

COMMUNITY & REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 31 January 2022

PRESENT: Councillor G.B. Thomas (Chair)

Councillors:

W.R.A. Davies, H.L. Davies, D.C. Evans, W.T. Evans (In place of S.J.G. Gilasbey), J.K. Howell, B.W. Jones, H.I. Jones, H.B. Shepardson and D. Thomas

Also in attendance:

Councillor L.D. Evans, Cabinet Member for Housing
P. Hughes-Griffiths, Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport and Tourism
D.M. Jenkins, Cabinet Member for Resources

The following Officers were in attendance:

C. Moore, Director of Corporate Services
I. Jones, Head of Leisure
J. Jones, Head of Regeneration
J. Morgan, Head of Homes & Safer Communities
J. Fearn, Head of Housing Property and Strategic Projects
R. Hemingway, Head of Financial Services
R.M. Davies, Strategic Housing Delivery Manager
M. Evans Thomas, Principal Democratic Services Officer
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator
G. Williams, Team Leader
S. Williams, Senior Accountant
M.S. Davies, Democratic Services Officer
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

Virtual Meeting - 2.00 - 3.30 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors F. Akhtar and J. Gilasbey and from Councillor E. Dole (Leader of the Council with responsibility for Regeneration).

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 No (s)	Nature of Interest
H. Shepardson	Minute 4 – Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2022/23 to 2024/25 (Appendix C – Charging Digest)	Season Ticket holder for Pembrey Country Park and the Millenium Coastal Car Parks

G. Thomas	5 – Housing Revenue Account Budget and Housing Rent Setting for 2022/23	Personal – Lets a property to the Council for Letting
D. Thomas	5 – Housing Revenue Account Budget and Housing Rent Setting for 2022/23	Personal – Wife lets a property to the Council

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

4. REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2022/23 to 2024/25

(NOTE: Councillor H. Shepardson had earlier declared an interest in Appendix 'C' to the report (Charging Digest) did not speak or vote on that Appendix)

The Committee considered the report presented by the Cabinet Member for Resources on the Council's Revenue Budget Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25, as endorsed by the Cabinet for consultation purposes at its meeting held on the 17th January 2022. The report provided Members with the current view of the Revenue Budget for 2022/2023 together with indicative figures for the 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 financial years based on officers' projections of spending requirements and taken account of the provisional settlement issued by Welsh Government on the 21st December 2021. It also reflected current departmental submissions for savings proposals after taking account of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the delivery of those savings.

The Cabinet Member advised that the provisional settlement from Welsh Government this year was considerably higher than we had planned for, however he also noted that the scale of expenditure pressures that we and other local authorities were facing was also at an unprecedented high level, which offset the higher settlement. The provisional settlement represented an average increase of 9.4% across Wales on the 2021/22 settlement, Carmarthenshire's increase had been 9.2% (£26.335m) thereby taking the Aggregate External Finance to £311.957m for 2022/23 which included £302k in respect of the Social Care Workforce Grant.

Across the whole of the council's budgets, validation added £23m, by some margin the highest we have needed to allow for in recent years.

The budget also included £12.5m. for new departmental expenditure pressures which have been identified by departments and were inescapable if we are to continue to deliver our main services at the current level. As with the inflationary uplift, this is considerably more than we have normally had to build in and reflects the scale of pressures on council services currently.

Turning to our savings proposals, the Cabinet Member highlighted our continued response to the pandemic had further impacted on the delivery of efficiencies. Nevertheless, he noted our budget strategy puts forward some £3.8m of savings next year and a further £7.9m over the following 2 years. Within this committee's remit, the current proposals totalled some £268k in year 1 and a further £573k

over the following 2 years.

The Budget Strategy proposed a Council Tax of 4.39% for 2022/23, in line with the Medium-Term Financial Plan, and that proposal would be considered as part of the budget finalisation process over the next month and where the Authority received further clarification on cost and grant funding with a view to limiting the Council Tax increase as far as possible. Final budget proposals would then be presented to the Cabinet late February, to ensure a balanced budget was presented to County Council.

