

No.

HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 7th December, 2022.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The recording of the meeting is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor A.M. Collins (Chair); Councillor B. Loveluck-Edwards (Vice-Chair); Councillors J. Aviet, G.M. Ball, S. Campbell, G.D.D. Carroll, S.M. Hanks, W.A. Hennessy, M.J.G. Morgan and S.D. Perkes.

Also present: C. Ireland (Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale Representative), D. Dutch, V. John and H. Smith (Tenant Working Group / Panel Representatives); Councillors E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health) and M.R. Wilson (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services).

529 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Chair read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing”.

530 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillor I. Buckley and G. Doyle (Tenant Working Group / Panel Representative).

531 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 7th November, 2022 be approved as a correct record.

532 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

The following declarations were received:

Councillor J. Aviet declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 – Initial Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Revised Budget 2022/23 and Proposals 2023/24. The nature of her interest was that she was a Vale of Glamorgan Council tenant. This was a personal interest only and not prejudicial as per paragraph 19.3.3(b)(ii)(A) of the Council’s Constitution. Therefore, Councillor Aviet remained in the meeting during consideration of this item.

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Councillor B. Loveluck-Edwards declared an interest in Agenda Item 6 - Draft Older Persons Housing Strategy. The nature of her interest was that she was the Vale of Glamorgan Council Older People's Champion. This was a personal interest only and not prejudicial as per paragraph 19.3.3(b)(i)(C) of the Council's Constitution. Therefore, Councillor Loveluck-Edwards remained in the meeting during consideration of this item.

Councillor W. A. Hennessy declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 – Initial Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Revised Budget 2022/23 and Proposals 2023/24. The nature of his interest was that he was a Vale of Glamorgan Council tenant. This was a personal interest only and not prejudicial as per paragraph 19.3.3(b)(ii)(A) of the Council's Constitution. Therefore, Councillor Hennessy remained in the meeting during consideration of this item.

533 DRAFT VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN 2023-24 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 17th November, 2022 as contained within the agenda was presented by the Director of Environment and Housing in order for Scrutiny to be consulted and to offer their comments or recommendations on the draft Annual Delivery Plan (ADP). The key points raised were as follows:

- The ADP linked into the Council's Corporate Plan and its four Wellbeing Objectives (as well as the Annual Service Plans, thereby part of the 'golden thread' which brought these key plans together).
- The ADP had six themes: Project Zero, Infrastructure, Transformation, Care and Support, Hardship and Community Capacity, as well as three key areas of focus, namely the Cost of Living Crisis, Project Zero and Organisational resilience. A key challenge to the ADP was any budgetary constraints resulting from the imminent financial settlement from Welsh Government (WG).
- The ADP also detailed the actions in order to achieve the Corporate and Wellbeing Objectives, ranging from to co-ordinate a response that supports residents, business, the third sector and council staff with the impact of the cost of living crisis through to taking action to protect the vulnerable from illegal money lending activities.

Following on from the presentation of the report, the Committee raised the following comments and questions:

- The Chair and the Committee raised the recent issues in England around social housing and the maintenance and general condition of these i.e. addressing damp, mould and condensation and the suggestion that this be included as an action within the ADP, with the Director of Environment and Housing suggesting that this should emphasise the need to ensure that the Council's housing stock continued to meet all relevant standards for both safety and construction. Although there was a number of items in the report about ensuring the new housing stock was of a high standard there was nothing that specifically related to existing stock, which this proposed action would help to address.

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- On Councillor Perkes' query on the impact of the cost of living crisis on the delivery of the ADP, it was explained that it was difficult to assess such an impact at this time, prior to the final WG settlement, but the Council was looking at various options and possible scenarios around the financial impact on service delivery, i.e. around savings and efficiencies (such as more effective procurement) as well as looking at potential increases in charges for certain services. However, such options needed to consider maintaining the provision of services to the most vulnerable in order that these were protected.
- The Vice-Chair commented on the action concerning the Council's core support service offer to schools in the ADP, and the need for awareness raising with governing bodies around the effectiveness that the service level agreement between schools and governing bodies provided i.e. offering good value for money. It was explained that the Council were looking to work closely with schools to understand what they required and what ancillary services the Council could provide or help with, and highlight the benefits, such as greater economies of scale.
- On the Vice-Chair's question on the first action in objective 3 of the draft ADP around providing an additional reference to fuel poverty, including signposting and support, this would be taken back to the relevant officers for consideration.
- The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services also referred to the financial challenges faced by the Council and how the ADP would operate in the current difficult economic climate. He stressed the importance that the Council placed on continuing to protect and support the most vulnerable residents within the Vale. He urged Members of the Committee and other Elected members to get in touch with him, the Cabinet Member for Public Sector Housing and Tenant Engagement or Contact One Vale regarding concerns raised by Council tenants or others around housing issues.
- On H. Smith's (Tenant Working Group / Panel Representative) concerns on mould appearing in tenant homes in her area following work done on their roofing / insulation, the Head of Housing and Building Services explained this was now in the process of being addressed by the Housing Assets Team (via the retrofitting of additional ventilation in the roof), who would also reach out to the Tenant Representative to ensure this had been completed satisfactorily.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the Cabinet reference and report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the following suggested additional action from the Committee be shared with the Director of Corporate Resources to inform revisions to the Annual Delivery Plan:

- For Objective 3, to support people at home and in their community: 'Ensure that the Council's housing stock continues to meet all relevant standards for safety and construction.'

Reason for Recommendation

In order that the Director of Corporate Resources be informed of the suggested additional action to inform revisions to the Annual Delivery Plan as part of the programme of consultation.

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534 INITIAL HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET REVISED BUDGET 2022/23 AND PROPOSALS 2023/24 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 17th November, 2022 was presented by the Finance Support Manager, who set out the revised budget for 2022/23 and proposal for 2023/24 for Committee to consider / comment on:

- The balance on the HRA reserve brought forward as of 1st of April 2022 was currently higher than had been budgeted due to lower capital expenditure incurred last financial year. In order to bring the level of this reserve down to a more prudent level, the revised 2022/23 HRA budget had been increased from a deficit of £11m to just over £16m, which brought the reserve balance back in line with the level required in the Housing Business Plan.
- Regarding the initial HRA budget proposals for 2023/24, this had moved from an original deficit budget £11.077m to a surplus of £26k, assuming a reduction in Capital Expenditure Revenue Account (CERA) of £12.7m. This brought the budget contribution to £5.7m and left an anticipated balance on the HRA reserve of £949k as at March 2024.
- Current challenges to the Budget and the Housing Business Plan came from high inflation and supply costs, the cost of living crisis, additional borrowing and high interest rates. Linked to this was the significant cost increases projected for 2023/24, i.e. capital financing due to additional borrowing, increase in interest rates and higher repair costs.
- Since the report had been produced, the rent policy notification from WG had been received and was being analysed for the revised Housing Business Plan for 2023/24. Various rental increases had been modelled to ensure the ongoing viability of the 30-year Housing Business Plan, which would be finalised and presented to Cabinet along with the final 2023/24 HRA budget proposals, in order that the statutory deadline to notify council tenants of the new rent and service charges would be met.

Following on from the presentation of the report, the Committee raised the following comments and questions:

- On Councillor Carroll's question regarding the provision for general inflation of £136k in the report and whether this was sufficient, the explanation given was this was what was currently forecast and therefore an element of estimation was involved, but this could be amended, if advised to do so, for the final HRA budget proposals report. Most of the impact of the inflationary cost pressures would be on the capital works that the Council undertook rather than the HRA itself. On the Councillor's other query concerning the £15k spent on consultants, this was largely connected with the implementation of the new ICT system for Housing and Building Services.
- On the Vice-Chair's request for clarification about the provision for bad and doubtful debts budget being reduced, referred to in the report, it was explained that the anticipated levels of bad debt provision within the Housing Business Plan, based on the various changes to the welfare system, had not been realised due in large part to the work undertaken by the Council around rent recovery and financial support and inclusion for tenants.

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- The Head of Housing and Building Services also highlighted the need to look at tenant rents, balancing both the need to sustain and expand social housing but also to ensure that the impact to tenants was not too onerous, particularly for those not in receipt of any benefits.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the Cabinet reference and report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T the revised Housing Revenue Account budget for 2022/23 be noted.
- (2) T H A T the initial Housing Revenue Account budget proposal for 2023/24 be noted.

Reason for recommendations

(1&2) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

535 DRAFT OLDER PERSONS HOUSING STRATEGY (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 17th November, 2022 was presented by the Operational Manager, Public Housing Services and by representatives of Housing LIN, who had provided consultancy support in drafting this Strategy. This had been agreed in principle by Cabinet but had been referred to Scrutiny for consideration.

The Strategy had been produced to ensure that the Council was responding to the housing challenges faced specifically by older people in the Vale Glamorgan.

The representatives from Housing LIN provided a short presentation to the Committee, detailing the approach used to develop this Strategy (i.e. review of best practice, use of focus groups), its 'vision' and intentions (i.e. 'to secure the best quality of life for older people to live as independently as possible in later life'), how the Strategy could be achieved (i.e. either supporting older people to stay in their homes or to enable them to move on to housing better suited to their needs, as well as greater community, health and social care involvement), as well as the associated actions required (ranging from a review of / consultation concerning the Council's sheltered housing services, through to encouraging private and other social housing providers to build more suitable accommodation).

Following on from the presentation of the report, the Committee raised the following comments and questions:

- On the Vice-Chair's question around the impact of rising dementia in the older population and how this could be reconciled with the Strategy's aim of older people living independently, it was explained that work was being undertaken with colleagues in Adult Services to provide delivery of care strategies in order to support the housing strategy. Also, the Strategy looked at offering housing support at various stages of their life and to allow them wherever possible to remain within their locality and next to their support networks.

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- On the Vice-Chair's follow up questions around the mechanism for the review of the Strategy and linking in with partners concerning this and what engagement there had been with private house builders in terms of providing affordable and accessible housing to older people, it was explained that the strategy tied in with a number of partners and services, i.e. the Regional Partnership Board (RPB) and health and social care partners, which also meant additional funding for integrated care. On private housebuilders, discussions had already started with them regarding housing site suitability, with the Strategy providing an evidence base for Planning to help inform the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and private builders on the most appropriate housing for older person and the most suitable 'mix' of types of accommodation.
- On Councillor Hanks' query on the Penarth care / retirement village, it was explained that this had been recently approved by the Council's Planning Committee and discussions were being held with Wales and West Housing Association in taking the project forward. Further updates would be brought to Committee in due course. On the 'step down' accommodation / units in Cowbridge (utilised in order to help stop 'bed blocking' in hospitals by giving patients a means of leaving hospital safely), there were two of these, with a maximum length of twelve weeks. Take up / occupancy was relatively low, in part due to these being optional for older persons leaving hospital, and the Council was looking to maximise their use more effectively, as had been seen at similar units in Penarth.
- Councillor Perkes queried what the process was to implement the Strategy and what planning there was to ensure that the necessary infrastructure was in place to support older persons and an increasing aging population in the Vale in their housing choices. It was explained that the Strategy had an Action Plan appended in order to set out the timelines, etc., around its implementation, but this was still in the process of being finalised, with some dates and deadlines proving to difficult to specify, i.e. the building of further social housing, specific to older person needs, dependent on the provision of future funding and the need to prioritise a range of competing needs to house various groups.
- On the Councillor's follow up question about the ability of families to build or convert accommodation for older relatives within their homes or adjacent land, it was explained that some planning restrictions had been lifted to help enable this wherever possible, with further changes needing to be fed back to WG and the review of the Local development Plan (LDP).
- Councillor Morgan urged the Committee to get behind this report and the need to look at planning and other areas of policy (via lobbying WG) to ensure that older persons within the Vale could remain within their local communities i.e. for there to be a presumption that older persons could seek to build a modest single person dwelling within their garden or grounds. This would also benefit their local communities and businesses (i.e. the significant contribution of older persons to voluntary work in their localities) and remove the 'fear factor' for older persons on their future housing needs.
- The Vice-Chair stressed the importance that all generations of residents of the Vale were consulted on this Strategy, to ensure that it continued to be fit for purpose in the years ahead, by taking into account their aspirations.
- On Councillor Hennessy's query on the new in-home emergency call system for older residents, it was explained that take up for Council tenants remained high and it remained their choice to have the new Telecare lifeline system or not.

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- On Councillor Carroll's query about Penarth Care / Retirement Village, it was explained that it was not strictly correct to describe it as a 'retirement village' but rather it entailed the bespoke provision of older persons accommodation in this particular locality, combining a sheltered housing scheme and an existing residential care home, based on affordable tenure. There was no intention at this stage that the extra care accommodation would include 'for sale' units.
- The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services endorsed the Strategy as a sustainable means of housing older persons in their localities and within their support networks, as well as addressing an aging population and the additional needs this would bring to social and health care. However, the Council would need to manage the expectations of residents and tenants around such housing and related support due to growing budgetary constraints.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the Cabinet reference and report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the following views of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee be considered by Cabinet prior to the final Strategy being agreed, namely:

- The importance of the Strategy to consider the impact of dementia on housing older persons and the complex needs and support associated with this as well as the effects of a growing aging population within the Vale of Glamorgan.
- The importance of keeping the Strategy under constant review and monitoring, with the need to also link in with other relevant organisations (such as Public Health bodies, Registered Social Landlords and private house builders and developers) around support, availability, affordability and accessibility to appropriate housing for older persons.
- The importance of the Strategy and Action Plan to lay out the process for implementing the Strategy and plan for the infrastructure required to house and support older persons, i.e. to support older persons to live in their existing homes.
- For the Council, as part of the Strategy, to engage with Welsh Government in order to review their planning policies to allow the development of older persons accommodation within the communities they live in already, and adjacent to, or within the grounds of, their existing accommodation.
- The Council looks to engage with all age groups around this Strategy in order to account for the aspirations of future generations, that it is fit for purpose and to demystify or to remove the 'fear factor' of what housing an older person means going forward.

