

The Vale of Glamorgan Council

Cabinet Meeting: 6 March, 2017

Report of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Social Care & Health

Environment and Neighbourhoods Strategy (Housing)

Purpose of the Report

1. To introduce an Environment and Neighbourhoods Strategy for public housing.

Recommendations

1. That the Cabinet endorse the new Environment and Neighbourhoods Strategy (Housing) attached at [Appendix A](#).
2. The Environment and Neighbourhoods Strategy (Housing) be referred to the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee for consideration.
3. That the Environment and Neighbourhoods Strategy is referred back to Cabinet for finalising upon receiving the views of the Scrutiny Committee.
4. That the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee receive six monthly monitoring reports in relation to the Operational Delivery Plan for the Environment and Neighbourhoods Strategy.

Reasons for the Recommendations

1. To ensure that the external environment on public housing estates is maintained to a good standard and is utilised by members of the local community.
2. To provide an opportunity for Scrutiny to make any comments.
3. To agree the final Strategy document.
4. To ensure the actions identified are progressed.

Background

2. The external environment on public housing estates is important to residents. The recent tenants' satisfaction survey highlighted issues including: parking, defensible space, rubbish/litter etc. as significant concerns. As well as the appearance of estates, the survey showed issues like access to open spaces and safety in the home/local area can have a big impact on quality of life. It is vital therefore that the Council set aside appropriate sums of money to invest in the external environment. It

is also vital to have in place a coherent approach to investment which reflects tenants' priorities as well as protecting the future viability of housing estates by ensuring they remain safe, secure, attractive places where people want to live.

3. The Council owns a significant amount of open spaces within and adjacent to housing estates across the Vale. Some of these areas are used by the communities for play and leisure activities, however in some places the land can be overgrown or a target for rubbish dumping. Investment in and improvement of these areas would improve tenants' quality of life but also reduce the costs to the Council associated with clearing rubbish and maintenance.
4. There has been a significant investment in the public housing stock over the last few years as part of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) programme, which has resulted in better quality homes. Investment in the external environment is the second stage and underlines the significance of 'neighbourhood' particularly that safe, secure, well maintained areas are critical to tenants' quality of life.
5. The WHQS standards required of the Council are vague in terms of the environment. They set out a minimum standard that "all dwellings should be located in an environment to which residents can relate and in which they feel proud to live" but provide little supplementary guidance, this has resulted in different interpretations by social housing providers. In recognition of this fact the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) were commissioned to consult with social landlords and develop a guide to best practice which could be used to inform investment plans and shape of this money is spent.
6. The Environment and Neighbourhoods Strategy adopts the principles set out in the WHQS guidance and the supplementary guidance recommended by the TPAS report, particularly around the interpretation of the standard, the potential for harnessing environmental improvements towards social inclusion objectives and about adopting a systematic approach to investment which took into account residents' priorities.

Relevant Issues and Options

- **Resident consultation and priorities**

7. The effective engagement of tenants is key to the success of Environment and Neighbourhoods Strategy, firstly in terms of identifying the priorities but also by getting residents involved with projects. This could be simple things like taking part in estate walkabouts, reporting fly tipping etc. or engaging in local consultations, forming groups and taking community ownership of local green spaces.
8. A variety of feedback has informed this strategy, including the Vale Citizens Survey, a WHQS environmental survey, the tenants' satisfaction survey and local consultations (including the work undertaken as part of the Gibbonsdown Estate Master Plan). In addition, there has been a consultation exercise conducted with the Vale Tenants Working group.
9. This feedback shaped four key themes which form the basis of the Strategy, namely: increasing residents' feeling of safety in their home and in their local neighbourhood; improving the appearance and cleanliness of the local environment; improving access to and use of open spaces for recreational use; and increasing residents' sense of pride in their area through effective community engagement around environmental issues.

10. These four priority themes give rise to a range of initiatives and actions to improve the quality of services provided. The case studies within the Strategy give some examples of the different initiatives, whilst the Operational Delivery Plan at the rear of the document is outcomes based and sets out more specific details regarding each of the actions designed to achieve the strategic aims.

- **Monitoring and evaluation**

11. Progress with implementing the Strategy will be measured via the completion of individual actions contained within the Operational Delivery Plan towards the back of the document. There will also be periodic reports to the Homes and Safe Communities Group regarding the range of projects and initiatives taking place.

Resource Implications (Financial and Employment)

12. Significant financial support has been set aside to deliver the objectives in the Strategy. The draft Housing Business Plan includes provision of a £2m budget for environmental and estate improvement works each year over the course of the next three years (which forms part of the Council's WHQS investment commitments). Revenue budget has also been set aside to fund two Community Investment and Involvement Officer Posts to take the lead in community engagement and drive a range of environmental improvements. Lastly, participatory budgets of £60,000 pa have been set aside to fund smaller scale estate and environmental improvements identified by local residents and groups.

Sustainability and Climate Change Implications

13. There are no direct sustainability and climate change implications arising from this report. However the wellbeing of our tenants will be improved if their local environments are clean, safe and well managed.

Legal Implications (to Include Human Rights Implications)

14. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Crime and Disorder Implications

15. A better quality environment contributes to residents feeling safer in their home and in the local neighbourhood. Initiatives like improved lighting, CCTV and more secure fencing enabled by this Strategy will make a positive contribution through discouraging crime and anti-social behaviour.

Equal Opportunities Implications (to include Welsh Language issues)

16. Environmental improvements will take into account the needs of tenants from a variety of backgrounds as well as people with protected characteristics.

Corporate/Service Objectives

17. This Strategy is consistent with the overarching vision within the new Corporate Plan, namely 'Strong Communities with a Bright Future' as well as several of the Well Being Outcomes, including 'An inclusive and Safe Vale', 'An Environmentally Responsible and Prosperous Vale', 'An Active and Healthy Vale'.

18. It is also consistent with many of the core objectives (which support the Well Being outcomes), including: reducing poverty and social exclusion; decent homes and safe

communities; promoting regeneration; sustainable development and protecting the environment; and active and healthy lifestyles.

Policy Framework and Budget

19. This report is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet.

Consultation (including Ward Member Consultation)

20. This report will affect all council tenants and therefore no individual ward member consultation has been undertaken.

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

21. Homes and Safe Communities.

Background Papers

Tenants Satisfaction Survey 2016 / 2017
Vale Citizens Survey
WHQS Environmental Survey
Consultation Exercise Vale Tenants Working Group

Contact Officer

Nick Jones - Housing & Strategic Projects Team Leader.

Officers Consulted

Andrew Treweek, Operational Manager, Building Services.
Committee Reports
Operational Manager Finance

Responsible Officer:

Miles Punter, Director of Environment and Housing.