

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMY, RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BY ZOOM ON THURSDAY, 11 JANUARY 2024

PRESENT

County Councillor A Davies (Chair)

County Councillors B Davies, K Lewis, G Mitchell, S L Williams, J Charlton,

D A Thomas, P James, C Kenyon-Wade, R Devlin and Chloe Masefield

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies received: Cllrs L Rijnenberg, A Jones

J Gibson-Watt Cabinet Member for and Open and Transparent Powys

M Dorrance Cabinet Member for a More Prosperous Powys

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest by Members relating to items to be considered at the meeting.

3. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPS

The Committee did not receive any disclosures of prohibited party whips which a Member has been given in relation to the meeting in accordance with Section 78(3) of the Local Government Measure 2011.

4. MINUTES

The Chair was authorised to sign the Minutes of the previous meeting on 11 December 2023 as a correct record.

5. RENT SETTING OVERVIEW

Background:

- The report provided an update on proposals for rents and service charges for Council House and garage rents and all property and tenancy related Service Charges, for the financial year 2024-25.
- And included recommendations for the Committee to consider before being presented to Cabinet later in the month.
- The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan will be provided to Scrutiny in the coming months.

Points raised by the Committee:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members:
How was the Major Repairs Allowance calculated by Welsh Government. 2.3 Council would not receive the annual Major Repairs Allowance (MRA), worth £3,720,000 million in capital funding for 2024-2025 year, to support ongoing investment.	It was expected that the funding figure was based on the number of homes within the local authority, however officers would investigate more detail for the Committee.
Assurance was sought around the	It was explained that for both rents and

<p>process and decision making around the 6.7% rent increase proposal.</p>	<p>gypsy accommodation a cost analysis had been conducted to review service efficiency, which had seen Void times halved. Legal requirements demand additional costs in the coming months that all voids (450) require floor coverings and carpets. Inflation was also considered. Increased numbers in homelessness and prevention had seen a proposal drawn up to provide a Bed and Breakfast for temporary accommodation to reduce the use of private run businesses and drive costs down.</p>
<p>It was asked if a nonpayment calculation had been performed.</p>	<p>The nonpayment element had been considered and explained that the rate of increase had been calculated to ensure the ability to pay.</p>
<p>Had funding been provided for homelessness prevention and if so, how much would that be.</p>	<p>Homelessness and prevention services were run through the housing general fund and included in the overall budget setting which would be decided by full Council. Welsh Government discussions were ongoing around the options for prevention.</p>
<p>Concerns were shared around the correlation between the service spend on garages and the cost recovery of garage payments.</p>	<p>It was explained that the garage element of the service was under review due to the condition of the garages and would be considered for alternative use e.g. Housing or car parking.</p>
<p>Illegal immigration was raised and how it was dealt with for those waiting to be allocated for rehousing and how priority listing works.</p>	<p>Home Office homeless legislation was followed by the Council and emphasised that each individual application was considered with its own unique circumstances.</p>
<p>Page 19 – 3.4.2 it was asked if the work had been completed to remove all careline pullcords from circulation. And if charges would change to reflect what was installed for the user.</p>	<p>Work was underway to remove and replace all pullcords with a pendant or wrist band. It was agreed that charges would be reviewed.</p>
<p>Page 21 – it was asked if all gypsy sites had grass.</p>	<p>It was confirmed that not all sites had grass and those with waste land would be considered for development e.g. play areas.</p>
<p>What did the weekly gypsy site occupation charge include.</p>	<p>The sites contain a mixture of accommodation and electricity would be a separate charge for the residents.</p>
<p>The level of charges was questioned and asked what accommodation and amenities gypsy sites provide.</p>	<p>Each site/family had an amenity unit fully furnished.</p>
<p>Figures were compared and temporary accommodation showed figures that were</p>	<p>It was explained that temporary accommodation was fully furnished which</p>

challenged and stressed temporary accommodation is often for vulnerable people.	was replaced on a regular basis therefore costs were higher to recover, the current charge did not reflect the full amount required to maintain the service.
Would sufficient funds be available to meet the Welsh Government Housing Quality Standards	Currently funding was available, however a new standard would be introduced in April 2024 and discussions were on going between landlords and the Welsh Government around funding needed to meet new standards.

- The committee felt that all challenges and questions had been answered and clarified in full.
- It was asked that all considerations above were taken forward by the service.
- And agreed that the eight recommendations within the report had been fully processed and considered in depth to meet demands on the service.

10.1.1 That with effect from April 1st, 2024, the average rent in Powys will increase by 6.7% (the average rent being £108.24 per week) for all 5,524 Council owned homes, excluding service charges.

10.1.2 That service charges charged to HRA tenants are amended with effect from April 1st, 2024 (included in Table Two above) to allow the Council to recover the cost incurred in providing these services.

10.1.3 That the weekly cost from April 1st, 2024, for all tenants receiving the Careline community alarm service in 2024-2025 is £3.91 per week.

10.1.4 That HRA garage rents in Powys with effect from April 1st, 2024, for 2024-2025 are increased by 6.7% to £14.65 per week.

10.1.5 That garage plot charges effective from April 1st, 2024, for 2024- 2025 are £186.29 per annum.

10.1.6 That the weekly occupation charge from April 1st, 2024, charges for Gypsy and Traveller pitches in 2024-2025 will be increased by 6.7%, the average rent being £122.09.

10.1.7 That the charge for temporary accommodation increases, with effect from April 1st, 2024, for the year 2024-2025, by 6.7%

10.1.8 That all other rental, not detailed above, effective from April 1st, 2024, will increase by 6.7%. Service charges continue to be recovered on an actual basis.

Resolved: The Rent Setting Overview be noted.

6. CAR PARKING REVIEW UPDATE

Background:

- The presentation summarised the feedback from the ongoing Working Groups.
- The Officers stressed that the solutions within the presentation were themes and ideas and had not been validated or verified.
- The Committee were asked for comments that would be collated and added to the final report.
- A report with recommendations and costings would be provided to Cabinet later in the year.

Points raised by the Committee:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members:
Tariffs	

Clarity was asked for around ticket types.	Permits were sold on an annual or seasonal basis (1,3,6 or 12 months) and valid in any long stay car park. An annual permit of £370 equates to just over £1 a day. Permits for Single use car parks had been commented by the Working Group.
It was felt that more imaginative ways were needed to encourage footfall into town centres, including options of half hour free car parking.	Suggested options had been logged on the presentation, however income would reduce.
It was commented that facilities differ in wards and each community would need a combination of parking options.	
How would the council facilitate unique car parking charges for each community.	Officers felt that options could be explored, benefits and equity would need to be demonstrated throughout the county.
It was suggested that a percentage of spaces for each car park could be designated free for certain periods of time.	
Prices were challenged and compared with those immediately across the border. It was felt that Ceredigion would not take demand away from Powys compared to that of closer local authorities.	Benchmarking had been part of the process and looked into neighbouring authorities including Ceredigion.
How much had the report cost.	Atkins commission was approximately £38k.
Enforcement Resources & Service Improvement /Innovation	
How many Parking Enforcement Officers were in post.	Full complement of eight full time equivalents were currently employed.
It was felt that the re-introduction of the short stay car park and changing the Parking Enforcement Officers working pattern would help towards solutions for the Council.	It was explained that the report would show short, medium, and long recommendations with costings.
It was asked if automation had been considered (cameras/barriers) which may be easier to implement than variable costing levels throughout Powys.	It is not believed that the legislation permits enforcement of off street car parks by ANPR systems, enforcement powers were restricted to moving traffic offences e.g. bus lanes, yellow boxes or no right turns. Barriers controlled car parks would demand a person to be contactable whilst barriers were in operation and capital outlay on the smaller car parks could not be justified.
Non-Pay and Display Car Parks	
It was suggested that digital monitors could be used to display prices and gain from advertising charges.	

<p>Would the Council consider a higher KW per hour charging machines for electric cars as it was expected that 1 hour of charging would provide approximately 25 miles.</p>	<p>The Council uses the Dragon Charging network with 21kWh fast chargers. The output of these were dependant on circumstance and capacity of the network which does vary the power they provide. Central government grants capped the cost per charger which limits the capacity of Electrical Vehicle Charing Points (EVCP) to maximum to 21kWh chargers. In addition to our EVCP network we have a concession agreement with SWARCO company that provides 50kw chargers in five car parks, this was a Welsh Government assisted funded project to provide a network of rapid chargers across Wales. Three sub stations had also been introduced in car parks using a green energy grant to future proof demand.</p>
<p>Did the scope of the review consider bringing in fees for all car parks, which could then provide all car parks with a set period of free parking.</p>	<p>It was confirmed that the suggestion had been covered in the scope of the review and would be reflected in the final report.</p>
<p>It was asked if community car parks were publicly owned for electric chargers to be installed.</p>	<p>Terms and conditions of the grant funding stipulate non streetcar parking; however, residents can use the chargers out of hours. Ticketing was considered and not always possible in non-public owned car parks. It was explained that as the network expanded the roles of both private and privately owned car parks would be explored more and for additional areas to be considered e.g. housing estates etc.</p>
<p>A request was made for longer term car park usage data to be shared to confirm usage.</p>	
<p>And asked if blue badge holders had to pay for parking.</p>	<p>Blue Badge (BB) holders currently had free parking in all off street car parks in any space. BB holders were provided with a guidebook that sets out permissions for on street parking Blue Badges: your rights and responsibilities GOV.WALES.</p>
	<p>The Portfolio Holder thanked everyone for contributions and stressed that the review was independent, informative and evidence based.</p>

- It was welcomed by the Portfolio Holder that the Economy, Residents and Communities Scrutiny Committee would receive the final report before presented to Cabinet.
- The Committee agreed that the review process was full, in-depth, and encompassed all aspects.

Resolved: The Car Parking Review Presentation be noted.

7.	CLIMATE REPORT
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Background:

- The report provided a summary review of the main Netherwood Report commissioned in May 2023.
- The Netherwood Report focused on the scope of the programme and how pace could increase.
- Key elements from the report highlighted:
 - The climate programme and the work around it was not strategic enough.
 - A recommendation to reframe the current programme with a focus on decarbonisation and climate risk.
 - Leadership and governance would need to strengthen between the mix of strategic and operational levels.
 - A recommendation to change the approach and look wider than the carbon accounts.
 - To fully understand opportunities across the full organisation.
 - To evidence how resources and staff time will be committed.

Points raised by the Committee:	Responses received from Officers or Cabinet Members:
It was asked if work was aligned with Bannau Brycheiniog after receiving shared prosperity funding as concerns were raised around duplication.	<p>The report showed that the Council and Bannau Brycheiniog had a close joined up working relationship however the report identified that elements needed to be strengthened.</p> <p>The Portfolio Holder added that Bannau Brycheiniog was interviewed as part of the review and gave assurance the programme was aligned.</p>
Would actions be included in the report that were due to be received in March.	Officers were working on the action plan to follow on from the report recommendations and also a project roadmap.
Concerns were raised around the use of consultants and reflected on resource issues within the Council which prevented this to take place and asked for consultant costs.	The Portfolio Holder explained that budget of £11k had been set aside for the climate and nature emergency as part of the transformation fund and consultants with a wide span of connections provided in depth information towards the project which could not be achieved in-house.
It was asked if place-based planning was the main mechanism by which complex discussions were held with communities.	<p>Co-producing decarbonisation and climate resilience plans with residents was key.</p> <p>The report supported the focus the council had on Sustainable Powys and were keen to ensure engagement with communities.</p> <p>It was explained that different ways to capture and share opportunities were being explored to share the good work carried out.</p>
It was noted that Town and Community Councils could be approached to get	Officers would provide the Committee with further information that could be used for

items on agendas and work together.	Town and Community Councils.
	The Portfolio Holder thanked everyone for contributions towards the report and working together with other local authorities to move forward.

- The Committee agreed with the recommendations in the report and felt that it was a very complex subject to tackle.
- The report reflected the process and position of the project and felt that it was portrayed in a succinct manor.

11.1 To acknowledge the commissioned report completed by NSF on the council’s approach to its climate and nature change programme and to acknowledge the council and stakeholders’ position on the identified recommendations.

11.2 To agree the recommendation that the Climate and Nature Programme will be re-shaped, to support a wider strategic approach, enable stronger leadership and act as a conduit to develop effective plans and draw down appropriate funding to drive forward change.

11.3 To acknowledge the Climate and Nature Boards feedback on the order of importance of the priorities detailed (4.2).

11.4 To acknowledge the Governance review of the Climate and Nature Programme, which will improve and enhance effective partnership working bringing access to more knowledge, funds, innovation, and expertise ensuring our individual and collective journeys to net zero are quicker, cheaper, and provide better outcomes to our residents and communities.

11.5 To acknowledge the development of costed Action plans. The aim is to have initial plans completed by the end of Qtr 1, 2024. The plans will provide clarity and management of the overall cost and ensure that the council is prepared for future external grant funding opportunities.

Resolved: That the Climate Report be noted.

8.	SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME
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Resolved: The scrutiny work programme be noted.

County Councillor A Davies (Chair)