



HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 11TH FEBRUARY 2025 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

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

Cabinet Members:

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

Together with:

Officers: M.S. Williams (Corporate Director for Economy and Environment), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services), J. Reynolds (Sports and Leisure Facilities Manager), B. Winstanley (Head of Land and Property Services), P. Cooke (Transformation Manager (Lead) – Decarbonisation), H. Richardson (Project Officer – Decarbonisation), N. Taylor- Williams (Head of Housing), C. Edwards (Head of Asset Maintenance and Repairs), L. Allen (Finance Manager – Housing), R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) and A. Jones (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance:

Cllr K. Etheridge – Agenda Item 7.

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 C. Bishop, R. Chapman, T. Heron, and M. James.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3. HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 10TH DECEMBER 2024

It was moved and seconded that the minutes be approved as a correct record. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal vote (and in noting there were 14 for, 0 against and 0 Abstention) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee held on 10th December 2024 (minute nos. 1 – 8) be approved as a correct record.

4. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

5. HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Mark Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) presented the report, which outlined details of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the period February 2025 to March 2025.

Members were asked to consider the FWP alongside the Cabinet work programme and suggest any changes prior to publication on the Council's website.

It was moved and seconded that the report recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 14 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the 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.

7. NOTICE OF MOTION – CEFN FFOREST LEISURE CENTRE

The Chair invited Councillor Etheridge to present the Notice of Motion to the Committee.

Councillor Etheridge sought clarification from the Scrutiny Officer on where the notice of Motion would go if supported by the Scrutiny Committee. The Officer confirmed that it could go onto either Cabinet or Council, as the Motion focussed on funding streams for the Leisure Centre which were yet to be fully determined. The Scrutiny Officer also highlighted that the Council was currently consulting residents on the future of this Leisure

Centre and if the Motion was successful a decision would be made on the next stage following this Public Consultation period.

Councillor Etheridge presented the Notice of Motion report to the Committee and requested that Senedd funding and reserves be used to keep Cefn Forest Leisure Centre operational. The Committee were advised that the Leisure Centre serves many towns and villages, 15 Primary Schools used the facility, and in 2014 there were 97,000 users at the Leisure Centre.

Officers were asked to establish best practice in terms of rationalisation through speaking to other local authorities and the benefits of making contact with a business called Halo Leisure Services was also highlighted.

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure, and Green Spaces to comment. The Member referred the committee to paragraph 5.2 of the report which confirmed that a 7 week consultation was currently being undertaken in relation to the proposal to close the Cefn Forest, Bedwas and New Tredegar Leisure Centres. Members were advised that the outcome of this consultation would be reported back to the Committee at a future meeting.

In relation to the request for the use of internal grants, Senedd funding and reserves for maintenance works, Members were referred to paragraph 5.3 of the report which outlined that there are no sources of external funding for these works. Members were advised that paragraph 5.4 of the report highlighted the savings of £47.456m that were required.

The Cabinet Member encouraged Councillor Etheridge and those in support of the Notice of Motion to use the consultation period to air their views by attending events advertised on the Council website.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and invited Members to ask questions.

Members fully discussed and debated the Notice of Motion and expressed their views on the matter.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the Notice of Motion, be supported. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal votes (and in noting that the Chair cast an additional casting vote against. there were 7 for, 8 against and 0 abstentions) The Motion fell.

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

A Member sought clarification on the Chair having a casting vote. The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that under Part 4 of the Council's Constitution Section 15.2 it stated that if there are equal numbers of votes for and against, the Chairperson will have a second or casting vote, there would be no restrictions on how the Chairperson chose to exercise a casting vote. The casting vote was to be given verbally irrespective of if the preceding vote was taken electronically or by a show of hands

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

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

8. PONTLLANFRAITH LEISURE CENTRE

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces presented the report to inform Members of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee on the outcome of a legal challenge to the decision taken by Cabinet on 20th March 2024 that Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre would remain permanently closed.

Views of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee were sought on the proposal that Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre remains permanently closed, with sporting facilities at the adjacent Y Cwmpawd, Pontllanfraith (Centre for Vulnerable Learners) including a 4-court sports hall, changing facilities, and a 3G pitch being made available for community use outside of school hours upon opening in Autumn 2025. The proposal would also see use of the 3G pitch on the Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre site cease once the 3G pitch at the adjacent Centre for Vulnerable Learners (CVL) was open for community use.

The views of Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee would be included in a further report to Cabinet for a decision.

One Member queried if dealing with the maintenance backlog would improve customer service. The Member also requested more detail on the proposed community offer from the Centre for Vulnerable Learners (CVL). The Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services highlighted that the backlog was based on an estimate and reminded Members about the age of the building under discussion. This was contrasted with the adjacent CVL which met modern building and accessibility standards. The Sport and Leisure Facilities Manager outlined some of the facilities included at the CVL such as a 4-court sports hall which met Sport England standards and a small 3G training pitch.

A Member requested information on the Integrated Impact Assessment and how findings could be mitigated. The Member also questioned how closing a Leisure Centre was in keeping with the Council's Sports and Active Recreation Strategy (SARS). The Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services advised that consultation identified some potential negative impact such as increased travel distances for users. Members heard how 75% of users drove to the existing venue and that this would still be the case with alternative provision. The Sports and Leisure Facilities Manager outlined to Members that since its inception in 2019 SARS had been responsible for almost £4M of investment in leisure facilities across the County Borough. The new Hockey Hub in Ystrad Mynach was given as an example. It was also highlighted that one of the aims was to increase physical activity, but that this was not centred solely on Leisure Centres. It was also highlighted that the strategy did envisage the rationalisation of facilities due to ongoing financial challenges.

One Member highlighted that this was the third time that the Council had tried to close Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre. The Member observed that a decision had been deferred following legal advice and that we were now responding to the outcome of a Judicial Review. He outlined how the report only gave detail on the one aspect where the Council conceded and did not mention the other five grounds for the review. The Member then questioned the cost in legal fees associated with trying to close the facility and the merit of continuing in such a way. The Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services responded that the cost would be provided outside of the meeting. He also advised Members that the Council only accepted one of the grounds on the decision-making process and had taken the pragmatic view that it would be better to ask Members to reconsider their decision, in light of this, rather than pursuing the matter further as part of a legal process. The Member highlighted that the Pontllanfraith 3G pitch is the only one to meet the Gwent County Standard and questioned if it was regularly closed on Saturdays, the usual matchday. The Sport and Leisure Facilities Manager advised that it had not been closed deliberately to avoid activity on Saturdays but conceded that it might have been closed occasionally. The Member questioned the suitability of the proposed alternative 3G

pitch at the adjacent site. The Sport and Leisure Facilities Manager recognised that this new pitch was smaller, but he highlighted the investment in the 3G pitch portfolio across the County Borough.

A Member wished to know the impact of closing the indoor facilities in 2020, in terms of usage, at other Leisure Centres across the County Borough. The Sport and Leisure Facilities Manager advised that last year the usage figures were 1.9M and it was forecast that this rate would reach over 2M users this year.

One Member wished to know what had happened to the staff working at Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre. The Sport and Leisure Facilities Manager advised Members that one member of staff had retired and that all the others were redeployed within the Sport and Leisure Service.

Clarification was sought on whether the CVL facilities would only be available to users outside of school hours and also questioned the lack of gym facilities. The Sport and Leisure Facilities Manager gave details on the arrangements for community use at schools and advised that the proposal would not have a negative impact on other leisure facilities.

One Member raised the remaining five grounds for the Judicial Review and wished to know how the proposal would now proceed. The Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services gave details on the five grounds and reminded Members that only one, relating to the Council's call-in procedure, had been accepted and that this was the reason for the report currently under discussion. The Monitoring Officer then advised that every Council decision was potentially open to Judicial Review. He outlined that a future Executive decision could face a similar challenge and reminded Members that the Court was not making a judgement on whether it was right to close a leisure centre in this instance. It was a view on how the Council had taken its decision. The Member wished to know if there was a future Judicial Review would it have to start afresh or continue proceedings. The Monitoring Officer advised that should there be a future challenge to any future decision resulting in a Judicial Review it would result in a new review process.

A Member asked if users of the Pontllanfraith 3G pitch would be accommodated at other similar sized 3G pitches available within the County Borough. The Sport and Leisure Facilities Manager advised the Member that this would be the case.

One Member asked if a Community Asset Transfer for this site would be appropriate under the Council's strategy if the closure of the leisure centre went ahead. The Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services outlined that a decision on the future of the site was separate to the one proposed, he also suggested that a Community Asset Transfer was an option for any asset subject to the Council disposal policy and highlighted the substantial maintenance liability and running costs at Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre which would be a key consideration for any prospective future operators.

Following consideration of the report it was

RESOLVED that: -

- 1 The Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee noted the outcome of the legal challenge to the decision of Cabinet made on 20th March 2024 in relation to Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre.
- 2 The Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee provided views on the proposal that Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre remains permanently closed, with sporting facilities at the adjacent Y Cwmpawd, Pontllanfraith (Centre for Vulnerable Learners) including a 4-court sports hall, changing facilities, and a 3G pitch being made available for community use outside of school

hours upon opening in Autumn 2025. The proposal would also see use of the 3G pitch on the Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre site cease once the 3G pitch at the adjacent Centre for Vulnerable Learners is open for community use.

9. DECARBONISATION ANNUAL REPORT NOVEMBER 2024

The Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change presented the report to the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee to provide an update on the work undertaken across the authority to deliver the aims of the Decarbonisation Strategy and sought any comments prior to the report being presented to Cabinet in February 2025.

An overview of the summary of the report was provided to Members for consideration. The Cabinet Member thanked those Members who had taken part in the recent carbon literacy sessions.

One Member queried the assertion that the planting of 24,350 trees took the Council over a third of the way to the 300,000-tree target, as the figure in question was not one-third of the total. The Transformation Manager for Decarbonisation clarified that 24,350 trees were planted during the year in question and that 105,000 trees had been planted since commencement of the strategy. The Member queried how the Council's asset management strategy was contributing to the Decarbonisation Plan. The Head of Land and Property gave details of initiatives to reduce operational emissions such as the installation of heat pumps at Ty Penallta and seeking Welsh Government funding for LED lighting and installing Solar PV Panels on the roofs of some Council buildings.

A Member expressed concerns over any plans that would result in a reduction in the number of staff working on decarbonisation initiatives and queried the merit of working with the Multiply Team on Carbon Literacy courses for residents. The Member also stressed the importance of working with Community Councils over the funding of decarbonisation projects and commented on the harm caused by idling motor vehicles.

One Member questioned how realistic it was for the Council to be carbon neutral by 2030. The Member also asked how the Council's ambition in this regard compared with similar aspirations by other Local Authorities in Wales. The Head of Land and Property advised that the 2030 target was set by the Welsh Government for the Public Sector as a whole. However, there was a slightly lower target for the NHS. Members heard how the Council was still refining the way carbon emissions were calculated, and in terms of reaching targets there were sometimes differences of opinion between practitioners and those that set policy. It was the Council's aim to be net zero by 2030, but a lot depended on adequate funding and refining targets based on operational emissions. The Transformation Manager for Decarbonisation provided clarity on the carbon neutral target of 2030 for public sector organisations, and the territorial target of 2050 for residents and businesses to be net zero.

Members then heard about public engagement work aimed at reaching the 2050 target. The Head of Land and Property also advised that the Welsh Government was keen to avoid setting league tables of public sector organisations when setting the methodology for measuring carbon emissions.

A Member enquired if there was a standardised system for measuring carbon emissions and questioned the effectiveness of planting trees given the amount of time needed before they start to capture carbon. The Decarbonisation Project Officer advised that the tree planting would have minimal impact on the 2030 target but much greater influence on the territorial aspirations by 2050. It was also outlined that there was a standardised approach

to measuring carbon emissions which was set by the Welsh Government based on the UN Greenhouse Gas Protocol.

One Member queried the level of Member attendance at the Climate Change Awareness course held just before Christmas and asked if Housing staff were trained in fitting triple glazed windows. The Head of Housing provided detail on the Council's argon filled triple glazing operation. The Decarbonisation Project Officer advised that fifteen Members completed the Climate Change course and that similar events would be organised in the future. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change also praised the organisers of these courses on the way they were run.

Following consideration of the report and noting the recommendations.

RESOLVED that Members of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee noted the progress made to date on the actions set out in the Decarbonisation Annual Report and commented on the content of the second annual progress report including the recommended priorities and next steps.

10. CAERPHILLY HOMES WHQS23 COMPLIANCE POLICY

The Cabinet Member for Housing presented the report for Members of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee to consider and approve the publication of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard 2023 Compliance Policy and submission to Welsh Government by 31st March, as detailed in the report and appended. The report would be presented to Cabinet Members on the 19th March 2025 and would include any comments or recommendations from the Committee.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions.

A Member sought clarity on whether the Policy only applied to new lettings. It was confirmed that it related to all council homes.

One Member queried whether outside space was the sole responsibility of the contract holder. Officers responded that in some instances there would be shared responsibility but that contract holders are responsible for garden maintenance.

Clarification was sought on whether the surveys pick up work that was not addressed during the original WHQS and whether these works would be addressed as a repair or as part of the planned asset maintenance programme. Officers advised that this would, depend on the nature of the works. It was outlined that if the works were relatively minor, they could be addressed as a repair or if they were more significant, they would be part of the programme. This distinction would not impact on the finances as repairs and WHQS works were funded by the same budget.

A Member enquired when Councillors would receive a breakdown of the schedule of works detailing when and where works would be carried out and also sought confirmation that the system ensured that information was updated and accurate. Members were advised that this was not available at the moment. It was confirmed that Officers were currently undertaking a comprehensive survey of all properties as a condition assessment, which would be followed by targeted energy pathways and the WHQS Programme investment strategy. This would then lead to the production of an energy performance certificate. A full schedule of works would not be available as the survey would be based on each individual property. In relation to the system a recent procurement system had been introduced for the whole of the Housing operation and would aid the undertaking of surveys. Members also heard about a new asset database which would provide data needed to meet the new challenging standards.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal vote (and in noting there were 13 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that: -

1. Members of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee acknowledged and considered the 2025/26 Housing Business plan prior to its approval by Cabinet on the 19th March, and its submission to Welsh Government by the 31st March 2025.

11. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2025/26

The Cabinet Member for Housing presented the report to the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee Members to consider and take a view on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2025/26 which would be presented to Cabinet on the 19th March 2025. The report highlighted that the HRA Business Plan was an annual requirement from Welsh Government (WG) as part of the annual submission of the Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) grant application.

There were no questions from Members and the Chair moved to the vote.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal vote (and in noting there were 13 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that: -

1. Members of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee acknowledged and considered the 2025/26 Housing Business Plan prior to its approval by Cabinet on the 19th March, and its submission to Welsh Government by the 31st March 2025.

The meeting closed at 19:18 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 25th March 2025, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR