



HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY 25TH MARCH 2025 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor A. Whitcombe – Chair
Councillor S. Williams – Vice Chair

Councillors:

C. Bishop, M. Chacon-Dawson, R. Chapman, P. Cook, D. Cushing, C. Cuss, D. T. Davies, T. Heron, A. Hussey, D. Ingram-Jones, A. McConnell, B. Owen, L. Phipps, H. Pritchard, and J. A. Pritchard.

Cabinet Members:

Councillors: S. Morgan (Leader of Council), J. Pritchard (Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change), C. Morgan (Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces), S. Cook (Housing), P. Leonard (Planning and Public Protection), C. Andrews (Education and Communities), N. George (Corporate Services, Property and Highways), E. Stenner (Finance and Performance), and E. Forehead (Social Care).

Together with:

Officers: M.S. Williams (Corporate Director for Economy and Environment), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), L. Sykes (Deputy Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services), J. Reynolds (Sport and Leisure Services Manager), N. Taylor-Williams (Head of Housing), K. Denman (Housing Solutions Manager), L. Allen (Finance Manager - Housing), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer), and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

Also Present:

Councillor S. Skivens.

RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live-streamed and recorded and would be made available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#) Members were advised that voting on decisions would be taken via Microsoft Forms.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M. James.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor C. Morgan declared a prejudicial interest in relation to Agenda Item 4. Call-in for Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre under paragraph 13 of the code of conduct for members as he was part of the Cabinet that made the decision being called in. However, as the scrutiny committee requested his attendance before it, he could do so under paragraph 14(3)(a) of the code of conduct.

Councillor A. McConnell declared a personal interest only in relation to Agenda Item 9. Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring – Period 9. in that she is a Council tenant. As this was a personal interest only there was no requirement for her to leave the meeting and she could take full part in the debate.

Details are also minuted with the respective items.

3. HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 11TH FEBRUARY 2025.

It was moved and seconded that the minutes be approved as a correct record. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 14 For, 0 Against and 2 Abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee held on 11th February 2025 (minute nos. 1 – 11) be approved as a correct record.

4. CALL-IN PROCEDURE – PONTLLANFRAITH LEISURE CENTRE (SPECIAL CABINET 12TH MARCH 2025).

Councillor C. Morgan declared a prejudicial interest under paragraph 13 of the code of conduct for members as he was part of the Cabinet that made that made the decision being called in. However, as the scrutiny committee requested his attendance before it, he could do so under paragraph 14(3)(a) of the code of conduct.

The Chair invited the Members, who had requested the call-in, to advise the Scrutiny Committee of their reasons for the call-in of the above report. A member supporting the call-in advised that more detailed financial information should have been provided when the report went to Special Cabinet for decision on 12th March 2025. It was also noted that this decision had previously been called in, however certain Members who initially supported the call in subsequently withdrew their support, and clarification was sought as to whether reasons had been given when this was withdrawn. The Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer reminded those Members that the call-in they had currently requested was in regard to their view that there was a lack of information on the exact costs of Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre when it was determined at Special Cabinet on 12th March 2025. Members were advised that no reasons had been given for the previous call-in being withdrawn, other than 2 of those Members did not wish to proceed with the call-in process.

Members who had requested the current call-in noted that full information regarding all financial aspects for the closure of Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre, together with more detailed information of the current condition survey, should have been made available to the Cabinet at their meeting on 12th March 2025, when the closure was determined. It was also noted that clarification on operating costs between the leisure centre and the centre for vulnerable learners should have been made available to the Cabinet at that time, together with information on marketing the site, and the transport issues/ costs for the

leisure centre users who would have to go elsewhere.

Members were advised that the condition survey was included in the information provided to Cabinet, together with full explanations of costs for work that was required. Members were also advised that all financial implications were included in the Cabinet report, together with full information regarding the details associated with the condition survey. Members were informed that full costings relating to the centre for vulnerable learners had not yet been determined as work was still ongoing but there was a high degree of confidence that these would be significantly less than the current position. Members were advised that, the marketing of the site of the leisure centre for sale would depend on future decisions made under the Council's disposal process.

A Member sought clarification on the reasons for the Lead Member on the call-in, as the premises was outside of their own ward, and they had not been involved in a similar case that was in their ward. The Member advised that he had been in support of the issue in his own ward, and acknowledged that it had not been the subject of a call-in.

A Member queried the additional financial information required as the subject of the call-in and noted the extensive financial information that had been available to the Cabinet in the report of 12th March 2025.

A Member queried the costs of the closure and future use of the site, and whether the costs of a vacant property inspection, and any security costs currently required on the site, had been considered when the decision had been made. Members were advised that these details had not been included in the report, however any ongoing costs of the leisure centre site would be covered from the budget allocated for the operating the sports facilities at the centre for vulnerable learners.

A Member sought clarification on whether any future use of the 3G pitch at the leisure centre had been considered and noted that the pitch at the new centre would not be suitable for full size games. Use of the existing 3G pitch could generate an income which could be used against running costs and maintenance. Members were reminded that this query was not related to the reasons for the call-in and would have been considered previously at Scrutiny and Cabinet.

A Member referred to the previous estimated costs identified in relation to the sports hall flooring, when the premises was open, and noted this was no longer included in the maintenance costs. The detailed report of the condition survey in 2019 highlighted essential work that was required to be carried out, and noted the site was subsequently used as a vaccination centre during the covid pandemic. The Member also suggested that the pitch remained open as the pitch facilities supported certain clubs' requirements linked to their particular leagues. Members were advised that full details of the condition survey from 2019 were available, and any essential maintenance relating to health and safety issues would have been addressed at that time as it would have been necessary for the site to operate safely. , would have been resolved prior to the Members were advised that the facility would have deteriorated further since the survey in 2019, and further damage had been caused to the sports hall floor due to use of the site as a vaccination centre. which would now require appropriate maintenance works to be undertaken at an estimated cost of approximately £30,000.

Councillor C. Morgan (Cabinet Member) referred Members to the full financial details that had been included in the Cabinet report and noted that the financial situation had been properly considered. It was also noted that the current leisure centre indoor facilities had currently been closed for 5 years, and new improved facilities would be available for residents within the next few months.

Agenda Item 6 (2) Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre – Special Cabinet 12th March 2025 - was called-in for reconsideration on the grounds that the decision was made without a proper examination of the true costs involved in relation to the closure of Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre. The call-in request was moved and seconded and by way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 6 For, 9 Against, and 1 Abstention) it was:

RESOLVED that the matter would NOT be referred back to the decision-making body (Cabinet) and therefore the decision shall take effect from the date of the original Cabinet meeting.

5. HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Manager presented the report, which outlined details of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the period March 2025 to March 2026.

Following consideration of the Forward Work programme it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms, this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme as appended to the meeting papers be published on the Council's website.

6. CABINET REPORTS

It was confirmed that there had been no requests for any of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda to be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports which were taken in the following order.

7. NOTICE OF MOTION – ZANES' LAW

Cllr Skivens presented the Notice of Motion to the Committee which was supported by Councillors J. Reed, K. Etheridge, G. Ead, J. Jones, N. Dix, A. Farina-Childs, B. Owen, L. Whittle, J. Roberts, A. Angel, T. Parry, E. Davies, C. Bishop and J. Taylor.

The Notice of Motion met the criteria set out in the Council's Constitution and in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure was referred to Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee for consideration, prior to its consideration by Council, if supported.

In his notice of motion Councillor Skivens called on this Council to write to the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Health, and the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the First Minister of Welsh Government, to express the Council's support for new legislation on contaminated land based on the proposed principles of 'Zane's Law', to request that these ministers support Baroness Natalie Bennett, by all possible means, in her efforts to advance 'Zane's Law' through the House of Lords, and that the Government provides all necessary funds for Local Authorities and others to meet the requirements of any new legislation.

The Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee were asked to consider the Notice of Motion as outlined above and make an appropriate recommendation.

A Member queried the cause of death referred to in the report, and noted the financial burden on local authorities if it were determined that they would have to cover all the costs of dealing with contaminated land. Members were referred to the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and were advised that the legislation does place duties on Local Authorities and Natural Resources Wales with regards to the inspection and management of contaminated land. Members were also advised that the Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy sets out a risk-based approach to considering potentially contaminated land, and many sites are dealt with through the planning application and development process.

Members were advised that the Local Authority and NRW have a duty of care when dealing with contaminated land, and that this is done by a risk-based approach, and assessments would be based on former uses of the site. A Member referred to areas of land within CCBC that had previously given some causes for concern, and noted residents visiting these areas could be unaware of the health and safety issues. Members were advised that any issues that had arisen during the planning process would have been resolved at that time.

Following due consideration, it was moved and seconded that the notice of motion be supported and by way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 6 For, 9 Against and 1 Abstention) the motion was declared LOST.

RESOLVED that the Notice of Motion as outlined in paragraph 5.1 of the Officers report, not be supported.

9. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET MONITORING – PERIOD 9.

Councillor A. McConnell declared a personal interest in that she is a Council tenant. As this was a personal interest only there was no requirement for her to leave the meeting and she could take full part in the debate.

The report informed Members of the projected position for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2024/25 financial year, based on the income and expenditure movements of the first 9 months of the year. The HRA Capital programme which is predominantly funded by the HRA was also included within the report.

A Member queried the under recovery of leaseholders' fees and sought clarification on the increase in claims and legal fees in relation to disrepair. Members were advised that the under recovery was due to an increased annual charge from £10 to £199 for leaseholders, and the increase in relation to disrepair was mainly due to legal fees.

A Member noted that the majority of council tenants' rent was funded by housing benefits/ taxpayers' money, and that value for money should be sought, in respect of the council tenants that paid their own rent. The Member sought clarification on 'decoration allowances' and whether the underspend on capital expenditure was due to issues with staff recruitment. Members were advised that 'decoration allowances' are still being paid in some circumstances. Members were informed that the underspend on capital expenditure could be resources, together with contractors. Members were offered detailed information on these matters if required, to be circulated following the meeting.

A Member queried whether the area housing offices were still open. Members were advised that following the closure of the local housing offices, costs were being held for these buildings until a permanent decision had been made regarding their future use.

A Member queried the criteria for the major repair allowance to be spent. Members were advised that this could only be spent on improving existing housing assets and could not be spent on demolitions or new builds.

The Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report.

8. VACANT PROPERTY - PRESENTATION

The Head of Housing gave a presentation to the Scrutiny Committee on vacant property. Members were provided with details on stock profile, vacant property management, voids standard, legislation, KPIs, vacant property process, delays, categorisation and average vacancy time, workforce, vacant property location, workload trend and capacity, costs and temporary accommodation, LA comparison, and solutions.

A Member queried whether a property could be re-let immediately if a tenant had only been in the property for a very short time. Members were advised that unless any work was required, the property could be re-let straight away.

A Member queried the number of in-house operatives working for each housing area. Members were advised that consideration would be given to these allocations as the statistics had highlighted some issues that needed to be addressed.

A Member thanked the Officer for the detailed presentation and sought clarification on the housing repairs that were in excess of 29 days, and whether these properties were monitored. Members were advised that these properties had been categorised differently going forward and were being reviewed throughout the process with ongoing data analysis.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the presentation and noted requests for the presentation to be circulated to Members for information, following the meeting.

The Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee noted the Presentation.

10. 2024/25 BUDGET MONITORING (PERIOD 9)

The report informed Members of the projected revenue expenditure for the Economy and Environment Directorate for the 2024/25 financial year as of 31st December 2024. Service Divisions included Infrastructure Services Division, Land and Property Services Division, Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services Division.

The report summarised the most recent budget monitoring projections for 2024/25 based on the financial information available as of 31st December 2024.

The attached appendices outlined more detailed budget monitoring figures for each of the services outlined, that fell within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee to provide commentary on the more significant variations against budget.

A Member sought clarification on the amount of waste and how it was being dealt with, together with a query on the underspends on the civic amenity sites. Members were referred to the work of the cross-party working group on waste over the last 12 months and were informed of issues regarding the level of food waste still being included in residual waste. Members were provided with information on the recent procedural changes ongoing at the civic amenity sites, together with information on new enforcement

powers for the different types of waste collection and the proposed changes to decrease the frequency of future residual waste collections.

A Member queried the overspend on organic recycling. Members were advised that further information would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

The Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report and the detailed budget monitoring pages in respect of the Infrastructure Services Division, Land and Property Services Division, Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services Division, which all fall within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair thanked all Officers for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 7.21 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 29th April 2025, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR