

12 February, 2013.

LLANELLI RURAL COUNCIL

Minute Nos: 402 – 411

At a **COUNCIL** Meeting of the Llanelli Rural Council held at the Council Chamber, Vauxhall Buildings, Vauxhall, Llanelli, on Tuesday, 12 February, 2013, at 6.00 p.m.

Present: Cllr. T. Devichand (Chairman)

Cllrs.

F. Akhtar	H. J. Evans
L. A. Beer	M. L. Evans
T. Bowen	R. E. Evans
L. J. Butler	T. J. Jones
S. M. Caiach	S. N. Lewis
D. M. Cundy	A. G. Morgan
M. V. Davies	C. A. Rees
S. L. Davies	A. Rogers
W. V. Thomas	

402. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. M. V. Davies, T. J. Jones, C. A. Rees and G. H. Wooldridge.

403. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

404. HOUSING SERVICES – CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Further to Minute No. 238, Members received Mr Robin Staines, Head of Housing Services, Carmarthenshire County Council. Mr Staines was attending the meeting as part of an ongoing community engagement exercise with local stakeholders such as town and community councils to help improve plans and influence policy development in the following key areas:

- Improving housing advice and options;
- Delivering the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard to council homes;
- Improving home standards in the private rented and owner occupier sectors;
- Supporting people to live independently in their homes;
- Facilitating more affordable housing initiatives.

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Mr Staines elaborated on the above policy areas and stated the Government was changing the benefits system as part of its plans for welfare reform. He referred to the 'Bedroom Tax' which would reduce housing benefit for tenants of working age deemed to have a spare bedroom from April 2013. Limits would apply to council and housing association tenants living in homes larger than they need. A 14% cut would apply for under-occupying one bedroom and a 25% cut would apply if a tenant was under-occupying two or more bedrooms. This would only affect people of working age who received help to pay their rent.

Mr Staines also referred to the Disability Living Allowance being replaced with a new benefit called Personal Independence Payment. All working age claimants would be re-assessed with many seeing a drop in their entitlement or taken off the benefit altogether. Mr Staines then went on to speak about the 'Universal Credit' which had a number of ramifications for the sector. Universal Credit was the new single benefit which would replace Housing Benefit, Income Support, Income related Job Seekers Allowance, Income Based Employment and Support Allowance and Tax Credits. Mr Staines explained most claims would be a single household payment, including the housing costs paid monthly in arrears directly to the claimant. All new claimants from October 2013 would claim Universal Credit with all other claims being migrated to Universal Credit over a four year period. Under these plans the Government wanted to see more tenants receiving the money in their hand rather than opting to have their benefit paid direct to their landlord. Mr Staines stated the Government argued that this would help ease the transition into work by replicating a monthly salary. However, this view was not shared by the majority of the sector stakeholders including Housing Services staff, landlords and tenants. He revealed several pilot programmes had witnessed tenants falling into rent arrears because of having the new responsibility of having the money in hand but then not paying rent because of having to meet other conflicting priorities. The current arrangement did not place tenants in this dilemma, money was paid straight to the landlord which reduced the risk of tenants falling further into debt. The situation could lead to a number of tenants being evicted thereby making them homeless, which in turn would place an additional cost burden on the County Council in having to find them new homes, whilst meeting temporary accommodation costs in the interim. Thereupon, Mr Staines responded to Members questions about the general ramifications of this measure.

Mr Staines also referred to the increasing rise in the use of foodbanks; the role performed by his staff in offering housing advice, which included money management advice to help people through the difficult times. He revealed that Carmarthenshire had 9,000 rented homes but the housing stock had diminished since the 'Right To Buy' was introduced many years ago with 7,000 or so properties having being bought by former tenants. By contrast there was 9,000 private rented homes in Carmarthenshire. The Council had been unable to build new housing stock as the funding was not available.

Mr Staines then referred to the Carmarthenshire Housing Standard whereby £200 million had been invested into the 9,000 council properties. It was anticipated that the County Council would be the second social landlord to attain the standard for all its properties by 2015.

In regard to the private rented sector he referred to landlords whereby all would be required to be accredited and registered under the Welsh Housing Act 2015. This was a major change and in Llanelli about 200 landlords had already been licensed as part of the Council's general preparations to invoke Government Policy in this area. The Council was working with them

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and other registered social landlords to help define standards. Mr Staines referred to the issue of empty properties; currently this stood at around 700 in Carmarthenshire (these were private dwellings). The Council was trying to incentivise and work with landlords/owners to bring them back into use. The Council had powers to take control of properties where landlords/owners refused to co-operate by taking out a formal Order against them. Mr Staines then briefly touched upon affordable housing schemes and the criteria adopted with housing developers; generally 25% of the new homes constructed should be classed as affordable dependent on the scheme and associated land costs. He also referred to the new national initiative to develop co-operative housing with the Brynmefys Estate (Hengoed Ward) being selected by the Council to pioneer the initiative in Carmarthenshire. The County Council was only one of three Councils chosen for the scheme but it hoped to be the first to sponsor the initiative.

There then followed a number of questions posed by Members, addressing the above points in further detail but covering the following areas:

- the Council's ability to build new homes;
- selling off Council land;
- tenants and rent arrears;
- direct payments to tenants;
- potential future evictions;
- private rented sector and protection of tenant rights;
- general advice tendered to tenants including using agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau;
- working with other social landlords.

Reference was also made to the County Council's 'Joint Community and Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee Task & Finish Group' which was established to examine the impact of the welfare reforms on households and communities throughout Carmarthenshire. The work of the group revealed the size of the challenge ahead particularly with the changes to the benefits system.

Mr Staines stated it was in everyone's interest to work together to develop policies to help deal with rent arrears and the like; it was not in anyone's interest to evict tenants because of the impact of impending welfare reforms. Mr Staines felt that Wales should have a national charter to help the 11 remaining unitary authorities to manage the remaining social housing stock.

Cllr. R. E. Evans left the meeting.

The Leader in summing up felt it was important the Rural Council should do something to help deal with the issues raised by Members over the impact of the impending welfare reforms and in a bid to help support the County Council's general policy development. He proposed that the Council's Policy and Resources Committee look at the issue in more detail. By way of response, Mr Staines offered to provide further information specific to the Wards of the Council to facilitate further discussion and this was welcomed by Members.

In drawing the debate to its conclusion, the Chairman thanked Mr Staines for attending the meeting and commented that the Council would like to extend an open invitation for Mr

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Staines and or other housing officers to return to a future meeting to inform of progress on the matters discussed, Mr Staines thereupon withdrew from the meeting.

405. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED that the following Minutes (copies of which had been previously circulated to Members) be confirmed and signed as a true record of proceedings:-

Council	8 January, 2013
Recreation and Welfare Committee	15 January, 2013
Policy and Resources Committee	16 January, 2013
Planning and Liaison Committee	28 January, 2013
Finance and General Purposes Committee	30 January, 2013
Learning and Development Consultative Committee	31 January, 2013
Special Meeting of the Civic and Ceremonial Committee	6 February, 2013
Special Meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee	6 February, 2013
Special Meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee	11 February, 2013

406. MATTERS ARISING

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Arising out of Minute No. 382, and in support of the comments raised under Minute No. 404 above about the increasing dependence on foodbanks, the Leader reaffirmed to Members that the Council had supported the Llanelli Foodbank by making a donation of £250 towards ground rent and electricity costs. He reminded Members that posters were still available to display around their wards to advertise the foodbank service.

**407. MID AND WEST WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
DRAFT ANNUAL ACTION PLAN 2013 - 2014**

Further to Minute No. 350, Members considered a letter from the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service dated 21 January, 2013. The Deputy Chief Officer reiterated ACFO Masson's assurances provided at the Council's January meeting that the level of service delivery for Llanelli would not change. As an emergency service he recognised the importance of delivering quality services.

The Deputy Chief Officer confirmed that ACFO Masson would be making arrangements to return to the Council later in the year to provide Members with an update on how the planned new crewing arrangements for Llanelli fire station had bedded in.

General discussion ensued and in noting the contents of the letter it was

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RESOLVED that an invitation be extended to the Fire Brigade Union to attend a future meeting to garner a different perspective on the Fire and Rescue Service's plans and objectives in so far as they affected Llanelli fire station.

408. YOUR HEALTH YOUR FUTURE – PRINCE PHILIP HOSPITAL (PPH)

(1) PROGRESS REPORT

Further to Minute No. 354, the Clerk provided Members with a progress report on events and matters since the last Council meeting. During his report he made reference to various extracts from the documentation bundle circulated with the agenda; listed under item (2) below.

The Clerk reported he had attended Hywel Dda Health Board's extraordinary meeting held on 15 January, 2013, in St. David's, Carmarthen where it determined a series of recommendations following its consultation on clinical services.

The Clerk confirmed that the recommendation to close Mynydd Mawr Hospital was unanimously approved despite widespread opposition to the closure during the consultation phase. He then referred to the methodology which Opinion Research Services (ORS) had adopted to assess questionnaire responses. Preference had been given to the household questionnaire on the basis it was more representative of the population as a whole even though only a small percentage had been returned (692 responses from a total of 5000 questionnaires).

The Clerk commented that despite the consultation ending, the final solution for future A&E services at Prince Philip Hospital was still unclear. He stated the health board's recommendation in respect of emergency care was ambiguous and camouflaged what the service would look like going forward. The health board announced at the meeting that a group of clinicians would further explore five work streams to help reshape the A&E service but no new information was available to clarify what this might entail.

The Clerk then invited the Leader to add any supporting comments about the points addressed in the progress report and the document bundle.

The Leader referred to correspondence received from the Welsh Government and the Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust (WAST) following the Council's complaint made to the Health Minister about WAST. He expressed disappointment with the letters received because they did not commit in any detail or offer an explanation as to how the Council's complaint against WAST would be addressed. He stated the situation should be monitored over the next few weeks with a view to the Council escalating the matter once again with the Health Minister, Welsh Government. If WAST failed to provide a timely and full response about the Council's complaint before the next Council meeting then it be informed that a fresh complaint would be raised with the Health Minister.

Members were then informed of a meeting organised by the Clerk with representatives of the Hywel Dda Community Health Council (CHC) which took place at the Council offices. The

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meeting was worthwhile and informative. The Council's attention was now focused on encouraging the CHC to refer the health board's recommendations to the Health Minister; the Council could then look to put forward the evidence it had garnered thus far when looking to lobby the Minister and other politicians. The Leader referred to a recent meeting with Llanelli Town Council representatives wherein it was agreed that a joint meeting of representatives from both councils would meet again with CHC officials at the CHC headquarters in Milford Haven. The meeting was due to take place on Thursday, 14 February, 2013, where it was intended to lobby CHC representatives once again and to supply it with further evidence in support of the matter being referred up to the Health Minister.

General discussion ensued during which reference was made to the methodology adopted by ORS and the health board in respect of the assessment and weighting preferences attributed to consultation questionnaire responses.

Members expressed frustration that it had been decided to give a more favourable weighting to household questionnaires instead of the open questionnaire, despite the much lower number of responses returned. It was claimed by ORS that the open consultation questionnaire needed to be interpreted carefully because the profile of respondents did not match the population profile for Hywel Dda at all closely, whereas the weighted household survey responded profile was more representative.

As debate continued comment was made that the Council represented over 21,000 people and yet it appeared that the health board/ORS had interpreted the Council's consultation response (submitted with the open consultation questionnaire) as though it was submitted by an individual with it carrying the same weighting as a single questionnaire response, when in fact it carried a much broader representative response on behalf of the 13 village/communities the Council represented. This needed to be queried with the health board and or ORS.

Cllr. T. Bowen left the meeting.

As discussion continued it was revealed that Unison had recently come out and criticised the health board proposals. Members then referred to examples of the pressure faced by the Ambulance Service locally, with ambulances queuing outside PPH. This would only increase with a nurse led/delivered A&E unit, with intra hospital transfers increasing and so WAST's role was critical, and it was

RESOLVED that:

- (i) a letter be forwarded to WAST requesting that it reply within two weeks to the Council's original complaint made to the Health Minister, Welsh Government. Furthermore, if no response is received within that timescale WAST be informed that a further complaint letter shall be raised with the Health Minister over the matter.
- (ii) The Clerk contact the health board and ORS to query the weighting preference allocated to the Council's consultation response.

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- (iii) In the event of the Council being unsuccessful in arranging a meeting with WAST officials to discuss the impact of service changes on the Ambulance Service, then an invitation be forwarded to a union representative(s) of local Ambulance crews instead.

(2) CORRESPONDENCE

The following document bundle was considered by Members when considering the Clerk's progress report in (1) above:

- Council media release 'Your Health – Grim Future' issued 18 January, 2013;
- Correspondence received from the Welsh Government dated 28 January, 2013;
- Correspondence received from the Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust dated 30 January, 2013; and
- Correspondence received from Hywel Dda Health Board in respect of its recommendations following its consultation on clinical services received on 21 January, 2013.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

409. MATTERS REPORTED

RESOLVED that the schedule of matters reported be noted.

410. LLANELLI JOINT BURIAL AUTHORITY

Members received the following Minutes of a meeting of the Llanelli Joint Burial Authority held on 12 December, 2012:-

“At the Meeting of the Llanelli Joint Burial Authority held at Vauxhall Buildings, Vauxhall, Llanelli, on Wednesday, 12 December, 2012 at 4:00 pm.

Present: P. J. Edmunds (Vice Chairman (in the Chair))

Cllrs.

F. Akhtar

S. L. Davies

S. N. Lewis

52. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. L. A. Beer, T. Bowen, R. M. Davies and J. Williams.

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53. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

54. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED that the following minutes (copies of which had been previously circulated) be confirmed and signed as a true record of proceedings.

Ordinary Meeting - 14 November 2012

55. INCOME AND EXPENDITURE REPORTS

RESOLVED that the income and expenditure report for October 2012 and the provisional report for November 2012 be noted.

56. SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS

Consideration was given to the schedule of payments for November 2012, which revealed expenditure for the month, amounted to £22,957.97.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

57. CEMETERY RULES AND REGULATIONS

Members received the latest version (issue two) of the cemetery rules and regulations.

RESOLVED that issue two of the Cemetery Rules and Regulations be received and adopted.

58. MEMORIAL SAFETY POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Further to Minute No. 47, Members considered the revised Memorial Safety Policy and Procedures which reflected the changes brought about by BS8415 (Monuments within Burial Grounds and Memorial Sites – Specification).

RESOLVED that the Memorial Safety Policy and Procedures (version 12) be received and adopted.

59. INTERIM INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT FOR 2012/2013

Members considered correspondence received from Auditing Solutions Ltd dated 19 November 2012 (copies having been previously circulated), in respect of the interim internal

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audit report. The report author confirmed that there were no significant issues that required attention and that the financial systems continued to operate effectively.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

60. PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSION TO MEETINGS) ACT, 1960

RESOLVED that in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted the following matters be considered in private and that the power of exclusion of the public under Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act, 1960 be exercised.

61. LLANELLI CREMATORIUM LTD – RENT REVIEW

Further to Minute No. 50 Members considered correspondence received from the Director of Llanelli Crematorium Ltd in respect of the recent rent review and the payment terms specified by the Burial Authority.

Following discussion it was

RESOLVED that the Secretary arrange a meeting as soon as possible with the Director, Llanelli Crematorium Ltd, with a view to resolving all outstanding issues.

62. FUEL MILES VOUCHERS

Members considered the Secretary's report regarding fuel miles vouchers. Having considered the content of the report it was

RESOLVED that the report proposal be accepted and that the future accumulation of fuel miles vouchers be periodically reported to committee for determination, the trigger point being a value limit of £50.00.

63. STAFFING MATTER

Members received a report from the Secretary on a staffing matter and it was

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

Arising out of discussion of the above Cllr. S. L. Davies expressed her thanks to the Administrative & Finance Officer and Administrative Officer for the temporary support provided over recent months.

FURTHER RESOLVED that Cllr. S. L. Davies' remarks be noted with pleasure.

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64. EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME (EAP)

Members considered a report from the Secretary which informed that Llanelli Rural Council had elected to participate in an EAP framework agreement procured by the Welsh Government for a trial period of 12 months. In view of this the scheme would be automatically extended to Burial Authority employees. Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

65. SEASONAL GREETINGS

The Chairman wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a healthy and prosperous New Year.

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The meeting concluded at 4:30 pm”
.....

RESOLVED that the Minutes be noted.

411. LETTERS OF APPRECIATION

RESOLVED that the letters of appreciation for the Council’s assistance received from the following, be noted with pleasure:

- (1) Breakthro Llanelli;
- (2) Ty Bryngwyn Hospice Trust Fundraising Committee.

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The Meeting concluded at 7.15 p.m.
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The afore-mentioned Minutes were declared to be a true record of the proceedings and signed by the Chairman presiding thereat and were, on 12 March, 2013, adopted by the Council.