

COMMUNITIES, HOMES & REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 8 JULY 2024

PRESENT: Councillor R.E. Evans (Chair)

Councillors (In Person):

B. Davies H.B. Shepardson

Councillors (Virtually):

W.R.A. Davies T. Davies H.L. Davies J.K. Howell
B.W. Jones M. Palfreman R. Sparks M. Thomas
A. Leyshon

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

Also Present (In Person):

J. Fearn, Head of Housing Property and Strategic Projects
I. Jones, Head of Leisure
J. Morgan, Head of Housing and Public Protection
H. Morgan, Economic Development Manager
R. Parkinson, Team Leader - Housing Advice
J. Williams, Rapid Rehousing Policy Lead
D. Hall-Jones, Member Support Officer
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

Also Present (Virtually):

R. Griffiths, Head of Place and Sustainability
M. Runeckles, Members Support Officer

Chamber - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP and remotely - 10.00 - 11.15 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

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

Councillor	Minute No (s)	Nature of Interest
H. Shepardson	6 – Alternative Outdoor Education Offer – Update	Season Ticket Holder at Pembrey Country Park

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

R. Sparks	7 – 2023/24 Quarter 4 / End of Year – Performance Report (01/04/23 - 31/03/24 Relevant to this Scrutiny	Has a swimming business and runs swimming lessons and has dispensation from the Standards Committee to speak and make written representations on leisure matters but not vote
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There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. RESULTS OF CONSULTATION EXERCISE ON A NEW SOCIAL HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY FOR CARMARTHENSHIRE

The Committee considered a report detailing the findings of a twelve-week consultation exercise undertaken on the development of a new Social Allocation Policy for Carmarthenshire to replace the current Emergency Allocation Policy developed by the Committee’s Task and Finish Group in 2023.

The following questions/issues were raised on the report:

- Reference was made to question 6 in the report relating to people having a local connection to Carmarthenshire. The Committee was advised that the application of local connections in relation to housing differed in the towns and rural areas in so far as, within the towns, there was a large amount of social housing situated in a small area whereas in the rural areas the availability of social housing was smaller and spread over a larger area. It was stated the Council could examine the feasibility of reducing the size of the rural areas thereby enabling more scope for properties to be allocated to people with local connections and, where there were no such connections, the area could then be expanded to include applicants with no specific connection to that area. Similarly, the Council may need to examine the position of allocating a property to people living close to its boundary to re-locate to within the county to be closer to relatives requiring support.
- With regard to a question on the scope and promotion of the consultation, it was confirmed applicants on the housing register were contacted via a mailshot containing a link to the consultation document and also offering assistance for completing their responses, if required.
- Reference was made to page 42 of the agenda pack wherein a respondent had stated it would be useful if “a helpful functional comment relating to the citing of ‘persons subject to immigration control who are eligible for an allocation of social housing’” could be included within the document. It was suggested that possibly, the Council could provide a link on its website to the Government website detailing its policies on persons

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subject to immigration control being housed in social housing. It was noted the Council could examine that possibility for clarity.

- The Committee noted that following the conclusion of the consultation period, work now be undertaken on finalising the draft New Social Allocation Policy which would be submitted to the Committee's October meeting for consideration prior to its onward submission through the political process to Cabinet and Council for approval.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

5. VOIDS PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT UPDATE

The Committee, in accordance with minute 8 of its meeting held on the 28th May, 2024 received an update report on the progress achieved on improvements to the Council's Voids service capturing both those made to date as well as future planned improvements.

The following questions / issues were raised on the report:

- Members referred to the reduction in void properties over the previous two years from 431 to 178 representing 1.85% of the total council housing stock of some 9,350. They expressed their appreciation to officers for all their hard work in achieving that reduction, including the creation of an in-house voids repair team, which had resulted in an additional 250 properties being available for let together with an increase in income of close to £1m per annum.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the update report be received.

6. ALTERNATIVE OUTDOOR EDUCATION OFFER - UPDATE

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

The Committee received a presentation on the Council's plans for the continued provision of its Outdoor Education Service following the planned closure of the existing facility at Pendine at the end of the 2025 season and its transition to an alternative delivery model based from Pembrey Country Park. The proposals would allow for organic growth and development and the operation of sustainable education facilities throughout the school terms together with the doubling of accommodation for use during holiday periods.

The following questions / issues were raised on the report:

- In response to a question relating to the provision of accommodation at Pembrey Country Park, the Head of Leisure advised it was proposed that would comprise yurt type tents for pupils and glamping pods for teachers. While the exact siting of the accommodation was yet to be determined, that could be at the existing caravan/camping site or, potentially, the nearby horse riding centre land, which was now vacant. It was also noted that the flexibility offered by both types of accommodation meant they

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could be moved to different locations within the park to accommodate varying needs.

- In relation to the numbers of pupils to be accommodated within the park, it was initially proposed that would total approximately 30, increasing incrementally to possibly 90.
- With regard to a question on the provision of accommodation utilising facilities at places such as the University of Wales Trinity St Davids and the Cynefin Centre in Carmarthen for example, the Head of Leisure confirmed the authority was examining the feasibility of using various external accommodation venues as part of the overall outdoor education provision, and that their utilisation would be dependent on a number of factors including, out of term availability and pricing.
- In response to a question relating to the potential of Delta lakes as an outdoor venue, the Head of Leisure advised the authority was of the view the main outdoor water sport facilities should be based at North Dock, Llanelli.
- With regard to engaging with children, including those with learning difficulties on the type of offer they would like to see being available, the Head of Leisure confirmed that was currently being undertaken on shaping future provision. However, it was recognised more could be done to further develop provision. He also advised that the new facilities at Pembrey would be accessible for the disabled. Similarly, the Actif team had a disability sports development officer who worked with local clubs to make them as accessible as possible to the disabled.
- Reference was made to the lack of indoor facilities within the county during periods of inclement weather. The Head of Leisure advised that whilst an indoor offer was not currently available at Pembrey Country Park, that possibility was being explored. In the interim, facilities could be available at the Carmarthen Hub together with those at Pentre Awel.
- In response to a question on coaching provision, the Head of Leisure advised on proposals for training staff at the Pembrey Hub to facilitate employment on a year-round basis as opposed to the current seasonal employment.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the update report be received.

7. 2023/24 QUARTER 4/END OF YEAR - PERFORMANCE REPORT (01/04/23-31/03/24) RELEVANT TO THIS SCRUTINY

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

The Committee received the 2023/24 Quarter 4 / End of year Performance Report for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March, 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.

The following questions / issues were raised on the report:

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- Reference was made to indicator HS-EMP/001 relating to the number of private sector empty properties returned to use through direct intervention. Clarification was sought on the involvement of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council in the grant process to facilitate the return of those properties.

The Head of Housing and Public Protection advised that that authority was the grant administering authority on behalf of the Welsh Government. He also referred to the number of unsuccessful grant applications, and advised discussions were being undertaken with Rhondda Cynon Taf in relation to those.

- The Head of Place and Infrastructure in response to a question relating to the vacant post within the Planning Enforcement Section reminded the Committee there was a moratorium in place at the present time on staff recruitment but that a case was being compiled to enable the vacant post to be filled. In the interim, it may be necessary to engage the use of consultants to assist with the workload.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

8. NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee received an explanation for the non-submission of the following scrutiny report:

- Tenant Incentive Scheme

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the explanation for the non-submission be noted.

9. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee received a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting to be held on the 1st October, 2024

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on the 1st October, 2024 be approved.

10. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 28TH MAY, 2024

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 28th May, 2024 be signed as a correct record.

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

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

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