R. Morris, Members Support Officer
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

Also Present (Virtually):

A. Thomas, Group Accountant
C. Daniels, Senior Sports and Leisure Manager
N Thomas, Senior Outdoor Recreation Manager
R. Stradling, Business & Projects Manager
S. Hendy, Member Support Officer
M. Runeckles, Members Support Officer

Chamber - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP and remotely - 10.00 am - 12.50 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N. Evans and R. Evans.

The Chair welcomed Esme Chapman to the meeting who was shadowing Cllr M. Palfreman.

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

Councillor	Minute No (s)	Nature of Interest
A Davies	7 – Regeneration division service delivery plan 2023-24	Tywi Valley Cycle Path

R. Sparks	5 – Revenue & Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2022/23	Has a swimming business and has dispensation from the Standards Committee to speak and make written representations but not vote.
R. Sparks	6 – Draft Divisional Delivery Plans 2023-24 for Housing & Public Protection, Housing Property & Strategic Projects and Leisure	Has a swimming business and has dispensation from the Standards Committee to speak and make written representations but not vote.
M. Palfreman	6 – Draft Divisional Delivery Plans 2023-24 for Housing & Public Protection, Housing Property & Strategic Projects and Leisure	Runs a consultancy service on Social Care to Local Authorities and has dispensation from the Standards Committee to speak and make written representations but not vote.

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISALS

The Committee considered a report on appraisals undertaken on the following 10 conservations areas within Carmarthenshire and the proposed amendments to their boundaries, where applicable. The report detailed the outcome of the consultation exercise undertaken between the 24th June and 26th August 2022, and outlined the next steps and future stages towards the adoption of the appraisals and their outcomes. It was also noted the appraisals had been undertaken in accordance with the Council's legal duties under the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990:

- Carmarthen Town,
- Priory Street, Carmarthen
- Lammas Street, Carmarthen
- Picton Terrace, Carmarthen
- Laugharne,
- St Clears,
- Kidwelly,
- Llanelli,
- Llandeilo
- Newcastle Emlyn.

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

- Reference was made to the 27 Conservation Areas within Carmarthenshire, many of which had not been reviewed since their creation, some as long ago as the 1970's. It was confirmed the lack of any subsequent reviews had been recognised, hence the undertaking of the above 10 appraisals. Whilst the delay in the reviews was part attributed to a resourcing issue, it was noted that as staffing levels within the unit were now up to full complement, appraisals of the remaining 17 areas would be undertaken in-house as part of the Unit's future work programme.
- Reference was made to the elements within the report relating to excessive street furniture within some of the conservation areas, for example in Llanelli, and clarification sought on whether they would be removed retrospectively following the report's adoption. It was noted that whilst the conservation areas had not been reviewed for a significant period, any consideration on the removal of street furniture would need to be undertaken as part of an examination of the public realm as a whole and being seen as an opportunity on how best to preserve and enhance the street scene while having regard to its conservation. That could include, for example, regeneration proposals and developing a blueprint for street furniture and tree planting.
- A point was raised regarding the appraisal consultations and how residents would be advised their properties were situated within a conservation area.

The Committee was advised that extensive consultations had been undertaken with the public on the appraisals which included holding events, online webinars, pre-consultation questionnaire and via the 'Have your say' portal on the Council's website. With regard to engaging with the public following the report's adoption the Head of Place and Infrastructure advised the department could look at how that could best be achieved, for example holding workshops.

- Reference was made to existing provisions preventing the erection of solar dishes on the front of properties within conservation areas, Clarification was sought on whether the same criteria would be applied on the installation of solar panels to reduce carbon emissions and help achieve net zero carbon.

The Senior Built Heritage Officer advised there were planning policies in place in relation to solar panels from the Welsh Government Guidance, and specific advice was also included on the Council's Planning Portal.

Should homeowners within a conservation area wish to erect solar panels on their home, they would need to apply for planning consent and each application would be considered on its own merit having regard to planning policies and any potential impact the development may have on the character of the area. Additionally, while solar panel installation was one avenue available to homeowners to achieving carbon reductions, there were other options available which the department could advise upon e.g. insulation or new windows, with each building having to be assessed individually on which package of measures would best achieve that reduction. It was also confirmed that if solar panels had been installed on a property prior to its inclusion within a revised conservation boundary their removal would not be required.