Reason for recommendation

To ensure that Cabinet make a fully informed decision on the final Strategy.

536 CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING MID YEAR REPORT (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 17th November, 2022 was presented by the Head of Housing and Building Services, who outlined to the Committee the work undertaken to improve corporate arrangements for safeguarding and the protection of children and

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adults. This remained a key corporate responsibility for the Council. The reference / appended report reflected on:

- The national and local reviews undertaken that would change the Council's safeguarding practices.
- The Corporate Safeguarding Group, which met quarterly and whose representatives from across the Council shared areas of priority and emerging themes at the strategic level as well as producing related reports and reviews i.e. on violence against women and domestic abuse, a safeguarding data report and a 'dashboard' style report to focus on areas that required greater inspection.
- There had been an update to the Council's Corporate Safeguarding webpage.
- A draft updated Safeguarding Policy had been produced (to be referred to Cabinet and Scrutiny in due course) applicable to all Local Authority employees, volunteers and contractors.
- There was also an update to the Safe Recruitment Policy during 2022, and Quarter 2 reporting had shown a 100% compliance across corporate and schools directorates.
- Where there was no completed Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks in place for new Council or school staff, a relevant risk assessment plan was put in place until the DBS checks could be provided.
- The launch of National Safeguarding Training Standards.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the Cabinet reference and report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T both the Cabinet reference and appended Cabinet report be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of both the Cabinet reference and Corporate Safeguarding mid-year report on the work undertaken to improve corporate arrangements for safeguarding and protecting children and adults.

537 ANNUAL DELIVERY PLAN MONITORING REPORT: QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE 2022/3 (DEH) –

The performance report, presented by the Director of Environment and Housing, charted the progress made by the Council at quarter 2 (Q2) (1st April to 30th September, 2022) towards achieving its Annual Delivery Plan (2022/23) commitments as aligned to its Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives, for the Committee's consideration. Overall, the status of the Annual Delivery Plan (ADP) was 'Green' in terms of performance indicators, actions and objectives.

Appendix A , which set out the areas of performance within the remit of the Committee including the achievements made by the Council under its four Wellbeing Objectives for Q2 was outlined, ranging from Objective 1, ('Work with and for our communities'), i.e. the work undertaken on using the data from the Tenant Profiling exercise to improve and target services, through to Objective 4 ('Respect, enhance and enjoy our environment'), i.e. the expansion and popularity of the Penarth Food Pod. Areas for

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future focus and improvement were also referred to, ranging from Wellbeing Objective 1 (i.e. tackling the significant number of households which remain in temporary accommodation) through to Objective 3 (to continue to provide advice and support to citizens in light of the cost of living crisis).

Performance exceptions aligned to the Scrutiny Committee's remit (Appendix B) now highlighted the current status of Red performing actions / indicators identified in the previous quarter to show direction of travel, with proposed remedial actions that had been undertaken to progress these, i.e. for the 'Percentage of households successfully prevented from becoming homeless' performance indicator, the challenges and unprecedented demand around this were outlined, as well as the measures to try to alleviate this, i.e. development of the Rapid Rehousing Plan.

Following on from the presentation of the report, the Committee raised the following comments and questions:

- On Councillor Hennessy's query on the future status of those persons housed in hotel / bed & breakfast accommodation once WG funding for this accommodation ran out, it was explained that this would be a key consideration as part of next year's Council budget. Some of these costs could be met through Council reserves but this would be a burgeoning pressure on the Council, with the need to continue to use such accommodation for the foreseeable future.
- On the Councillor's follow up question about the construction and use of 'modular' temporary accommodation at other Council owned sites within the Vale, it was explained that funding had been made available for Local Authorities and other housing association partners to potentially look at bringing more accommodation online very quickly. One of the areas that the Council was looking at was its existing land holding, known as 'meanwhile sites'. This was in tandem with the ongoing development programme by the Council for more permanent housing in various sites in the Vale such as in Barry (the former Sea View Labour Club and Castle Hotel) and drawdown of the WG capital grant.
- The Chair and Committee Members also wished to pass on their thanks for the extensive work and efforts undertaken by Housing and Building Services.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the performance results and progress towards achieving the Annual Delivery Plan 2022/23 commitments, as aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan Wellbeing Objectives within the remit of the Committee, be noted.

(2) T H A T the remedial actions to be taken to address areas of under-performance and to tackle the key challenges identified within the remit of the Committee, be noted.

Reason for recommendations

(1&2) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.