The Committee thereupon considered the following detailed budget information appended to the Strategy relevant to its remit:

- **Appendix A(i)** – Efficiency summary for the Regeneration, Leisure, Planning and Non HRA Housing Services;
- **Appendix A(ii)** – Growth Pressures summary for the Regeneration and Planning Services (none for the Leisure and Non HRA Services);
- **Appendix B** – Budget monitoring report for the Regeneration, Leisure, Planning and Non HRA Housing Services;
- **Appendix C** – Charging Digest for the Regeneration, Leisure, Planning and Non HRA Housing Services;

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

- In response to a question on the savings achieved on travelling costs during the covid pandemic, the Director of Corporate Services advised that while those figures were available departmentally and in some cases had been adjusted as part of the budget process, they were not consolidated corporately, as we needed to understand the impact of the revised way of working post covid before adjustment to the corporate were made. However, he would make arrangements for the committee to be provided with that information.

RESOLVED that:

- 4.1 The 2022/23 – 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation be received.**
- 4.2 The Charging Digests for the Regeneration, Leisure, Planning and Non HRA Services, as detailed in Appendix C to the report, be endorsed.**

5. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET AND HOUSING RENT SETTING FOR 2022/23

(NOTE:

- 1) Councillor G.B. Thomas having earlier declared an interest in this item redeclared that interest. He had received legal advice that he could remain in the meeting and participate in the vote;
- 2) Councillor D. Thomas having earlier declared an interest in this item redeclared that interest and left the meeting for its consideration and did not participate in the discussion or voting)

The Committee considered the report presented by the Cabinet Member for

Resources on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget and Housing Rent Setting for 2022/23, being presented as part of the budget consultation process that brought together the latest proposals for the Revenue and Capital budgets for the Housing Revenue Account 2022/25 to be presented to the Cabinet and Council for determination.

The Cabinet Member advised that the report had been prepared reflecting the latest proposals contained within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan, being the primary financial planning tool for delivering and maintaining the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard *Plus* (CHS+) for the future. The proposed investment within the current business plan delivered the CHS by 2015 (to those homes where the tenants agreed to have work undertaken) provided investment to maintain CHS+ and continued investment for the Authority's Housing and Regeneration Delivery Plan.

The report detailed how rents would increase for 2022/23 with the HRA budget being set to reflect:-

- Social Housing Rent Policy (set by Welsh Government) which this year, due to the increased level of CPI had activated the Minister's determination
- Proposals contained in the Carmarthenshire Housing Revenue Account Business Plan
- Housing Regeneration and Development Delivery Plan

The Cabinet Member reminded the Committee that with regard to the setting of the Housing Rents, the Authority had, on the 24th February 2015, adopted the Welsh Government's Social Housing Rent Policy for the four year period ending in 2018/19. For 2019/20, the Welsh Government had provided an interim policy while it awaited the results of the Affordable Housing Supply Review. Following that review, the Welsh Government had decided to retain the policy for a further 5 year period from 2020/21 – 2024/25 with some additional/amended requirements, as detailed within the report.

This policy allowed local authorities to uplift the total rent envelope by CPI + 1% for each of the 5 years running to 2024/25. It also allows for the level of rent for individual tenants to rise by up to an additional £2 over and above CPI+1% for the rent harmonisation, on condition that the total rental income collected by the social landlord increases by no more than CPI+1%.

However, should CPI fall outside the range of 0% to 3%, the policy provides for the Minister with responsibility for Housing to determine the appropriate change to rent levels to be applied for that year only. As CPI was 3.1% in September 2021 this clause has been activated this year and the Government Minister for Climate Change had instructed that the maximum increase in the rent envelope for any local authority should not exceed 3.1%

The Cabinet Member went on to confirm that this year we had been able to respond to all our priorities and been able to balance the business plan and propose a rent increase at an overall increase of 2.9%, which will produce an average rent of £94.26 for our tenants.

Included within the overall rent increase envelope it was proposed that the

Authority continues with the rent progression and this will be set at a maximum of £1 for properties below target rent.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED THAT IT BE RECOMMENDED TO THE CABINET/COUNCIL:-

- 5.1 to increase the average housing rent by 2.90% (£2.66) per dwelling as per the Welsh Government's Social Housing Rents Policy thereby producing a sustainable Business Plan, maintain CHS+ and resource the Housing Regeneration and Development Delivery Plan, as supported by the Housing and Regeneration Strategic Team;**
- 5.2 To keep garage rents at £9.00 per week and garage bases at £2.25 per week;**
- 5.3 To apply the service charge policy to ensure tenants who received the benefit from specific services paid for those services;**
- 5.4 To increase charges for using the Council's sewerage treatment works in line with the rent increase;**
- 5.5 To approve the Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2022/25 (2023/24 & 2024/25 being soft budgets) as set out in Appendix A to the report;**
- 5.6 To approve the proposed Capital Programme and applicable funding for 2022/23 and the indicative spends for 2023/24 to 2024/25, as set out in Appendix B to the report.**

6. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2022-25 CARMARTHENSHIRE HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report presented by the Cabinet Member for Housing on the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2022-25 Carmarthenshire Housing Investment Programme the purpose of which was fourfold. Firstly, it explained the vision and detail of the housing investment programme over the next three years and what it meant for tenants. Secondly, it confirmed the income to be received from tenants' rents and other funding sources over the next three years. Thirdly, it confirmed the financial profile based on current assumptions, for the delivery of the housing investment programme and council new build over the next three years. Fourthly, it produced a business plan for the annual application to the Welsh Government for Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) Grant for 2022/23 equating to £6.1m.

The report highlighted the importance of the Council supporting its tenants and residents in everything it did, with the following five key themes having been identified as driving the business for the next three years:-

- Theme 1 – Supporting Tenants and Residents;
- Theme 2 – Investing in Homes and Surrounding Areas;
- Theme 3 - Providing more homes;
- Theme 4 – Decarbonisation of the Housing Stock;
- Theme 5 – The Local Economy, Community Benefits and Procurement

The Following questions/issues were raised on the report:

- In response to a question on the time taken to undertake work to void properties prior to re-letting, the Committee was advised that currently the level of void properties had reduced from in excess of 400 to 344, as at the end of December, 2021, set against a total stock number in excess of 9,200. While the level of voids had reduced, there were a number of reasons for the delays in their re-letting. Those included, for example, the impact of covid, availability of contractors and the availability of materials. It was also noted that 45 of those voids may not be returned to the stock and consideration was being given to their future which included sale or, possibly, demolition.

The Head of Housing Property and Strategic projects advised that a review was currently being undertaken on voids with a view to increasing turn-around times. That included visiting other local housing authorities and social landlords to gain a perspective on their processes/procedures. Additionally, the minor works contractor framework was due for renewal in the coming months and, as part of that tendering process, consideration would be given to the feasibility of extending the framework to include an increase in the number of contractors.

- As part of the discussion on voids, reference was made to local members not being apprised of turn-around times for them to advise their electorate. It was confirmed that arrangements would be made for local members to be informed following an inspection of a void property of its estimated re-letting time.
- Reference was made to the discussion undertaken at the Committee's previous meeting on the impact of NRW regulations re phosphates on development/regeneration. The Head of Homes and Safer Communities advised that a meeting had recently been held thereon with the Welsh Government and arrangements were being made for it to meet with local authorities, including Carmarthenshire, to discuss the issues. An update on those discussions could then be provided to members at a later date.

RESOLVED THAT IT BE RECOMMENDED TO THE CABINET/COUNCIL TO:-

- 6.1 Confirm the vision of the Housing Investment Programme over the next three years;**
- 6.2 Agree the 2022/23 Business Plan could be submitted to the Welsh Government**
- 6.3 Note the contribution the Plan made to the Housing Regeneration and Development Delivery Plan in supporting the delivery of over 2,000 new homes**
- 6.4 Note the principles behind moving towards net zero carbon homes and developing a Decarbonisation and Affordable Warmth Strategy to support that;**
- 6.5 Note the importance of the investment included in the Plan and its role in stimulating the local economy and recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.**

7. HOUSING REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT - FIVE YEAR DELIVERY PLAN (2022 - 2027)

The Committee considered a report presented by the Cabinet Member for Housing

detailing the Housing Regeneration and Development Delivery Plan that set out the Authority's plans to support the delivery of over 2,000 additional homes across the County over the next five years. If adopted, the Plan would build on the success of the current affordable housing delivery plans, would support economic growth by investing over £300m into communities and directly support the actions in the Economic Recovery Plan, supporting business, people and places.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO CABINET/COUNCIL TO:-

- 7.1 Confirm that the Housing Regeneration and Development Delivery Plan will support the delivery of over 2,000 homes for rent and sale in the County over the next five years, meeting housing need, stimulating economic recovery and growth and supporting the Council's Net Zero Carbon Principles;**
- 7.2 Agree that the authority acquire non-Council owned land and buildings identified in the Housing Regeneration and Development Delivery Plan, together with any other land and/or buildings that would add value to the Council's Housing and Regeneration priorities and aspirations be delegated to the Head of Regeneration in consultation with the Housing and Regeneration Strategic Team;**
- 7.3 Agree that the Plan would play a key role in increasing the supply of social rented homes in our communities, including homes suitable for:**
 - General needs households;**
 - Specialist supported accommodation for people with complex needs and;**
 - Easily adapted flexible accommodation for older people.**
- 7.4 Confirm that mixed tenure developments, consisting of homes for social rent, low-cost home ownership and open market sale will be supported through this delivery plan, creating balanced, strong resilient communities;**
- 7.5 Agree that the Plan would include providing new flexible, innovative, mixed tenure housing solutions that meet the needs of an aging population;**
- 7.6 Agree that the Plan would support the delivery of the Council's strategic regeneration sites by providing more homes for rent and sale, including:**
 - Town Centre Regeneration;**
 - Rural towns and villages;**
 - Pentre Awel Life Science Village and;**
 - Tyisha.**
- 7.7 Confirm that the homes supported through the plan would be delivered using a range of delivery vehicles that offer flexibility, scale and place;**
- 7.8 Agree that the county-wide delivery of homes in the plan would follow the affordable housing action areas, building up wards in the County into distinctive areas which link geographically and culturally.**

8. DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES DEPARTMENTAL BUSINESS PLAN 2022/23

The Committee considered a report presented by the Cabinet Members for Culture, Sport and Tourism and for Housing providing an extract of the Communities Departmental Business Plan 2022/23 for Leisure and Housing Services and providing it with the opportunity to review and comment thereon. The Business Plan provided a summary of the key actions and measures required to support the delivery of those services within the Corporate Strategy and the Council's Well-being Objectives and was supported by a detailed divisional plan subject to regular review.

The following issues were raised on the report:-

- In response to a question on the progress of the Pentre Awel Project, the Head of Leisure reminded the Committee that a large element thereof related to the provision of a new leisure centre. It was anticipated works on its construction would commence in the current year, with an anticipated 2024 completion date.

The Director of Corporate Services confirmed a contractor for the project had been appointed and final discussions were being undertaken on firming up the contract details.

- With regard to the new Archives building in Carmarthen, it was anticipated it would open to the public in the Spring of 2022 following the completion of the transfer of materials and resources.
- With regard to works being undertaken at Llyn Llech Owain Country Park the Head of Leisure advised that over £188k had been spent to date on new paths, ground and tree works and a new play area.
- Reference was made to the success of the caravan park facility at Pembrey Country Park and to whether the Council would be considering providing additional facilities at other areas within the County.

The Head of Leisure referred to the unique position of the Pembrey Country Park and to the enhancement the caravan park provided to its facilities. On the question of providing other caravan parks, he advised that the Council would need to be mindful of that uniqueness and to the impact any expansion in provision could have on private caravan site owners in the county. However, one growing element of the Tourism trade within the county and U.K. wide was the increased popularity with motor homes. Currently, the authority had provided a facility to accommodate 10 motor homes at Burry Port and would be monitoring future demand

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Communities Departmental Business Plan 2022/23 insofar as it related to Housing and Leisure Services be received.

9. REGENERATION EXTRACT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DEPARTMENTAL BUSINESS PLAN 2022/23

The Committee considered an extract of the Chief Executive's Departmental Business Plan 2022/23 for Regeneration Services that provided it with the opportunity to review and comment upon. The Business Plan provided a summary of the key actions and measures required to support the delivery of regeneration

within the Corporate Strategy and the Council's Well-being Objectives and was supported by a detailed divisional plan subject to regular review.

The following question/issue was raised on the report:-

- Reference was made to the allocation of income derived from Section 106 Planning Agreements and the Head of Regeneration confirmed he would arrange for members of the Committee to be provided with a guide on the allocation process

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Regeneration Services element of the Chief Executive's Business Plan 2022/23 be received.

10. NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee received an explanation for the non-submission of the following scrutiny report(s)

- Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Report 2020/21: Carmarthenshire;
- Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2021/22;
- 5 Year Capital Programme Budget Consultation
- City Deal Procurement Update;
- Decarbonisation and Affordable Warmth Strategy;
- Environment Department Business plan

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

11. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee received a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its next meeting to be held on the 24th February, 2022.

RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items to be considered at the next scheduled meeting on the 24th February, 2022 be noted.

12. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 DECEMBER 2021

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 14 December, 2021 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE