

## CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

### MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES CABINET ADVISORY COMMITTEE

HELD AT COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC CENTRE, SWANSEA ON  
THURSDAY, 5 FEBRUARY 2015 AT 2.00 PM

**PRESENT:** Councillor A S Lewis (Chair) Presided

<b>Councillor(s)</b>	<b>Councillor(s)</b>	<b>Councillor(s)</b>
R A Clay D W Cole	P Downing T J Hennegan	B Hopkins G J Tanner

**Officers:**

K Anderson	-	Operations Manager (West)
J Harries	-	Landlord Services Manager
S Jordan	-	Sheltered Housing Manager
J Storer	-	Senior Welfare Rights Manager
S Woon	-	Democratic Services Officer

**23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D Hopkins, Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing.

**24 DISCLOSURES OF PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS.**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea no interests were declared.

**25 MINUTES:**

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Communities Cabinet Advisory Committee held on 8 January, 2015, be approved as a correct record.

**26 FEEBDACK FROM SITE VISITS TO RSL AND COUNCIL SHELTERED ACCOMMODATION.**

The Chair referred to the site visits to Council Sheltered Accommodation and RSL Accommodation which had taken placed on 27 and 28 January, 2015.

**Members' comments arising from the site visits to Council Sheltered Accommodation comprised:**

- Very informative, good experience;
- Wardens undertake a lot of work, both officially and unofficially;
- The role of community connectors and how they can compliment the role of wardens;

- Residents appear to be happy;
- Nice mixture of different types of accommodation visited;
- The importance of the design of the site (the site on a hill had some disadvantages compared to the purpose built site which was on one level);
- The role of sheltered accommodation in providing services which takes pressure off social services;
- Guest rooms are available for visitors at a number of establishments, although often kept for emergencies;
- The variety of accommodation provided allowed for personal choice and there was no optimum site.

Sarah Jordan, Sheltered Housing Manager, briefed Members on the support planning process which ensures a person centred approach to providing support to tenants for the duration of their tenancy.

The Sheltered Housing Manager advised that there were approximately 300 individuals on the waiting list for sheltered accommodation.

In response to a question, the Sheltered Housing Manager confirmed that on some sheltered sites there is communal heating and water, for which a set weekly charge is made. .

**Members' comments arising from the site visits to RSL Sheltered Accommodation comprised:**

- Hazel Court was ahead of other types of accommodation and is available for individuals aged 50 plus. The rent includes a care package. Facilities include a restaurant, IT room and a gym. The complex offers a lot of facilities for use by the local community. The provision is economically viable. If the Council were to build a similar establishment, community rooms should be open to the whole community.
- The communal facilities are open to the community by the agreement of all residents.
- Rooms are available for rent for individuals visiting tenants.
- The Llys y Werin day centre has 25 places per day which tenants can be referred to.
- Issues with the Council funding respite room, which is only used 30% of the time. (It was noted that there were issues with matching a suitable care package to the respite suite);
- Need to look at the suitability of venues for people with higher needs, e.g., coming out of hospital in wheelchairs;
- The ability to 'bulk purchase' utilities and incorporate a utilities into the weekly rental fee.

The Chair referred to Coastal Housing Group who had felt that their accommodation was outdated. Coastal Housing Group do not believe that people should pay for other services (e.g., support packages). There are care packages available which would incur a further expense.

In response to a question by the Chair, Members confirmed that they would like to visit other facilities which were examples of best practice outside the authority.

A discussion ensued regarding the facilities at Kenfig Hill, Carmarthen and Crymych.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a. The Sheltered Housing Manager forward copies of waiting lists to Committee Members; and
- b. Site visits be organised to facilities at Kenfig Hill, Carmarthen and Crymych.

**27** **VOID PROPERTIES.**

Kevin Anderson, Operations Manager (West), provided a presentation on Void Properties.

He stated that there had previously been a high number of voids. However, rationalisation of stock carried out some years ago, market conditions and changes to the way the Housing Service managed its voids in late 2004 had resulted in a steady reduction of void properties over recent years.

He detailed:

- Void Levels;
- Demand;
- Stock Turnover; and
- Improvements to Voids management.

Members' asked questions of the Officer who responded accordingly.

Key issues arising from discussions included:

- Clarification was sought as to whether the numbers on the Housing Register include people on the ADAPT list waiting for adapted accommodation;
- The impact on rental streams if void properties are demolished;
- Difficulties associated with the use of Council properties for fraudulent use (i.e., individuals using the postal address but not residing at the property) and the measures being taken to combat this practice;
- The process of pre-allocation of properties before they are ready to live in was successful in reducing loss of income;

The Chair thanked the Operations Manager (West) for his informative presentation.

**RESOLVED** that the presentation be noted.

**28** **FEEDBACK FROM UNIVERSAL CREDIT BRIEFING (HELD ON 28 JANUARY, 2015) - (VERBAL).**

The Chair referred to the Universal Credit Briefing which had taken place on 28 January, 2015.

Jane Storer, Senior Welfare Rights Advisor, reported that the first seminar had taken place with further presentations planned for 10 and 12 February and 10 March, 2015. The presentations provided a broad overview of Universal Credit and all Council Staff and Members were encouraged to attend.

She detailed the timescales in relation to the implementation of Universal Credit and the progress made by neighbouring authorities.

It was noted that the scheme had far reaching consequences for many people with the added complexity that claims would have to be made and managed on-line. This would create challenges in respect of access to IT, bank accounts and budgeting skills.

She referred to a pilot scheme (in respect of a housing association based in Scotland) with payments direct to the landlord, who had seen the transaction fees triple to their organisation following the introduction of universal credit. This was due to the fact that tenants were paying their rent in instalments as opposed to paying it in one lump sum when they received the actual direct payment.

She stated that individuals were using their rent to pay for more urgent and pressing financial needs. However, as they were still receiving their other benefits which were paid at different times (e.g. job seekers allowance; child tax credit) they would use these payments to contribute to their rent. As a consequence they did not see the amount of arrears they expected, but they did see an increase in their transaction costs.

In conclusion, as these benefits (jobseekers allowance, child tax credit) would be included together with rent in a Universal Credit payment, claimants would not have the available financial resources to pay rent in instalments, so it would remain to be seen what the consequences would be.

The Chair stated that the briefing had been very informative and useful and provided information which would assist Members to signpost individuals.

The Chair thanked the Senior Welfare Rights Officer for her informative presentation.

**RESOLVED** that the Senior Welfare Rights Officer provide an update following the Seminars.

**29** **WORK PLAN 2014/2015.**

The Chair presented the Work Programme 2014/2015.

**RESOLVED** that the following proposals for the action plan be approved:-

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Cont'd

- The Senior Welfare Rights Officer provide an update following completion of the Universal Credit Seminars;
- Site visits be organised to RSL's sheltered accommodation in Kenfig Hill, Carmarthen and Crymych for March and be reported back to Committee in April;
- Reference to an invitation to the Director of Shelter Cymru to be removed from the workplan;
- Reference to an invitation to Councillor Mark Thomas to be removed;
- Rose McCreesh to be invited to the March meeting to provide a presentation on changes to Council tax in respect of empty properties;
- The Task and Finish Group on Poverty report their findings to the scheduled meeting in April. (It was noted that dates were awaited from S Crawley for an overview presentation).

The meeting ended at 3.41 pm

**CHAIR**