In response to the above, a comment was made on legislation relating to conservation areas and its conflict with the Welsh Government's target of achieving zero carbon emissions. It was felt the Committee should write to the Welsh Government in that regard requesting it give consideration on how it could best support both preserving and saving the environment.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

- 4.1 that the Conservation Area Appraisals Report be approved.**
- 4.2 That a letter be sent from the Chair to the Welsh Government to highlight the challenges and contradictions between conservation areas and the climate emergency and that it considers how it can best support in both preserving and saving the environment.**

5. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2022/23

(NOTE: Councillor R. Sparks declared an interest in this item and remained in the meeting for its consideration)

The Committee considered a report on the 2022/23 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring reports for the Housing, Regeneration & Property, Place and Sustainability and Leisure and Recreation Services for the period up to the 31st December, 2022. It was noted the main budgetary pressure were being faced within Leisure Services which had predicted £907k overspend to year end. Overall, the revenue budget was forecasting a £407k overspend but, based on current reductions, it should be close to target at the year end. The capital budget was forecasting a £25,999k underspend, whilst the Housing Revenue Account was forecasting a £651k underspend.

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:

- Reference was made to the income shortfall within the provisions markets, due to low occupancy rates, and clarification sought on what remedial action was being taken to increase those rates.

The Head of Regeneration advised one of the issues related to the level of rent prospective leaseholders were able to pay for units in the markets compared to target rentals. Consideration was being given to how the units could be made more attractive to potential leaseholders and to how

those could be marketed. For example, while vacant units were currently advertised by means of tender documents, future marketing could involve promotion via social media.

- Reference was made to the increased car parking income at the car parks at Burry Port Harbour and whether it could be possible for that income to be used to provide additional toilet facilities at the harbour. Currently, there was only one toilet cubicle available at the rear of the coffee shop to serve 2 beaches.

The Head of Regeneration advised the Leisure Division was in discussion with the Town Council in that regard and he would raise the matter with the Head of Leisure and for a response to be forwarded to the Councillor.

- Reference was made to the report being for the accounting period up to the end of December 2022, some three months out of date. It was enquired whether future reports could include more up to date information.
- With regard to the £907k projected overspend within the Leisure Services Division, clarification was sought on what measures were being introduced to address the covid slump and encouraging more people to use the leisure facilities.

The Committee was advised that the next report on the agenda for the committee's consideration that morning relating to the Draft Leisure Business Plan 2023-24 which addressed that very point detailing step by step objectives and timelines for actions.

The Director of Communities reminded the Committee that during the covid pandemic the Council's indoor leisure facilities had been closed and the government grant to support those had ceased in April 2022. Subsequently, the division had worked extremely hard to rebuild the service and current usage levels were 95% of pre-pandemic levels with visitors to the Country parks also increasing. Those participation rates were encouraging, and the Division was entering the new financial year on track with regard to membership levels.

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

6. DRAFT DIVISIONAL DELIVERY PLANS 2023-24 FOR HOUSING & PUBLIC PROTECTION, HOUSING PROPERTY & STRATEGIC PROJECTS AND LEISURE

(NOTE:

Councillor R. Sparks having earlier declared an interest in this item re-declared the interest and remained in the meeting for its consideration.

Councillor M. Palfreman declared an interest in this item and remained in the meeting for its consideration)

The Committee considered the 2023-24 Draft Divisional Delivery Plans for the Housing and Public Protection, Housing Property & Strategic Projects and the Leisure Divisions within the Communities Department detailing the strategic

actions and measures to be taken forward to enable the Council to make progress against its Well-Being Objectives, thematic priorities and service priorities.

The following issues / questions were raised on the reports:

- In response to a question on Action A2 on the Housing and Public Protection Plan, to resettle refugees in a co-ordinated way to ensure settled accommodation is available to meet their needs, the Head of Housing and Public Protection confirmed the Council was meeting its obligations and the introduction of the New Social Housing Allocations Policy was assisting in that regard.
- In response to a question on Action A17 on the Housing and Public Protection Plan, to contribute to 'Further, Faster Carmarthenshire' ensuring additional community-based accommodation offer for older people, the Committee was advised it related to preventing elderly people being admitted to hospital by providing them with appropriate accommodation to meet their needs. Similarly, it aimed to assist in discharging elderly people from hospital at the earliest opportunity by providing the right accommodation at the right time with appropriate support where needed. The Department was also working closely with Health and Social Services to secure those early releases.

The Head of Housing and Public Protection reminded the Committee that the Council had plans to develop more affordable housing with their delivery being key. It would also need to be recognised there would, on occasions, be capacity issues but that by operating in co-ordinated way the department should continue to manage their provision and meet demand.

- Reference was made to the Actions and Measures element of the report and a suggestion made they could be used as the basis for future reports to the Committee to monitor progress.
- In response to a question on the high risks detailed within the Housing and Public Protection Plan, the Head of Housing and Public Protection advised that status was necessary to ensure risks were managed in a proper manner.
- With regard to the reference within the Housing Property and Strategic Projects report recording a reduction in the level of void properties from over 400 to 280, the Committee was advised that subsequent to the report's preparation the number of voids had further reduced to 239.
- In response to a question on the use of local contractors to undertake works to Council Housing, the Head of Housing Property and Strategic Projects reminded the Committee that a new contractor framework was currently being prepared which would hopefully encourage smaller contractors to apply for inclusion. It was also noted the Council was increasing trade staffing levels to enable it to undertake more minor works to properties itself with larger works being undertaken by contractors.
- Reference was made to the 'Care and Repair' service provided to elderly private homeowners to make their homes safer by installing new locks for example and to whether a similar service could be provided to council tenants.

