

COUNTY COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY, 12 JULY 2023

PRESENT: Councillor B.A.L. Roberts (Chair) (In Person)

Councillors (In Person):

P. Cooper	C.A. Davies	W.R.A. Davies	B. Davies
G. Davies	K. Davies	L. Davies	L.D. Evans
S. Godfrey-Coles	T.M. Higgins	J.K. Howell	P.M. Hughes
J.D. James	G.H. John	D. Jones	H. Jones
A. Lenny	A. Leyshon	M. Palfreman	D. Price
E. Rees	E. Skinner	R. Sparks	E.G. Thomas
M. Thomas	J. Tremlett	A. Vaughan Owen	

Councillors (Virtually):

L.R. Bowen	K.V. Broom	J.M. Charles	M.D. Cranham
D.M. Cundy	S.A. Curry	T.A.J. Davies	C. Davies
LI.M. Davies	T. Davies	M. Donoghue	A. Evans
D.C. Evans	H.A.L. Evans	N. Evans	R.E. Evans
W.T. Evans	P. Hughes-Griffiths	M. James	R. James
B.W. Jones	A.C. Jones	N. Lewis	K. Madge
A.G. Morgan	D. Owen	S.L. Rees	E.M.J.G. Schiavone
J. Seward	H.B. Shepardson	D. Thomas	G.B. 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
P.R. Thomas, Assistant Chief Executive (People Management & Performance)
L.R. Jones, Head of Administration and Law
G. Morgan, Head of Democratic Services
L. Jenkins, Cabinet Support Officer
M. Runeckles, Members Support Officer
E. Bryer, Democratic Services Officer
L. Davies, Translator

Also Present (Virtually):

J. Hawker, Digital Support Officer
R. Morris, Members Support Officer
S. Hendy, Member Support Officer

Chamber - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP and remotely - 10.00 - 11.00 am

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S.M. Allen, A. Davies, H.L. Davies, S.L. Davies, A.D. Harries, J.P Hart, G.R. Jones, M.J.A. Lewis and B.D.J. Phillips.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS.

Councillor	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
M. Palfreman	Agenda Item 7 –Cabinet Minutes 19/07/23 - Minute 6 – Health & Care System for West Wales: How Far, How Fast?	Undertakes work as a consultant advising on issues relating to the provision of Health & Social Care Services. Cllr Palfreman has been granted dispensation by the Standards Committee allowing him to speak and submit written representation.
H.B. Shepardson	Agenda Item 7 –Cabinet Minutes 19/07/23 - Minute 11 – Model Teachers’ Pay Policy 2022/23.	Daughter is a teacher.
K. Madge	Agenda Item 7 –Cabinet Minutes 19/07/23 - Minute 6 – Health & Care System for West Wales: How Far, How Fast?	Daughter works in Social Services.
B.A.L. Roberts	Agenda Item 7 –Cabinet Minutes 19/07/23 - Minute 6 – Health & Care System for West Wales: How Far, How Fast?	Family members work in Social Care.
P.T. Warlow	Agenda Item 7 –Cabinet Minutes 19/07/23 - Minute 6 – Health & Care System for West Wales: How Far, How Fast?	Wife works in Social Care.
S. Godfrey-Coles	Agenda Item 7 –Cabinet Minutes 19/07/23 - Minute 6 – Health & Care System for West Wales: How Far, How Fast?	Partner works in Social Care.
T. Davies	Agenda Item 6 – Standards Committee Annual Report.	One of the hearings mentioned within the report refers to him.

3. CHAIR’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The Chair stated that she, and her consort, had attended a number of events since last Council including the Betws Association meeting in Garnant, the Hope event in Dafen Social Club and the opening of the Old

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Market Place in Llandeilo. The Chair stated that she was also asked to attend the 75 year celebration of the National Health hosted by the League of Friends.

- Councillor A. Davies extended congratulations to Carmarthenshire Young Farmers Club teams following their success at the National level competition in Staffordshire on the weekend.

4. ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE LEADER, CABINET MEMBERS AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Leader of the Council provided the Council with an update on the current position regarding the Home Office's decision to use the Strade Park Hotel in Ffwrnes on the outskirts of Llanelli to accommodate asylum seekers. He advised that the application for an interim injunction in the High Court was unsuccessful and that the Council had to consider the verdict and the next steps. It was stated that the Council was working with partners to provide support and guidance to the staff who had lost their jobs and would be supporting them to look for work. The Council had invited various companies to attend an employment fair last week.

Reference was made to the protest and the presence of the public and police at the entrance to the Stradey Park Hotel and the unfortunate arrests over the weekend. The Leader emphasised that he understood why people had assembled there and the strength of feeling and anger caused by the conduct of the UK Conservative Government. The Council had consistently argued that there was an alternative and better way of providing accommodation for asylum seekers using a more dispersed model and planning smaller groups.

The Leader noted his disappointment with the lack of response from the Home Office and that the Council was no further forward than the previous update on the 21st June. The Home Office had promised the Council would be notified of the demographics of those receiving accommodation 24 hours before arrival but to date no information had been received. It was re-iterated that the Council would do what it could to support the local community and the staff at the hotel.

5. TO APPROVE AND SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON THE 21ST JUNE 2023.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on the 21st June, 2023 be signed as a correct record.

6. STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

[Note: Councillor T. Davies declaration an interest in this item and remained in the meeting during the deliberation and voting thereof]

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

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Mrs Mary Dodd, Chair of the Standards Committee, who had been invited to present to Council the Annual Report of the Standards Committee for the 2022/23 period.

It was noted that this was the first annual report presented by the Standards Committee in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 which placed new duties upon political group leaders to promote compliance with the code by their group members. This Act also placed a requirement upon Standards Committees to report on how well group leaders have complied with those duties.

Mrs Dodd thanked the Council for the opportunity of presenting the Annual Report on behalf of the Standards Committee and proceeded to provide an overview of the issues addressed by the Committee during 2022/23. Those included Code of Conduct Complaints, Applications for Dispensation and the Code of Conduct Training for Town and Community Councils.

It was noted that the committee received 2 referrals from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales for investigation and reminded members that they should not be complacent and to be mindful of their obligations under the code of conduct.

It was also noted that 52 applications for dispensations had been considered by the committee which was a significant increase compared to previous years. She encouraged members to consider the need for dispensation and to seek advice when required.

The Chair thanked Mrs Dodd for her presentation and for the work undertaken by the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED that the Annual Report of the Standards Committee for the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 be received.

7. TO RECEIVE THE REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON THE 19TH JUNE, 2023

[Note: Councillors M. Palfreman, H.B. Shepardson, K. Madge, B.A.L. Roberts, P.T. Warlow and S. Godfrey-Coles had earlier declared an interest in this item and remained in the meeting during the deliberation and voting thereof]

In reference to Minute 6, of the Cabinet Meeting held on the 19th June, 2023 regarding the Health & Care System For West Wales : How Far, How Fast? the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Services was asked if she could provide assurance of her confidence of the plan being delivered in Carmarthenshire, given the significant risks identified in the report including workforce availability across the system, a lack of available, robust evidence of formal integration across Wales and the need for radical rethinking of governance and management control the system to make a transformation of this kind work.

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In response, the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Services stated that the workforce challenges were recognised and were at the forefront of Hywel Dda Health Board and the County Council as an ongoing priority. The Health & Social Care Scrutiny had also received and endorsed the report. She advised that integration work in Carmarthenshire had started several years ago, and the relationship of trust has developed with partners and that work would continue at pace.

In reference to Minute 9, regarding the Burry Port Harbour petition to Full Council update position it was asked why there were no mention in the minutes of Burry Port Marina Ltd going into administration on the 7th June. Clarification was also requested on the current position regarding the future of Burry Port Harbour.

In response the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Leisure, Culture and Tourism confirmed that he had provided a comprehensive update at the meeting and that while the minutes were correct, they were not a verbatim record of discussions. He stated that it was on public record that it was announced that the company in question had been placed into administration. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Leisure, Culture and Tourism further advised that the current position remains and that senior officers had met and continued to be in regular dialogue with the administrators while the formal administration process ran its course. Due to the legal process it was advised that specific details could not be shared at this stage but that he hoped to achieve a position where the future of the harbour becomes clearer. Assurance was provided that all relevant stakeholders would be kept updated whenever possible during this process.

In response to clarification regarding Minute 5.1, Question by Mr Havard Hughes, the Leader advised that the project had been developed over a number of years and had been subject to a number of reports. He advised that the project was a massive opportunity in terms of generating tourism revenue and economic development. He stated that the timescales attached to the funding of this project was challenging and that initiating the CPO process was a sensible approach otherwise there was a greater risk of the scheme not being delivered next year.

In reference to Minute 9, regarding the Burry Port Harbour petition to Full Council update position, it was asked if a meeting could be held with the administrators and other interested parties so that the administrators could be get an understanding of local perspective. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Leisure, Culture and Tourism advised that the administrators were now running the harbour and that as a major stakeholder the primary aim of the Council was to ensure that the harbour was safe to open and operate. While he could not comment on behalf of the administrators, he hoped that they would take into account all stakeholder views as part of the process.

RESOLVED that the report of the meeting of Cabinet held on the 19th June, 2023 be received.

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8. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED).

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

9. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS:-

9.1. QUESTION BY COUNCILLOR JOHN JAMES TO COUNCILLOR ALED VAUGHAN OWEN CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE, DECARBONISATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

“The accelerating pace of climate change, deforestation, pollution and other human activities have pushed nature to the brink, threatening the delicate balance that sustains life on Earth.

How do you think Carmarthenshire County Council can best respond to the Nature Emergency which it and the Welsh Government have declared?”

Response by Councillor Aled Vaughan Owen – Cabinet Member For Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability:-

Thank you Chair and thank you Councillor James for the timely question.

I’m sure we’ve all heard last week was the warmest week on the planet which reminds us that humanity needs to increase the level of action on the climate and nature emergencies and to do so with emergency. If we don’t ensure that we keep temperature levels under control then it will have a catastrophic impact on our health systems, food systems, the economy, our communities and also upon nature.

That’s why I’m delighted that we as a council called for a recognition of the world nature emergency at the end of the last term of election and it is a great honour to now be the portfolio holder for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability and to have a small part in the important role in how the Council responds to these challenges. But indeed, the challenges cannot be met with just one portfolio holder, the nature challenges the responsibility of us all, as local members, as cabinet members and as a public body.

We have to place climate and nature at the centre of policy making and day to day actions. We are now seeing this recognised in the Corporate Plan and also in the Transformation Strategy. We have already created a cross-party advisory panel on the climate and nature emergency and we have a group of passionate members who are there to advise, challenge and inspire so that we can make the right decisions now and also in the future.

This group has met several times in the past year and have had the opportunity to help shape the way we achieve not only what we are legally required to under the Environment Wales Act but also what is the real level of ambition that we should be aiming for.

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Members have been able to suggest deeper, faster and braver steps for us to aim for in the next Action Plan and I look forward to bringing it to the scrutiny committee where I know it will be given the appropriate challenge to ensure it meets the goals and ambitions we all here share

But whatever real action the public will see, and during the past winter Carmarthenshire County Council through Welsh Government funding has been able to provide 5 tree planting sites including 3 new woodlands in Tregyb, Kidwelly and Llandybie. The right tree in the right place for the right reason is vital and allows us to have wider benefits for nature, restoration, habitat enhancement, climate mitigation but also vital health and wellbeing benefits for local communities. Locating these on suitable land in and around our communities allows for so much more than just the environmental benefits.

We are also close to designating 3 new Local Nature Reserves. Working with local communities, we have been able to obtain further funding from Welsh Government to help restore and protect high value area of habitat and biodiversity located near towns. This brings in so many additional heritage and leisure and education benefits along the way. These are in addition to the important conservation work being carried out at Llyn Llech Owain, Mynydd Mawr Woodland Park, and Nanty Ci Hill, Pembrey Burrows Local Nature Reserve, and Pembrey Country Park.

Last year more than 30 sites were designated across the county that would be managed for pollinator insects. Pollinators play a vital role in the ecological health balance of our planet. Protecting pollinators is essential for ensuring food security, maintaining biodiversity, promoting sustainable ecosystems and much more.

This year we are increasing the amount of land we manage differently to further understand the different techniques and what management system is required. Our biodiversity and ground maintenance teams are currently drawing up plans so that amenity grass cutting can be offered differently so that land can be used for wider benefits going forward. I will discuss these with my cabinet colleagues in housing, regeneration and education who will be able to introduce changes in their departments in phases.

Tree planting evokes a lot of debate and uncontrolled/unregulated tree planting to greenwashing carbon-intensive practices by at the expense of Welsh communities is something no one needs, and we do not support this. However, the importance of trees cannot be overstated. Their benefits for biodiversity and climate are just a couple of the significant roles trees play in ensuring our existence on this planet.

We have already created the first draft of a Tree Strategy for Carmarthenshire County Council which has been discussed in the Place and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee. We discussed the need to be sensitive to local rural communities while also looking for opportunities to make our grey urban areas greener. We will now take the feedback, learn further from other organisations and ensure we co-design policy that supports and brings communities with us

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while also ensuring that we recognise and understand the science, do not ignore the hard evidence that is so obvious and develop bold strong targets that match the urgency set out in this council's nature emergency declaration.

Supplementary Question by Councillor John James:

Later this month we will be celebrating Wales nature week which will start on the 22nd July. This offers us all an opportunity to focus on what we can do to protect and enhance nature in Carmarthenshire. Services that are delivered to us by nature is immeasurable – clean air, water and pollinator of food and so much more. Councillor Owen, how do you see Carmarthenshire's landscape and unique ecosystems, from the way we manage upland areas to the potential seagrass on low coast playing a part in mitigating and adapting to climate change?

Response by Councillor Aled Vaughan Owen – Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability:-

If we are truly going to both mitigate the worst effects of Climate Change and Adapt our communities to the amount of climate change that is already in the post, then working with the grain of nature offers us the best chance of success.

Carmarthenshire's varied landscapes and ecosystems offer an amazing opportunity for us to reach our shared decarbonisation aspirations - Our upland peatbogs they are an incredibly efficient carbon store, retaining more carbon in the soil than the equivalent capacity of a forest of trees. The 4% of Wales covered by peat stores up to 30% of Wales's soil carbon. However, decades of mismanagement and I guess shortsighted policies mean damaged peatlands are releasing carbon into the atmosphere, contributing to speeding up climate change.

Given that 70% of the UK's drinking water comes from upland areas dominated by peatlands, the need for their restoration is clear especially following 2 months where Wales has received only 44% of its expected rainfall. What's more, wet peat bogs contain up to 90% water meaning that they act as a natural barrier to spreading wildfires and they also reduce the risk of floods further downstream.

Managing land differently will be essential to reduce pollutants entering rivers, emitting further climate heating gases and reducing and adapting to flooding and other extreme weather scenarios. This will need to be done sensitively and appropriately working with all the stakeholders. But unfortunately, our thinking and actions do not change to keep up with the pace of changing climate, more areas and more people will become vulnerable to extreme weather and catastrophes. Change happens at the end of our comfort zone.

Nature based solutions offer opportunities within our towns. Decarbonisation and health are both reasons why we should shift the way that we travel. Green infrastructure offer huge potential in reducing harmful gases and improving local air quality. It provides habitat for pollinators, opportunity for sustainable urban

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drainage to slow down surface water flooding and greening up built environments can reduce heating and offers shade in extreme weather.

In 100 years, around 390,000 properties will be at risk of flooding. There will be a 47% increase in those liable to tidal flooding. This is where business as usual takes us. This is where protecting out of date agendas and habits gets us. This is where “This is how we’ve always done it” gets us. Embracing nature based solutions while changing our polluting practices will give us the opportunities to give the next generation a fighting chance.

One of the exciting developments as you mentioned is that of Sea grass. Sea grass is such an important ecosystem that we rarely appreciate. It is one of the best carbon sinks on the planet, it helps clean up pollutants in the water, it offers amazing habitats for species, and it also helps reduce coastal erosion which could result in reduce tidal flooding. Carmarthenshire should be proud that we have a sea grass nursery in Pendine, with academia supporting the research that hopefully can be rolled out at scale.

Many thanks for both your insightful questions Councillor James. I look forward to working with now and in your new Shadow Cabinet role, continue to be inspired by the Advisory Panel and challenged and supported by the members of the scrutiny.

The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that somebody else will save it. On these issues let’s continue to rise above any petty political point scoring, because it is in our collective action that will generate the power to heal and protect our planet and in so doing ensuring the survival of humanity .

10. MINUTES FOR INFORMATION (AVAILABLE TO VIEW ON THE WEBSITE)

The Chair stated that the minutes outlined on the agenda under 10.1 – 10.8 were available for information on the Council website.

CHAIR

DATE

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