

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES CABINET ADVISORY COMMITTEE

HELD AT COMMITTEE ROOM 3C - GUILDHALL ON THURSDAY,
5 MARCH 2015 AT 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor A S Lewis (Chair) presided

Councillor(s):

R A Clay
D W Cole

Councillor(s):

J P Curtice

Councillor(s):

T J Hennegan

Officers:

H Morgan - Divisional Environmental Health Officer
S Jones - Technical Officer, Housing and Public Protection
M Wade - Community Housing Services Manager
S Porter - Housing Options Manager
J Parkhouse - Democratic Services Officer

30 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Downing, B Hopkins and G J Tanner.

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

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, the following interest was declared:

Councillor D W Cole - Minute No. 33 - empty property work in Swansea - dealing with an empty property in Gorseinon - personal.

32 **MINUTES:**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Communities Cabinet Advisory Committee held on 5 February 2015 be approved as a correct record.

33 **EMPTY PROPERTY WORK IN SWANSEA.**

The Technical Officer and Community Housing Services Manager, supported by the Divisional Environmental Health Officer, provided a detailed and informative presentation on empty property work in Swansea. Details provided in the presentation included:

- Empty property work in Swansea;

- Empty property figures for the Swansea area;
- Measures to bring empty properties back into use;
- Annual mailshot;
- What legislation allows;
- Enforced sale of empty properties;
- Informal actions;
- Houses into homes, including examples;
- Role of registered social landlords.

The Committee asked a number of questions of the Officers who responded accordingly. Discussions centred around the following:

- Advice provided to owners especially regarding signposting;
- The criteria required for dealing with properties and problems surrounding listed buildings;
- The difficulties in finding “ghost” landlords;
- The methods used to tackle properties in poor repair that are still occupied by owners;
- The success of enforced sales in bringing in extra income to the Authority;
- Occupiers at risk would always be the priority for the Authority;
- The role of Councillors in identifying empty properties and how they can assist the process in the future;
- The possibility of the Authority improving empty properties and renting them accordingly, similarly to RSL's;
- The need to communicate this aspect of the Council's work to a wider audience, e.g. Community/Town Councils;
- The need to have more Officers undertaking this work in order to increase the income of the Authority.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the contents of the presentation be noted;

- (2) an email be circulated to Councillors highlighting how they can assist in identifying empty properties within their Wards;
- (3) the Committee highlights to the Cabinet Members the need for further resources in this area in order to provide additional income to the Authority.

34 **HOMELESSNESS: HOW WE PROVIDE FOR THE FUTURE.**

The Community Housing Services Manager and Housing Options Manager provided a detailed and informative presentation regarding Homelessness: How We Provide For The Future. Details provided in the presentation included:-

- The Housing Options Service - An Overview;
- Role of Housing Options;
- Causes of homelessness;
- Homelessness myths;
- Preventing homelessness;
- Options for moving into permanent housing;
- Housing Options and the voluntary sector;
- Assessment Team;
- Assessment myths;
- Key issues.

The Committee asked a number of questions of the Officers who responded accordingly. Discussions centred around the following:-

- The numbers and assistance provided to rough sleepers in Swansea and the numbers of families currently supported in bed & breakfast accommodation;
- Methods used to encounter issues surrounding homelessness and the fact that landlords were not directly getting their money;
- The provision of homelessness figures and reasons to Welsh Government;
- Background regarding the current points system being used in Swansea;
- The difficulties encountered by the Authority in housing individuals under 35 years old, particularly single people who were on a lower rate of Housing

Benefit and had very little option other than to share due to the lack of one bedroom accommodation in the area;

- Temporary accommodation usage across the Authority;
- The involvement of Councillors in local housing meetings and the information provided;
- Minimum standards of repair to properties before they can be let to tenants;
- The services provided by Housing Options with regards to support, advice and mediation;
- The need to assist elderly people to move from two and three bedroom accommodation to sheltered housing, especially assisting with removal of furniture, etc;
- The introduction of a private sector letting scheme by the Authority where the Council acts as agent and works in partnership with landlords;
- Cases of possible Housing Benefit fraud within communities and methods used to address such problems.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the contents of the report be noted;
- (2) details of homelessness figures and reasons provided to Welsh Assembly Government be provided to the Committee;
- (3) the numbers currently on the waiting list for single bedroom accommodation be provided to the Committee;
- (4) figures relating to temporary accommodation being provided across the Authority be provided to the Committee;
- (5) details of the private letting scheme being undertaken by the Authority and of changes in policy be reported to the Committee when completed;
- (6) details of individuals who live outside the Authority and who have no link who are currently on the waiting list be provided to the Committee.

35 **WORK PLAN 2014/2015.**

The Chair presented the Work Programme 2014/2015.

RESOLVED that the following proposals for the Work Plan be approved:

- (1) feedback be provided to a future meeting on the private rented sector lettings team and change in policy;

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- (2) a briefing regarding rent recovery and Housing Benefit fraud be provided to a future meeting of the Committee;
- (3) the Task and Finish Group on Poverty report their findings to the scheduled meeting in April 2015;
- (4) feedback from site visits to RSL's sheltered accommodation in Kenfig Hill, Carmarthen and Crymych be reported to the Committee meeting scheduled for April 2015.

The meeting ended at 4.40 pm

CHAIR