The Head of Housing Property and Strategic Projects advised that whilst the Council did not provide such a service to its tenants at the present time, there may, as its trades staffing levels increased, be an opportunity to consider such provision in the future thereby providing a proactive service for tenants.

- Whilst emergency works to tenant's properties were undertaken promptly, a concern was raised the same could not be applied to remedial works. The Head of Housing Property and Strategic Projects advised that over recent years the council had encountered difficulties in undertaking such works in a timely manner due to the impact of covid and contractor availability. However, as the number of skilled trades staff employed by the Council increased to enable works to be undertaken in-house, the response times would improve.
- In response to a question on the Kidwelly Industrial Museum within the Leisure Plan, it was confirmed the site currently remained closed due to safety issues. However, a plan was being developed to help facilitate its re-opening at a future date.
- With regard to action A7 within the Leisure Plan to develop a 'sport for all' approach the committee was apprised of the work being undertaken by the Leisure Division to promote that ethos. That included working with clubs etc to increase the number of volunteers and provide advice on finance and grant availability. The Council also provided sports for children prior to them joining clubs such as swimming and was currently developing an aquatics plan in that regard.
- With regard to a question on the marketing of corporate events at Council owned facilities such as Pembrey Country Park, the Head of Regeneration advised he would raise the issue with the Council's marketing section.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the 2023-24 Draft Divisional Plans for the Housing and Public Protection, Housing Property & Strategic Projects and Leisure Divisions be approved.

7. REGENERATION DIVISION SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN 2023-24

(NOTE: Councillor A. Davies had earlier declared an interest in this item and remained in the meeting for its consideration)

The Committee considered the 2023-24 Service Delivery Plan for the Regeneration Division within the Chief Executives Department detailing the strategic actions and measures to be taken forward thereby enabling the Council to make progress against its Well-Being Objectives, thematic priorities and service priorities.

The following issues / questions were raised on the reports:

- The Committee was advised that with regard to the Shared Prosperity Fund and the Arfor 2 programme, the current position was that the first phase of the SPF had now closed, with a good response having been received thereto and the Arfor 2 programme had been launched. It was confirmed an update report on those schemes could be provided to a future meeting of the Committee.

- In response to a question, the Head of Regeneration confirmed an update report on the Pentre Awel development could also be provided to a future meeting following the completion of lease negotiations.,

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the 2023-24 Service Delivery Plan for the Regeneration Division be approved.

8. PLACE AND SUSTAINABILITY DIVISION - SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN 2023-24

The Committee considered the 2023-24 Service Delivery Plan for the Place and Sustainability Division within the Place and Infrastructure Department detailing the strategic actions and measures to be taken forward thereby enabling the Council to make progress against its Well-Being Objectives, thematic priorities and service priorities.

The following issues / questions were raised on the reports:

- With regard to a question on planning enforcement, the Committee was advised the department had, over the previous year, reduced the number of outstanding enforcement cases from over 1,000 to 392, a reduction of over 600. In addition, a further 600 new cases had also been processed representing a 66.8% investigation rate compared to the previous 38%.
- With reference to Section 106 Agreements, the Committee was reminded of the need for local members and Town and Community Council's to submit representations at the pre-application stage on what they felt should be included in any agreement to benefit the community as, once signed, it would prove very difficult to change. It was also noted the department had held workshops for town and community councils to assist them understand the S106 process and how they could become involved.
- With reference to promoting the Welsh Language, the Head of Place and Sustainability advised the Local Development Plan was currently subject to public consultation and the department was working closely with Llais from Gwynedd on the development of a plan to ensure the Welsh Language and local people were an integral part of the LDP. It was hoped the plan would be completed by April to feed into the LDP. It was also recognised the LDP would be updated regularly prior to its submission to the Welsh Government Inspector.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the 2023-24 Service Delivery Plan for the Place and Sustainability Division be approved.

9. 2022/23 QUARTER 3 - PERFORMANCE REPORT (01/04/22-31/12/22) RELEVANT TO THIS SCRUTINY

The Committee received the 2022/23 Quarter 3 Performance Report for the period 1st April to 31st December in respect of the areas falling within its 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 the Council would continue reporting on the objectives throughout 2022/23 until they were superseded by the new Corporate Strategy.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

10. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee received a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting to be held on the 15th May, 2023.

RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on the 15th May, 2023 be noted.

11. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 23RD FEBRUARY 2023

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 23rd February, 2023 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE