

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS ON THURSDAY 18 JUNE 2015

Present: County Councillor R G Thomas (Chair)
County Councillors K Curry, M Dorrance, D O Evans, V Evans, D C Jones, E M Jones, H Lewis, R H Mills, E T Morgan, G Morgan, D R Price, G D Price, K S Silk, D H Williams and G Williams and S Williams

In Attendance: County Councillor W J Powell, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability

Officers: Simon Inkson, Head of Housing, Sarah Jowett, Senior Manager Regeneration and Property, Hugo Van Rees, County Farms Manager and John Forsey, Interim Joint Passenger Transport Manager

1.	ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR	PLSC1– 2015
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RESOLVED that County Councillor E M Jones be elected Vice Chair for the ensuing year.

2.	APOLOGIES	PLSC2– 2015
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors G G Hopkins, T J Van Rees and Professor I Roffe, Independent Member.

3.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	PLSC3 – 2015
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County Councillor H Lewis declared a personal interest in Item 7, County Farms Estate, but reminded the Committee that he has a dispensation from Standards Committee to speak on issues relating to County Farms.

4.	DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPS	PLSC4 – 2015
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There were no declarations of party whips.

5.	MINUTES	PLSC5– 2015
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The Chair was authorised to sign the Minutes of the last meeting, held on 12 March 2015, as a correct record. (Copy filed with signed Minutes.)

Notes of meetings of the Joint Chairs Steering Group held on 20 February and 13 March were also circulated with the agenda. The Chair drew Members' attention to the adjustment to the Areas of Responsibility for the Committee.

6.	HOUSING	PLSC6 – 2014
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The Committee received a presentation by the Head of Housing covering the following issues:

- Key Issues
- Context
- Restructuring

- Housing Act 2014
- Service Improvement Plan
- Appointment of Housing Scrutiny Champion

Discussion:

- Whilst an authority is not obliged to retain housing stock, if it does, that stock must be managed and maintained
- A new staffing structure and IT system were introduced in November 2104 followed by a new allocations system
- Housing Management and Options Officers (HMOOs) have replaced Housing Officers, Rent Officers and the Prevention of Homeless Officers. HMOOs each have a case load of approximately 200 properties to manage.
- A number of short term issues are being resolved
- The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 places new responsibilities on the Authority and is more prescriptive. Regional working with Carmarthenshire is ongoing
- De-pooling – charges for communal items in flats are to be charged separately. Members expressed some concern that a standard charge, averaged across all properties, to tenants of flats would not incentivize tenants to maintain certain areas such as communal gardens. There could be an opportunity for waiving charges if tenants assumed responsibility for grass cutting etc
- The Authority has exited the HRA regime at a cost of £72M – this will add £1.3m pa to revenue and give greater freedom to borrow. Capital receipts will also be reinvested. The authority will also be able to acquire and develop new housing accommodation.
- MAPPA – the Committee had previously had a response from the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner regarding scrutiny of MAPPA.
- Renewable energy sources – a recent cabinet report into use of renewables had excluded the housing stock. Air source heat pumps are being effectively used in off gas areas. A range of arrangements was in place across the County for different heating types and these would be reviewed as appropriate
- The new IT system will allow the service to become paperless, improve customer access, and allow agile staff working. Further developments will allow automated satisfaction surveys and overdue rent demands
- Fire risk assessments are to be carried out
- Definition of local connection in respect of Housing Allocations to be circulated
- Right to Buy – discussion to be had regarding requesting the Welsh Government to suspend right to buy as there is an undersupply of affordable housing. A settled income stream is needed to support further borrowing
- Universal credit could pose a risk to the Authority – currently Housing Benefit is paid direct to the Council. Under the new arrangements a tenant would have to be eight weeks in arrears before the Council can request that Housing Benefit is paid to the Authority.
- The Workforce Development Plan would be checked to ensure that appropriate training was in place to reflect the Authority as being Dementia Friendly
- Care and Repair deliver a significant proportion of adaptations and Disabled Facilities Grants

Outcome:

- Further information be sought on the scrutiny of MAPPA, including the level of seniority of members, areas scrutinized and whether an Annual Report is produced.
- County Council should determine the opinion on Right to Buy
- All County Councillors to be made aware of housing needs in their areas
- A Scrutiny Champion for Housing would be appointed at the next meeting

7.	COUNTY FARMS	PLSC7– 2015
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Documents:

- Report of the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability

Issues:

- County Farm Estate Asset Delivery Plan had been updated and would be circulated to Members
- 3 year rent reviews
- Levels of investment

Response:

- Traditional and new tenancies are subject to a 3 year review
- Increase in income of £20K has been achieved at reletting rather than increased rents. The industry is not sufficiently strong to support large increases
- Tenants are concerned with the condition of the estate
- Capital investment is needed
- Some holdings do not meet Farm Assurance standards and may result in some holdings not being able to continue to maintain dairy herds
- It has been the case that dairy units had generated the largest rents but this is no longer the case
- Condition survey being undertaken and should be largely complete by December. This will provide base data to determine a revenue and capital programme over the longer term
- Income from capital receipts has been diverted to the Schools Modernisation Programme with only 10% retained within the service
- Reinvestment is essential if the Estate is to progress
- Only £185K was available for maintenance and repairs in the previous financial year and this will reduce to £140K in the current year
- Members believe that a debate regarding the future of the Estate must be undertaken

Outcome:

- A further report to be given to the Committee in December 2015 by which time the condition survey will be nearing completion and the extent of the issue will be clearer

8.	PUBLIC TRANSPORT	PLSC8– 2015
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Documents:

- Report of the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transportation

Issues:

- Budget reductions have led to a review of public transport options
- Two options are being consulted upon
- Draft policy to be produced for local bus service provision

Responses:

- Planned budget reduction of £500K
- Methodology to evaluate services compiled
- Pre engagement consultation had been undertaken with five public interest groups including the Older Peoples Forum and Disability Powys
- Consultation period to close on 29 June
- New proposals to be implemented in November 2015
- Member Development Seminar 3 July 2015 to debate responses to consultation
- Moratorium on bus service improvement during consultation period

Outcome:

- Members of the Committee to meet to scrutinize the proposals on the afternoon of 3 July following the Member Development Seminar

County Councillor ET Morgan left the meeting at 12.40

County Councillor D R Price left the meeting at 12.55

9.	SCRUTINY REVIEW GROUPS	PLSC9 – 2015
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i) Civil Parking Enforcement

Documents:

- Cabinet Action Plan

Outcomes:

- That the Action Plan be accepted

ii) ICT Infrastructure

County Councillors S Williams and D R Price be appointed to sit with the Corporate Matters Working Group of the People Committee to consider the way in which ICT supports service improvement

10.	WORK PROGRAMME	PLSC10 – 2014
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Documents Considered:

- Work Programme

Outcomes:

- Highways and Transportation be invited to the next meeting to provide an overview of the service
- Waste and Recycling – a presentation to the Committee on action the Council is taking to influence the national agenda and legislation

11.	CORRESPONDENCE	PLSC11– 2015
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There was no correspondence.

R G THOMAS
CHAIR

Place Scrutiny Committee
18.06.2015 10.00 – 13.15