

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

NOTICE OF MEETING

You are invited to attend a Meeting of the

COMMUNITIES CABINET ADVISORY COMMITTEE

At: Committee Room 1, Civic Centre, Swansea

On: Thursday, 5 February 2015

Time: 2.00 pm

AGENDA

Page No.

- 1 **Apologies for Absence.**
- 2 **Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.** 1 - 2
- 3 **Minutes:** 3 - 6
To approve, as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting of the Communities Cabinet Advisory Committee held on 8 January, 2015.
- 4 **Feedback from Site Visits to RSL and Council Sheltered Accommodation.**
(Councillor J E C Harris, Cabinet Member for Services for Adults and Vulnerable People and Councillor U Clay attending).
- 5 **Void Properties.** 7 - 9
(Kevin Anderson Attending).
- 6 **Feedback from Universal Credit Briefing (held on 28 January, 2015) - (Verbal).**
- 7 **Work Plan 2014/2015.** 10



Patrick Arran
Head of Legal, Democratic Services & Procurement
Thursday, 29 January 2015

Contact: Democratic Services - Tel: (01792) 637292

COMMUNITIES CABINET ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Labour Councillors: 9

R A Clay	H M Morris
D W Cole	A S Lewis (Chair)
P Downing	R V Smith
T J Hennegan (Vice-Chair)	G J Tanner
B Hopkins	

Liberal Democrat Councillors: 2

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Independent Councillor: 1

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Conservative Councillor: 1

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Officers and relevant Cabinet Members :

Councillor D H Hopkins	Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities
Councillor W Evans	Cabinet Member for Anti Poverty
Chris Sivers	Director of People
Lee Wenham	Head of Marketing, Communications & Scrutiny
Lee Morgan	Head of Housing and Public Protection
Democratic Services	
Archives	

Total Copies Needed:

20

Disclosures of Interest

To receive Disclosures of Interest from Councillors and Officers

Councillors

Councillors Interests are made in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea. You must disclose orally to the meeting the existence and nature of that interest.

NOTE: You are requested to identify the Agenda Item / Minute No. / Planning Application No. and Subject Matter to which that interest relates and to enter all declared interests on the sheet provided for that purpose at the meeting.

1. If you have a **Personal Interest** as set out in **Paragraph 10** of the Code, you **MAY STAY, SPEAK AND VOTE** unless it is also a Prejudicial Interest.
2. If you have a Personal Interest which is also a **Prejudicial Interest** as set out in **Paragraph 12** of the Code, then subject to point 3 below, you **MUST WITHDRAW** from the meeting (unless you have obtained a dispensation from the Authority's Standards Committee)
3. Where you have a Prejudicial Interest you may attend the meeting but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence relating to the business, **provided** that the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose, whether under a statutory right or otherwise. In such a case, you **must withdraw from the meeting immediately after the period for making representations, answering questions, or giving evidence relating to the business has ended**, and in any event before further consideration of the business begins, whether or not the public are allowed to remain in attendance for such consideration (**Paragraph 14** of the Code).
4. Where you have agreement from the Monitoring Officer that the information relating to your Personal Interest is **sensitive information**, as set out in **Paragraph 16** of the Code of Conduct, your obligation to disclose such information is replaced with an obligation to disclose the existence of a personal interest and to confirm that the Monitoring Officer has agreed that the nature of such personal interest is sensitive information.
5. If you are relying on a **grant of a dispensation** by the Standards Committee, you must, before the matter is under consideration:
 - i) Disclose orally both the interest concerned and the existence of the dispensation; and
 - ii) Before or immediately after the close of the meeting give written notification to the Authority containing:

- a) Details of the prejudicial interest;
- b) Details of the business to which the prejudicial interest relates;
- c) Details of, and the date on which, the dispensation was granted; and
- d) Your signature

Officers

Financial Interests

1. If an Officer has a financial interest in any matter which arises for decision at any meeting to which the Officer is reporting or at which the Officer is in attendance involving any member of the Council and /or any third party the Officer shall declare an interest in that matter and take no part in the consideration or determination of the matter and shall withdraw from the meeting while that matter is considered. Any such declaration made in a meeting of a constitutional body shall be recorded in the minutes of that meeting. No Officer shall make a report to a meeting for a decision to be made on any matter in which s/he has a financial interest.
2. A "financial interest" is defined as any interest affecting the financial position of the Officer, either to his/her benefit or to his/her detriment. It also includes an interest on the same basis for any member of the Officers family or a close friend and any company firm or business from which an Officer or a member of his/her family receives any remuneration. There is no financial interest for an Officer where a decision on a report affects all of the Officers of the Council or all of the officers in a Department or Service.

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES CABINET ADVISORY COMMITTEE

HELD AT COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC CENTRE, SWANSEA ON
THURSDAY, 8 JANUARY 2015 AT 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor A S Lewis (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)	Councillor(s)	Councillor(s)
R A Clay	T J Hennegan	H M Morris
D W Cole	B Hopkins	G J Tanner
P Downing	H M Morris	

17 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R V Smith.

18 **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.

19 **MINUTES.**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the People Cabinet Advisory Committee held on 4 December, 2014, be approved as a correct record.

20 **TO RECEIVE ADVICE REGARDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A TASK AND FINISH GROUP ON POTENTIAL CHANGES TO THE MEMBER ROLE IN TACKLING POVERTY STRATEGY.**

The Director of People presented a draft scoping paper on the establishment of a task and finish group on the potential changes to the Member role.

She referred to the Poverty Strategy which was approved by Council on 4 November, 2014. One of the key actions within the Strategy was to embed community development in ward member roles, develop Pathfinder training and develop a full training programme was part of the Member training programme.

The purpose of the Group was detailed which included identifying:

- how ward members can take a lead in delivery of the poverty strategy locally;
- ways in which community development can be more fully embedded and developed in ward member roles;
- good practice in community development by ward members, both locally and elsewhere;
- need to any changes in how ward members operate locally; and

- practical steps to make these happen.

The scope of the Group was detailed as follows to:

- research practice in other local authorities;
- research appetite and practice locally and throughout Swansea;
- take advice from officers on key issues (likely to be in the People directorate and in the Legal and Democratic Services team to start); and
- Produce a report outlining a proposal for the Cabinet Member to consider.

In relation to organisation, Committee Members were asked to agree who the lead CAC member would be (to Chair the meeting, ensure progress and production of the report) and which other Members wished to be involved, either from the existing Committee or wider membership.

It was proposed that the Group meet at a time and place and with frequency to suit their needs and the job to be done. The report could be produced for the April meeting of the Cabinet Advisory Committee.

In response to a Member question, the Director of People suggested that examining procedures in other local authorities would be beneficial in so far as identifying best practice.

A discussion ensued regarding the purpose and mechanics of the operation of food banks.

In response to a Member question, the Director of People, stated that there was not one action alone that would reduce poverty and its causes. There were a series of strands mainly concerned with changing cultures. Work was being undertaken with partners (e.g., the Local Service Board) regarding the collective approach to tackling poverty. The Council Plan has three overriding work streams one of which is empowering local people by allowing people in communities to develop resilience. The role of ward Members were valuable and deemed as a huge resource signposting people out of a crisis. The emphasis was upon making the most of resources.

The Director of People, stated that further information would be provided on the mechanics of food banks. Whilst food banks provide a vital role, people are not getting sufficient support to become resilient and manage debts effectively. Food banks are seeing themselves too often as simply providing the food and not supporting families to no longer need such an emergency service.. Negotiations were ongoing with the food banks to ensure people get the right advice (e.g., debt advice) but have not yet produced sufficient advice provision.

Members' discussed the membership and timescales in respect of the task and finish group.

RESOLVED that:

- a. The Task and Finish Group comprise the Chair, Vice Chair, Councillor G J Tanner and Councillor H M Morris.
- b. The Chair to liaise with the Director of People to arrange a suitable date for an in-depth overview presentation.

21 **TO BE ADVISED OF SUITABLE SHELTERED HOUSING COMPLEXES TO VISIT AND IDENTIFY MEMBERS TO UNDERTAKE THIS VISIT.**

The Democratic Services Officer reported that the Landlord Services Manager had recommended two sites for site visits at Plas Melyn in Portmead and Heol y Gors in Townhill.

Members' enquired why these venues had been chosen and discussed their requirement for a comprehensive list (which included an outline of each of the premises), sheltered accommodation provided by the Authority and Registered Sheltered Landlords (RSL's) in order that the Committee may chose suitable venues for a site visit. They discussed the timescales for the site visits and time allocation at each venue. It was agreed that ward members would be advised of site visits in their wards and offered the opportunity to attend.

RESOLVED that:

- a. The Landlord Services Manager provide a comprehensive list (including an outline of each venue) of sheltered accommodation provided by the Authority;
- b. The Landlord Services Manager also provide a comprehensive list of RSL sheltered accommodation;
- c. The Chair and Vice Chair choose 3 varied premises to visit;
- d. The Chair, Vice Chair and Councillors R A Clay, P Downing and B Hopkins undertake the site visit;
- e. The site visit programme to allow for flexibility with a 15 minute tour and 30 minute discussion with residents and carers (if available);
- f. Ward Members be invited to attend.

22 **WORK PROGRAMME.**

The Chair presented the Work Programme 2014/2015.

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

- a. A comprehensive list of RSL sheltered accommodation be provided in order to undertake site visits;
- b. An seminar on universal credit (including welfare reform) be provided before the end of January, 2015;
- c. Feedback from site visits to sheltered accommodation and RSL sheltered accommodation be scheduled for 5 February, 2015;
- e. Homelessness and Empty Properties be discussed at the meeting on 5 March, 2015;

- f. An invitation be extended to John Puzey, Director of Shelter Cymru (Swansea) to attend the 5 March, 2015 meeting in relation to Homelessness;
- g. The Cabinet Member and Policy Convenor be invited to the meeting on 5 February to discuss Adult Social Services; and
- h. The task and finish group examining Poverty report back in April, 2015.

The meeting ended at 2.50 pm.

CHAIR

Report to the Communities Cabinet Advisory Committee

Council Void Properties

1. Introduction

1.1 For a number of years, there were high levels of voids which peaked at 1,201 in 2001 as the demand for social housing had decreased due to housing market conditions. However, in more recent years, demand has grown with most areas of the City & County having healthy waiting lists for most accommodation types. There are however inevitably small pockets where the accommodation type is not so popular or the location is not as sought after

1.2 A rationalisation of the stock was carried out some years ago due to a number of factors including a lack of demand, poor stock condition. In addition, most bedsits located in the high rise blocks were unpopular and they were effectively mothballed until demand increased a few years ago when they were repaired and let.

1.3 Following major changes and improvements to the way in which voids are managed over recent years, the level of voids has substantially reduced. A Homes Preparation Unit (HPU) was established in 2004 to co-ordinate all works to void properties. During 2004 the voids level stood at 823 and at quarter 3 this year they were 298. In recent years voids have shown a broad downward trend as follows

Table 1 – Void Levels at Year end

Year	No. Voids	As % of stock
2008/09	383	2.8%
2009/10	286	2.1%
2010/11	251	1.8%
2011/12	221	1.6%
2012/13	278	2%
2013/14	220	1.6%

2. Demand

2.1 Demand is currently outstripping supply for the majority of accommodation. A major review of the Housing Register has very recently been carried out and following this review there are still 1,700 people waiting for Council accommodation in Swansea plus 1,390 waiting for a transfer within the stock. The annual turnover of stock has remained fairly constant in recent years fluctuating between 10.5% and 12.6%.

2.2 Staff are proactive when dealing with the more difficult to let properties, for example, advertisements are displayed at our DHO's; Housing Options; via the internet at Swansea.housing and from time to time on the Council's website. Low

demand properties tend to be some 2 and 3 bedroom houses at some of the less popular, hilly parts of Townhill; OAP bedsits at West Cross and 3 bedroom maisonettes/flats at some locations. These however are sporadic rather than in large numbers.

2.3 As stated, there is demand for most accommodation, but principally due to the Spare Room Subsidy, demand for 3 bedroom flats has decreased, however, 55 units were let during 2013/14. With regard to 3 bedroom flats in the high rise blocks at Clyne Court, Sketty and Jeffreys Court, Penlan, when the refurbishment works are underway during 2015, any 3 bedroom flats that have not been let, will be reconfigured into 2 bedroom flats.

2.4 Weekly monitoring of voids is carried out at senior management level to assess performance against targets. Clearly it is important that targets are met since rental income has an impact on meeting the WHQS. Demolition of stock is an action of last resort since it results in less income, which in turn affects Housing's Business Plan.

3. Turnover of Stock

3.1 As stated in sec. 2.1, stock turnover in recent years has fluctuated between 10.5% and 12.6%. In terms of numbers, the table below serves to illustrate:

Table 3 – The Number of End of Tenancies received per annum

Year	Number received	Ave. p/w	Stock % turnover
2008/09	1,562	30	11.4%
2009/10	1,636	31.5	12%
2010/11	1,433	27.6	10.5%
2011/12	1,497	28.8	11%
2012/13*	1,713*	32.9	12.6%
2013/14 (53 week year)	1,630	30.8	12%
Total	9,471	30.3	11.6%

*A higher number received during 2012/13 due to 65 properties returned to the stock during the course of the year for re-letting due to the end of the Asylum Seekers contract with the Home Office

(This year's figure is projected to be 11.6% turnover)

4. Improvements carried out to the Voids Process

4.1 When an end of tenancy notice is received, this triggers a sequence of events which each void progresses through to ensure that the property is brought up to the minimum letting standard and is ready for occupation. These stages are to meet legislative requirements and to ensure that all health & safety regulations are met.

4.2 Over recent years, many changes to working practices have taken place in order to make the process as streamlined and effective as possible. A Systems Thinking Review was also carried during the past couple of years which has seen further positive changes implemented such as the introduction of a multi-task clearance, cleaning and garden cutting service; the use of key safes which allows a number of different functions to be carried out simultaneously and viewings taking place by prospective tenants when works are ongoing.

4.3 Wherever possible, repairs of a minor nature are carried out after the new tenant has moved in. However, where there are more extensive repairs or where there are a substantial number of minor repairs, these are carried out prior to the property being let. The extent of repairs and the associated works can vary considerably depending on the property condition.

4.4 The Homes Preparation Unit moved to Heol y Gors some years ago to establish a closer working relationship with Corporate Building & Property Services staff. This has improved communication with close liaison taking place on a daily basis. This is essential with around 200 or so properties being worked on at any one time.

Agenda Item 7

Report of the Chair

People Cabinet Advisory Committee – 5 February 2015

PEOPLE CABINET ADVISORY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

Date	Subject Area	Lead
8 January 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advice re:- Task and Finish Group on potential changes to the member role in Tackling Poverty Strategy To discuss this suggested work programme To be advised of suitable sheltered Housing Complexes to visit and to identify members who wish to undertake these site visits. 	Cllr W Evans and C Sivers List to be provided by Jane Harris
27 & 28 January 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Site Visit by certain CAC Members to Sheltered Housing Complexes 	Jane Harris/ Sarah Jordan
28 January 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness Raising Seminar – Universal Credit (including Welfare Reforms) 	Jane Storer
5 February 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback from Site Visits to RSL & Council Sheltered Accommodation (Councillor J E C Harris and U Clay to attend) Void Properties Councillor M Thomas to attend to outline his policies and key areas of responsibilities 	Chair K Anderson
5 March 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empty Properties Homelessness Invitation to the Director of Shelter Cymru? 	Huw Morgan, Sally Jones Mark Wade/ Mark Wade & Steve Porter
2 April 2015		
Future Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed changes to Council tax in respect of empty properties 	Rose McCreesh
Future Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Task and Finish Group to report back on Tackling Poverty 	Cllr W Evans and C Sivers
Future Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion regarding Sheltered Accommodation by means of a Joint CAC that deals with Adult Services 	Jane Harris