

COUNTY COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY, 24 JANUARY 2024

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

Councillors (In Person):

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

Councillors (Virtually):

L.R. Bowen	K.V. Broom	A. Davies	T.A.J. Davies
LI.M. Davies	S.L. Davies	T. Davies	M. Donoghue
D.C. Evans	N. Evans	R.E. Evans	J.P. Hart
T.M. Higgins	G.H. John	B.W. Jones	A.C. Jones
D. Jones	N. Lewis	K. Madge	A.G. Morgan
D. Owen	B.D.J. Phillips	E.M.J.G. Schiavone	J. Seward
F. Walters	P.T. Warlow	D.E. Williams	J. Williams

Also Present (In Person):

C. Moore, Director of Corporate 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)
R. Edgecombe, Legal Services Manager
J. Fearn, Head of Housing Property and Strategic Projects
R.M. Davies, Strategic Housing Delivery Manager
G. Morgan, Head of Democratic Services
C. Higginson, Media Manager
L. Jenkins, Cabinet Support Officer
M. Davies, Member Support Officer
J. Owens, Democratic Services Officer

Also Present (Virtually):

S. Williams, Senior Accountant
E. Evans, Principal Democratic Services Officer
R. Morris, Members Support Officer
D. Hall-Jones, Member Support Officer
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator

Chamber - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP and remotely - 10.00 - 11.52 am

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B. Davies, A.D. Harries, M.J.A. Lewis, D. Nicholas and E. Rees.

Apologies were also received from W. Walters, Chief Executive, J. Morgan, Director of Community Services and L. Rees-Jones, Head of Administration and Law & Monitoring Officer who were unable to be in attendance at the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS

Councillor / Officer	Minute Number	Nature of Interest
Councillor J.P. Hart	6. Polling district and polling places review 2023, draft proposals	Workplace is used as a polling station.
Councillor J.P. Hart	7.1 - HRA and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25	Close family member rents a property within the County.
Councillor H.A.L. Evans	7.1 - HRA and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25	Close family member is the Chief Executive of a Housing Association.
Councillor J.D. James	7.1 - HRA and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25	Family members are council house tenants.
Councillor P.M. Hughes	7.1 - HRA and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25	He rents a property.
Councillor M. Donoghue	7.1 - HRA and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25	Her husband has a property rented through the Authority.
Councillor D. Price*	7.1 - HRA and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25	His grandmother is a Council tenant.
Councillor E. Skinner*	7.1 - HRA and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25	Holds a lease with the Authority and pays service charges.
Councillor G.B. Thomas*	7.1 - HRA and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25	Owns a house which he rents out through the Authority.
Councillor A. Evans*	7.1 - HRA and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25	His Aunt's mother is a council house tenant.
Councillor D. Thomas*	7.1 - HRA and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25	His wife owns a property rented through the Authority.

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Councillor S.L. Rees*	7.1 - HRA and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25	In relation to close relatives.
Councillor H.A.L. Evans	7.2 – HRA Business Plan 2024-27 - Carmarthenshire’s Housing Investment Programme	Close family member is the Chief Executive of a Housing Association.
Councillor J.D. James	7.2 – HRA Business Plan 2024-27 - Carmarthenshire’s Housing Investment Programme	Family members are council house tenants.
Councillor E. Skinner*	7.2 – HRA Business Plan 2024-27 - Carmarthenshire’s Housing Investment Programme	Holds a lease with the Authority.
Councillor J.P. Hart	10.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors Glynog Davies and Alun Lenny	His sister is a teacher within the County.
Councillor A. Davies	10.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors Glynog Davies and Alun Lenny	His wife is a teacher employed by the County.
Councillor H.B. Shepardson	10.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors Glynog Davies and Alun Lenny	His daughter is a teacher within the County.
Councillor L.D. Evans	10.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors Glynog Davies and Alun Lenny	Her daughter is a teacher within the County.
Councillor B.W. Jones	10.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors Glynog Davies and Alun Lenny	Her son is a head teacher in a school within the County.
Councillor A.Vaughan Owen	10.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors Glynog Davies and Alun Lenny	His wife is a teacher in a school within the County.
Councillor F. Walters	10.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors Glynog Davies and Alun Lenny	Family members are teachers.
L.I.M. Davies	10.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors Glynog Davies and Alun Lenny	Her husband is a teacher in a secondary school within the County.
E. Skinner	10.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors Glynog Davies and Alun Lenny	Niece is a teacher

**Declaration of interest made prior to consideration of item 7.1 of the agenda.*

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

3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY)

- The Chair reflected on a very busy month for her and her Consort and referred to her attendance at the very successful Pembrey Walrus Dip which raised over £800 for charity. The Chair extended her gratitude to those who had assisted with the fund-raising efforts.
- The Chair, on behalf of the Council, conveyed condolences to former Councillor Irfon Jones, following the passing of his wife, Jean.
- The Chair, on behalf of the Council, conveyed condolences to Councillor Carys Jones, following the passing of her father.
- The Chair, on behalf of the Council, conveyed condolences to the family of former County Councillor Jim Jones following his recent passing and informed Council members of the funeral arrangements.

4. ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE LEADER, CABINET MEMBERS AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (IF ANY)

The Leader provided an update on the Council's response following the recent announcement by Tata Steel of its plans to cut 2800 jobs at their Port Talbot site.

The Leader referred to the gradual decline of heavy industry in Wales, whereby the significant reduction in the number of workers over the decades had resulted in lower levels of production, to a point where, in 2022, only 2.8 million tonnes of steel were produced in the UK, compared to 40 million tonnes in Germany and 996 million tonnes in China.

The Leader emphasised the significant economic impact of the job cuts which would be felt across the whole of South Wales and informed Council that work had commenced to assess the number of Carmarthenshire residents whose jobs are at direct risk at Port Talbot, and of the impact on the supply chain within the county. Furthermore, it was reported that the Chief Executive had also been in discussions with Chief Executives from across the region and representatives of the Swansea Bay City Deal. An assurance was provided to Members that the Council would support those affected; it was however expressed that given the scale of the Tata Steel announcement, only a UK Government intervention could change its course.

The Leader referred to the written representations he had made to the Chair of Tata Steel UK, seeking an assurance about the future of the Trostre plant in Llanelli, which currently processes steel from Port Talbot to make its packaging and directly employs over 650 people. As a major employer within the area for 70 years, concerns were raised regarding Trostre's medium-term future due to the changes at Port Talbot. In this regard, Tata Steel had confirmed that it would continue production using coil rolled from imported slabs in the hot strip mill in Port Talbot, or with coil imported from Tata Steel plants in the Netherlands and

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India as well as other select strategic suppliers. The Leader highlighted his concerns that the potential reliance on imported materials would result in additional travel costs and uncertainty, therefore jeopardising the future viability of the Trostre site.

In closing, the Leader stated that any response from the Chair of Tata Steel UK would be circulated to Members.

5. TO APPROVE AND SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON THE 6TH DECEMBER 2023

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on the 6th December, 2023 be signed as a correct record.

6. POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW 2023, DRAFT PROPOSALS

[NOTE: Councillor J. P. Hart, having earlier declared an interest in this item, redeclared his interest and remained in the meeting during the consideration and determination thereof.]

Further to minute 8 of the Council meeting held on 11 October 2023, the Council received for consideration the outcome of the preliminary Polling District and Polling Places Review 2023. The preliminary review undertaken by Electoral Services entailed an assessment of the suitability of the current polling districts and places within the county.

In an update to Council, Members were advised that the timetable detailed within the report would be revised following a request from the print supplier for poll card data relevant to the Police and Crime Commissioner elections to be uploaded in March 2024 which would therefore delay the final proposals being considered by Council.

The report put forth for consideration detailed the legal framework and included information and proposals on the implementation of parliamentary boundary changes and polling district changes. Council's approval was sought to proceed to the next stage of the review in respect of the commencement of a robust consultation exercise with key stakeholders on the draft proposals.

The Cabinet Member for Organisation and Workforce, in response to a query, provided an assurance to Council that officers would address the matters raised pertaining to live CCTV cameras and the provision of temporary structures within the areas that did not have viable polling stations, as appropriate.

RESOLVED that:

6.1 The draft proposals detailed within the report be endorsed.

6.2 Approval be granted to proceed to the next stage of the review in respect of consultation on the draft proposals.

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

7. TO CONSIDER THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CABINET IN RESPECT OF THE FOLLOWING ITEMS

7.1. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT AND HOUSING RENT SETTING 2024/25

[NOTE: Councillors M. Donoghue, A. Evans, H.A.L. Evans, J.P. Hart, P.M. Hughes, J.D. James, D. Price, S.L. Rees, E. Skinner, D. Thomas and G.B. Thomas having declared an interest in this item, left the meeting prior to the consideration and determination thereof.]

Council was informed that the Cabinet, at its meeting held on the 15th January 2024 [minute 9 thereof refers], had reviewed the Housing Revenue Account and Housing Rent Setting proposals for 2024/25 prior to the consideration of Council. The report, prepared by the Director of Corporate Services in conjunction with officers from the Communities Department, brought together the latest proposals for the Revenue and Capital Budgets for the Housing Revenue Account 2024/25 to 2026/27 and detailed proposed increases to housing rents for 2024/25.

Reference was made to Appendix D of the report which set out the views of the Communities, Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee following consideration and endorsement of the proposals at its meeting held on the 13th December 2023, as part of the budget consultation process.

In presenting the report the Cabinet Member for Resources expressed the challenges faced by the Authority in achieving the fine balance of setting the rent within current Government policy at an affordable level for tenants whilst also delivering on its housing aspirations. Furthermore, it was emphasised that adoption of the Cabinet's recommendations by Council would represent an average increase of 6.5% to housing rent, which was just below the Welsh Government cap of 6.7%. The Cabinet Member for Resources clarified that the increase would equate to an average housing rent of £105.90 per week for its tenants and represented one of the lowest rent levels out of the 11 stock-retaining Welsh Authorities, and significantly below the private sector housing rents.

In closing, the Cabinet Member for Resources reported that the proposals sought to balance the pressures on households during a cost of living crisis with the need to continue with the Authority's Housing Development Programme, while ensuring that properties continued to be maintained to the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard Plus (CHS+) standard.

RESOLVED that the following recommendations of the Cabinet be adopted:

7.1.1 "to increase the average housing rent by 6.5% (£6.47) per dwelling per week within the parameters of the WG Social Housing Rents Policy (inclusive of progression for tenants below target rents)

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

- properties at target rents will increase by 6.39% and
- properties where rent is below target rent will increase by 6.39% plus a maximum progression of £1.00
- those rents above target are frozen until such time that they meet the target

which will produce a sustainable Business Plan, maintain the CHS+ and deliver the Authority's Housing Regeneration and Development Delivery Plan;

- 7.1.2 to continue with a maximum progression of £1 for rents below the proposed rent for each stock type;
- 7.1.3 to increase garage rents by 6.5% from £9.00 to £9.60 and garage bases from £2.08 to £2.22;
- 7.1.4 to apply the amended Service Charge Policy to ensure tenants who receive the benefit from specific services pay for those services (Appendix C of the report);
- 7.1.5 to increase charges for using our sewerage treatment works in line with the rent increase;
- 7.1.6 to approve the Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2024/27 (2025/26 & 2026/27 being soft budgets) as set out in Appendix A of the report;
- 7.1.7 to approve the proposed Capital Programme and applicable funding for 2024/25 and the indicative spends for 2025/26 to 2026/27, as set out in Appendix B of the report."

7.2. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2024-27 CARMARTHENSHIRE'S HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

[NOTES:

- Councillor H.A.L. Evans, having earlier declared an interest in this item, was not present during the consideration and determination thereof.
- Councillors J. D. James and E. Skinner, having declared an interest in this item, remained in the meeting during the consideration and determination thereof.]

Council was informed that the Cabinet, at its meeting held on the 15th January 2024 [minute 8 thereof refers], had considered the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2024-27 Carmarthenshire's Housing Investment Programme which explained the vision and detail of the Council's Housing Investment Programme over the next three years and comprised housing stock improvement plans, the new build programme and provision of more affordable homes, together with the development of new standards to meet the Authority's net zero carbon principles.

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

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Homes summarised the five key themes set out within the business plan and provided an overview of the priorities which would define the Authority's direction of travel over the next three years, as follows:

- Provision of a new estate and tenancy management offer to ensure housing officers are more visible and accessible on the Authority's estates. The offer would also seek to balance support for Council tenants with enforcement activity where appropriate. This would also be aligned to the implementation of a new pilot "handyperson" scheme on priority estates;
- Continue to keep the number of void properties at a low level and reduce the current backlog of day-to-day repairs with an enhanced in-house provision around day-to-day repairs and re-balance the current split between internal and external contractors;
- Continue to invest in making sure homes are cheaper to run for Council tenants with long-term aims to decarbonise homes;
- Acquisition of more land in the areas of greatest need, including larger sites with exclusive use for Council housing to meet the unprecedented need for homes;
- Further investment in specialist type housing (e.g. learning disability, older people and young person supported housing) to ensure needs are met in the most appropriate way. This investment would also ensure a move away from expensive and inappropriate out of county placements for certain client groups; and
- Procurement of a new minor works framework for day-to-day repairs and wider improvement projects to ensure a quicker response and to support smaller local contractors across the County.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Homes highlighted that income received from tenants' rents and other funding sources over the next three years would enable the Authority to develop a capital programme exceeding £110m which would have a positive impact upon current and future tenants and endeavour. In closing, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Homes extended her gratitude to those who had contributed to the development of the comprehensive and ambitious plan of the Authority.

In response to a query in respect of the Council's policy on damp and mould policy, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Homes referred Members' attention to the Housing Standards Compliance Policy set out at Appendix F to the report and Theme 2 of the Housing Investment Programme, which comprised seven key areas of work, and included the Council's intended actions to minimise exposure to dampness and mould. It was further noted that tenants also had a responsibility to inform the Council of such issues.

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

Reference was made to the new estate and tenancy management offer whereby a request was made for a proactive approach to be taken by officers to work with Members in a partnership approach to improve living conditions for tenants.

It was commented that the Authority's endeavours to tackle the housing crisis with significant investment during times of austerity and budget constraints was to be commended.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Homes, in response to concerns raised regarding homes with living conditions deemed unacceptable due to severe cases of mould, stated that queries could be directed to her for further investigation.

Following a query, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Homes provided an assurance that remedial work in respect of the removal of cavity wall insulation was undertaken by the Council, as required.

RESOLVED that the following recommendations of the Cabinet be adopted:

- 7.2.1 to confirm the vision for the housing investment programmes over the next three years;**
- 7.2.2 to agree that the 2024/25 Business Plan be submitted to Welsh Government;**
- 7.2.3 to note the new estate and tenancy management offer that will ensure our housing officers are more visible and accessible, balancing the support required by tenants and the need to take enforcement action when required;**
- 7.2.4 to agree the implementation of a new pilot "handyperson" scheme on priority estates;**
- 7.2.5 to note the Authority's commitment to keeping the number of void properties as low as possible;**
- 7.2.6 to confirm the Authority's commitment to reduce the number of back-logged day to day repairs by rebalancing the split between internal and external contractors, and developing a new small works framework;**
- 7.2.7 to confirm the Authority's priority to purchase additional land and develop large sites exclusively for Council housing and to note the contribution this plan makes to increasing the supply of affordable homes;**
- 7.2.8 to note the Authority's commitment to make all our homes more energy efficient for tenants, achieving a minimum Band C energy performance rating (EPC C), installing rooftop solar panels as part of our re-roofing programme and developing a business**

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

case for the wider installation of solar panels to tenants' homes and supporting the Council's net zero carbon principles;

- 7.2.9 to confirm the Authority's commitment to continue to increase the supply of specialist housing in the county;**
- 7.2.10 to note the importance of the investment included in this plan and its role in stimulating the local economy and creating local jobs and training opportunities."**

7.3. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2024-25

Council was informed that the Cabinet, at its meeting held on the 15th January 2024 [minute 12 thereof refers], considered a report which outlined information in regard to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme introduced by Welsh Government in 2013/14. Despite being an all-Wales scheme, individual Councils were required by the Prescribed Requirements Regulations to formally adopt a Council Tax Reduction Scheme by 31st January each year. Details pertaining to the limited areas of local discretion and the policy adopted by Council in respect of those discretions were set out in the report.

The report sought formal adoption of the Council Tax Reduction scheme for 2024/25. It was noted that subsequent to the Cabinet meeting the scheme regulations had been approved by Welsh Government and had come into force on 19th January 2024.

In presenting the report the Cabinet Member for Resources referred to two corrections to be made to section 2.4 of the report whereby it was clarified that the regulations had been laid by the *Senedd* on 5th December **2023**.

RESOLVED that the following recommendations of the Cabinet be adopted:

- 7.3.1 "that the standard all-Wales Council Tax Reduction scheme provided for in the Council Tax Reduction Schemes and Prescribed Requirements (Wales) Regulations 2013 be formally adopted;**
- 7.3.2 to implement the annual up-rating figures (used in entitlement calculations) and other technical amendments, included in the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements and Default Scheme) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2024 due to come into effect 19th January 2024 and these Regulations be applied in relation to a council tax reduction scheme made for the financial year beginning on 1st April 2024;**
- 7.3 to continue to exercise its discretion with regard to the limited discretionary elements of the prescribed scheme as outlined in the Executive Summary to the report".**

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

8. TO CONSIDER THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE IN RESPECT OF THE FOLLOWING ITEM:-

8.1. MULTI LOCATION MEETING POLICY

Council was informed that the Democratic Services Committee, at its meeting held on the 5th December 2023 [minute 5 thereof refers], had considered a report which appended proposed amendments to the Authority's Multi-location Meeting Policy.

The Authority's Multi location meeting policy had been approved by Council on the 12th October 2022 (Minute 4.1 thereof refers) and took into account the interim statutory guidance issued by Welsh Government. Council was advised that the Welsh Government published its final guidance on the 7th July 2023 and consequently it was considered opportune to review the policy based on the Authority's experience of multi-location meetings to-date.

The proposed amendments to the policy, based upon feedback from Committee Chairs, included greater guidance on the use of cameras for remote attendees in order to maintain the integrity of the Authority's decision-making process and to reduce the opportunity for legal challenge in this regard. Minor amendments in response to the easing of covid-related restrictions and voting methodology had also been proposed.

A concern was expressed regarding the impact emanating from the introduction of the multi-location legislation imposed by Welsh Government. It was explained that officers of the Authority had no influence over the electronic devices utilised by members of the public who participated in multi-location meetings, whereby the frequent recurrence of technical issues experienced by members of the public, including connectivity issues and impaired audio were not considered conducive to the smooth running of meetings. Furthermore, some members of the public were unable to utilise the simultaneous translation facilities provided by the Authority, which infringed upon on the rights of those in attendance to use the Welsh language during some meetings.

RESOLVED that the following recommendation of the Democratic Services Committee be adopted:

“that the amended Multi-location Meeting Policy be approved.”

9. TO RECEIVE THE REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON THE 11TH DECEMBER 2023

RESOLVED that the report of the meeting of the Cabinet held on the 11th December 2023 be received.

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

10. TO CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING NOTICE OF MOTION:-

10.1. NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLORS GLYNOG DAVIES AND ALUN LENNY

[NOTE: Councillors A. Davies, Ll.M. Davies, L.D. Evans, J. P. Hart, B.W. Jones, H.B. Shephardson, E. Skinner, F. Walters and A.Vaughan Owen having earlier declared an interest in this item, redeclared their interest and remained in the meeting during the consideration and determination thereof.]

Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors Glynog Davies and Alun Lenny:-

“TEACHERS PAY UPLIFT

Carmarthenshire County Council calls on Jeremy Miles, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language, to ensure that the pay uplifts for teachers for Sept 2022 and Sept 2023, of 1.5 % in each year (which equates to £3m for this council), is fully funded by the Welsh Government for future years. This would avoid putting an additional pressure on Local Authorities and the consequential impact on school budgets, which are already extremely tight.”

The motion was duly seconded.

The proposers and seconder of the Motion were afforded the opportunity of speaking in support thereof and outlined the reasons for its submission, as set out in the Motion.

A number of representations were made in respect of the Motion.

RESOLVED that the Motion be supported.

11. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

12. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS (NONE RECEIVED)

The Chair advised that no questions by Members had been received.

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

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

The Chair stated that the minutes outlined on the agenda under 13.1 – 13.13 were available for information on the Council website.

CHAIR

DATE

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