

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 24 March 2016

PRESENT: Councillor D.M. Cundy (Chair)

Councillors:

J.M. Charles, J.K. Howell, J. Owen, G.B. Thomas, S. Matthews, H.I. Jones, H.B. Shepardson, E.G. Thomas, S.M. Allen (In place of W.R.A. Davies), D.J.R. Bartlett (In place of T. Devichand) and B.A.L. Roberts (In place of S.L. Davies)

Also present:

Councillor L.D. Evans – Executive Board Member for Housing

Councillor M. Gravelle – Executive Board Member for Regeneration and Leisure

The following Officers were in attendance:

I. Jones, Head of Leisure
R. Staines, Head of Housing and Public Protection
D. Eldred, Group Accountant
H. Morgan, Interim Economic Development Manager
S. Walters, Interim Economic Development Manager
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer
L. Quelch, Head of Planning

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen - 10.45 am - 12.15 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S.L. Davies, W.R.A. Davies, T. Devichand and J. Thomas

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS

There were no declarations of personal interests

3. DECLARATION OF PROHIBITED PARTY WHIPS

There were no declarations of prohibited party whips.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (NONE RECEIVED)

No public questions had been received.

5. FORTHCOMING ITEMS

The Committee received a list of forthcoming items to be considered at its meeting to be held on the 6th May, 2016.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the list of forthcoming items be received.

6. REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2015/16

The Committee received for consideration the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Reports for the Housing, Regeneration, Planning and Leisure and Sport Services that provided an update on the latest budgetary position as at the 31st December, 2016 in respect of the 2015/16 financial year.

The following issues were raised during consideration of the report:-

In response to a question on staff vacancies within the Planning Division, the Head of Planning confirmed that whilst the Division was short of resources, it was not intended that the posts would remain vacant as consideration was currently being given to a re-alignment of posts, with a view to staff resources being directed to the areas in most need.

Reference was made to the dredging works to be undertaken to Burry Port Harbour, and an update requested thereon together with the status of the group known as the Friends of Burry Port Harbour. The Head of Leisure advised that tender documents were currently being prepared for the major dredging works of the inner harbour, which were scheduled to be undertaken during the Autumn of 2016. The annual dredge of the outer channel would be undertaken in the spring, as normal. With regard to the Friends of Burry Port Harbour, that was an external constituted group established with the aim of securing improvements to the harbour area, which the Council had met with on two occasions, on request.

In response to a question on digitising library materials, the Head of Leisure advised that it related to proposals to digitise a range of materials including historic photographs, with the cost to be met primarily from the services' revenue budget. In addition to digitisation, the division was also investing in its I.T. systems via the rollout of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology, an automated scanning system enabling users to check out library books themselves. The Committee was also informed of recent improvements to the St Clears library incorporating a craft centre, a café and, potentially, the local Police Station, which was being considered as a co-located services model for other libraries etc within the county.

The Head of Leisure in response to a question on Parc Howard, Llanelli, advised that it was proposed to undertake works to the roof externally at a cost of £240k from the repair and maintenance budget. Should those works exceed that provision, the additional cost would be met from the revenue budget.

Reference was made to the number of vacancies within various services and to whether posts were not being filled as a means of balancing the budget and funding any overspend. The Head of Leisure advised that whilst there were always vacancies within the department, arising from the natural turnover of staff, the department was corporately required to continually assess its budget, with the management of staff being a part of that process. However, posts were not being kept vacant to fund any potential overspend.

Reference was made to the previous monies set aside for improvements to Ammanford Town Centre, and clarification sought on what works had been undertaken to improve footfall to the town centre, apart from the pedestrianisation of Quay Street. The Interim Economic Development Manager (SW) advised that

initially, a meeting had been held with members in September 2015 to discuss potential projects to be undertaken within Ammanford utilising the £485k capital funding set aside. Subsequently, at a meeting held in January 2016, it had been agreed that the list of aspirational projects be reviewed. Notwithstanding that review, a number of projects had been undertaken, or were close to completion, which included a proposed housing and office development at Foundry Road, the deadline for the submission of interest for the development of the former Police Station was set for the 7th April, the library had been refurbished and £250k was to be spent on upgrading facilities at the leisure centre, incorporating a new fitness suite.

In response to a question on Opportunity Street in Llanelli, the Interim Economic Development Manager (SW) reported that, to date, three properties in Stepney Street had been purchased with the assistance of grant funding from the Welsh Government. Planning consent was currently being sought for the development of those properties, including the provision of car parking for the residential element, with works expected to commence in the near future. With regard to the Welsh Government Grant, the Committee was advised that in addition to the original £400k grant, the Council had been awarded a further £588k for the acquisition of additional properties.

In response to a question on the challenge to the Compulsory Purchase Order for the Cross Hands East Strategic Employment Site, the Interim Economic Development Manager (SW) confirmed that whilst negotiations were on-going, it was anticipated the cost of the project would not exceed the £1.1m budgetary provision.

Reference was made to the increased £408k income received from reducing the amount of time council properties were void, and the Head of Housing and Public Protection advised that the increased income was attributable to the introduction of new processes by building services which, over time, had reduced the average void period from 80 to 20 days.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. LEISURE SERVICES ANNUAL UPDATE

The Committee received for consideration the Leisure Services Annual Update Report for 2015/16 across its service areas of Leisure and Sport, Cultural Services, Countryside and Coast and the Pendine Outdoor Educational Centre set against the following seven outcomes:

Outcome 1 – People can access opportunities to be active

Outcome 2 – More Children and Young People are hooked on leisure / cultural activity for life (0-24)

Outcome 3 – More people (25years+) are active in Leisure and Culture

Outcome 4 People are affiliated to clubs / community groups or facilities

Outcome 5 – People are given the skills to become physically and creatively literate for life

Outcome 6 – People achieve their potential

Outcome 7 – Our facilities and services are well managed and efficient

The following issues were raised on the report:-

Reference was made to the increased income in Leisure and Sport and to whether that was attributable to increased charges, attendance or both. The Head of Leisure advised that the increase was mainly attributable to increased patronage. However, whilst increased charges had played a part, it should be noted that any increases had been set at a sensitive level and had regard to any validation of the division's budget to reflect inflationary costs including pay awards and energy bills.

In response to a question on the income and expenditure cost for Cultural Services, the Head of Leisure advised that whilst it operated a number of services including libraries, museums, theatres and archives the report related to the operation of the service as a whole, and not individual elements. He reminded the Committee that only certain cultural services including the theatres and the Laugharne Boat House levied a charge for accessing facilities. He reported that whilst the operational cost of the service was displaying a downward trend, the net cost to the Authority was nearly £3m.

Reference was made to recent increases in the minimum wage and clarification sought on any impact that could have on the division's operating costs, especially in relation to wage levels within the private sector. The Head of Leisure advised that as the Division had to operate within the Council's pay policy, any increase in wage costs would be funded corporately and validated into its budget. With regard to pay levels within the private sector, although the pay gap was narrowing, the way the private sector operated was less bureaucratic, and the Division whilst adapting to change more quickly, had to ensure any changes complied with the Council's Policies and Practices.

Reference was made to the operation of leisure services by the private sector and to whether that sector viewed the Council as a competitor. The Head of Leisure advised that whilst that was evident to some extent, it should be noted that the private sector mainly operated services from which it could make a profit unlike the Council which provided a range of services under the Education, Social Care and Health and Well-Being objectives.

In response to a question regarding recent Audit concerns on the operation of the Pembrey Country Park, the Head of Leisure confirmed that the Division was working with the Council's Audit Division to ensure its operation complied with the Council's processes and procedures.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

8. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The Committee received for consideration an update report on the key activities of the Economic Development Division as detailed within the report.

The Following issues were raised on the report:

Reference was made to the 'ARCH' project and to whether that included the provision of a home for the elderly. The Committee was advised that the ARCH project was part of a £100m highly ambitious and significant project to provide a complex Wellbeing and Life Science Village on land at Delta Lakes in the context of the Swansea Bay City Region in conjunction with Abertawe Bro Morgannwg

University Health Board, the Hywel Dda Health Board, Swansea University and the Welsh Government which would include provision for a health and well-being academy, business and enterprise infrastructure, Institute of Health Science, Hotel/Health tourism and primary care provision. The wellness element would include the provision of a wellness village for retired people helping them to live healthier and longer lives.

Reference was made to the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund programmes and information sought on whether their future delivery could be affected by a vote to leave the European Union in the forthcoming referendum. The Interim Economic Development Manager (HM) advised that should there be a vote to leave the union, the process could take 5 years to resolve. However, guarantees had been received that the above programmes would be secure up to 2020.

Reference was made to the work being undertaken by the Tourism and Marketing Section on promoting Carmarthenshire and to the recently created Marketing Suite for the Swansea Bay City Region in the Great Hall at the New Swansea University Campus. It was suggested that there may be merit in the committee visiting the suite.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

8.1 That the report be received.

8.2 That arrangements be made for the Committee to visit the Marketing Suite at the Swansea University Campus

9. EXPLANATION FOR NON-SUBMISSION OF SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee noted the reasons for the non-submission of the Supporting People Programme Update.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the reason for the non-submission be noted.

10. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12TH FEBRUARY 2016

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 12th February, 2016 be signed as a correct record.

CHAIR

DATE