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CORRESPONDENCE FOLLOWING THE COMMITTEE MEETING

Committee COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Date and Time
of Meeting** WEDNESDAY, 6 JANUARY 2016, 5.00 PM

Please find below correspondence send by the Committee Chair following the meeting,
together with any responses received.

For any further details, please contact scrutinyviewpoints@cardiff.gov.uk

9 **Correspondence following the Committee Meeting** *(Pages 1 - 10)*

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My Ref: Scrutiny/Correspondence/Cllr McGarry

8 January 2016

Councillor Susan Elsmore
Cabinet Member
c/o Room 520
County Hall
Cardiff
CF10 4UW



Dear Susan

Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee – 6 January 2016

On behalf of the Members of the Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee, I would like to thank you and the officers for attending our Committee on 6 January 2016. I have sent a separate letter to you and Councillor Patel regarding our scrutiny of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment and Site Assessment Criteria. This letter covers our pre-decision scrutiny of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2016-17 and our deep dive into council housing voids management.

Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2016-17

Members thank officers for preparing the report and presentation, which we found both interesting and useful. With regard to the robustness of the Business Plan, Members are unable to comment on this given that the levels of several key parameters are still awaited from Welsh Government.

With regard to the proposed rent increase of 1.4% plus £2 per week, leading to an average increase of £3.30 per week, Members were reassured to hear that this will not impact on the majority of tenants as the increase will be covered by housing benefit. Members were concerned about the impact on those tenants most affected by recent Welfare Reforms, notably the benefit cap and 'Bedroom Tax'. Members note that there are approximately 200 households covered by the benefit cap, who will be affected by the rent increase. Members note that, for those tenants affected by the 'Bedroom Tax', the consequent impact will be approximately 14% of the overall increase, and therefore more manageable than may first appear to be the case.

Members asked several questions regarding the level of debt repayment, both overall and specifically to do with debts relating to the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy exit. Members note officers' assurances that the debt repayment is prudent, sustainable and affordable in the longer term. Members also note that finance officers keep a close eye on the situation with a view to enabling earlier repayment were this proven to be viable. However, Members think that it would be useful to undertake comparison with other local authorities to see how our ratio of debt and repayment measure up, if only to provide reassurance that our ratio is appropriate.

With regard to the Building Maintenance Framework Agreement, Members are aware of the main issues with this, particularly following our deep dive into council housing void management, which included examining the Constructing Excellence Wales reports taken to Audit Committee recently and discussing issues with officers involved in the day to day management of this Agreement. Members recommend that the shortfalls in this Agreement be addressed in the new agreement being developed; this will improve the experience of tenants when contractors are undertaking planned, programmed and reactive repairs, as set out in the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2016-17. More details on this are provided in our report on the deep dive into council housing void management, attached to this letter.

I mentioned at the meeting that the signage at Marland House requires improvement to clearly signpost that services are now provided at Central Library. I note that Sarah McGill agreed to improve the notices in the ground floor windows of Marland House, to make them larger and clearer, and I look forward to this being undertaken.

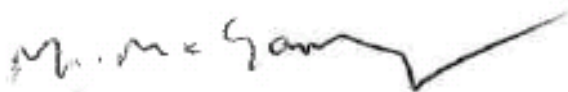
Deep dive into council housing voids management

As mentioned above, our Performance Panel has recently undertaken a deep dive into council housing void management, with the subsequent report being approved at Committee. The report is attached to this letter and contains sixteen recommendations, aimed at improving our performance in the short and medium term. I very much hope that this is of use to you and officers.

To summarise, I look forward to hearing back from you on the following:

- Recommendation – to undertake comparator work with other local authorities regarding Housing Revenue Account debt and repayment ratios
- Recommendation – that the shortfalls in the Buildings Maintenance Framework Agreement be addressed in the new agreement being developed
- Recommendations from the deep dive into council housing void management – whether these are accepted and, for those that are accepted, details of how and when they will be implemented.

Yours sincerely,



COUNTY COUNCILLOR MARY M^CGARRY

Chairperson - Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee

Cc: Sarah McGill Jane Thomas Colin Blackmore Anil Hirani
Liz Patterson
Claire Deguara Matt Swindell

My Ref: Scrutiny/Correspondence/Cllr McGarry

8 January 2016

Councillors Susan Elsmore & Ramesh Patel
Cabinet Members
c/o Room 520
County Hall
Cardiff
CF10 4UW



Dear Susan and Ramesh

Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee – 6 January 2016

On behalf of the Members of the Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee, I would like to thank you and the officers for attending our Committee on 6 January 2016 for the pre-decision scrutiny of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment and Site Assessment Criteria.

With regard to the Accommodation Assessment, it is pleasing to see the high rate of engagement with Gypsies and Travellers in Cardiff resulting in 172 survey forms being completed. Members were very interested to read the results of the survey and the insights these give and were pleased to hear assurances that the survey met the Welsh Government requirements with regards to Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessments. However, Members believe the report would benefit from more explanation regarding the reasoning used to arrive at some of the figures in the table at Point 5.1, specifically those relating to overcrowded pitches and new households (page 32 of the Accommodation Assessment report).

Members therefore recommend that further explanation be provided in the body of the report regarding how the number of overcrowded pitches is determined. Page 9 of the report provides the caravan count figures for authorised local authority sites in July 2015. This shows that 130 caravans were on 80 pitches. Members believe it would be useful to include further wording to explain why not all of the 50 additional caravans on the sites would need to be counted towards an overcrowding figure and how the figure of 17 overcrowded pitches was determined.

Members also recommend that further explanation be provided in the body of the report regarding how the number of new households is determined. Members recognise that the Welsh Government guidance recommends using 2.25% as the anticipated growth rate to project future households; Members can see that this has been used to calculate the need for 16 pitches at year 5 and 39 pitches at 2026. However, the table at Point 5.1 also includes a figure of 23 new households, which has been taken from the table at D3, page 29, over the next five years. Members believe it would be helpful to include further wording to explain why both the 23 new

households and the 16 new households are being counted towards the total unmet need, as the current wording could lead to concerns that there is double counting of new households emerging over the next five years.

To assist our understanding of these issues, Members would like to receive clarification on the occupation levels allowed on the local authority site pitches and the difference between overcrowding and over-occupancy, referred to at the meeting.

With regard to transit site provision, Members note that the report (at point 5.2) states that there is a clear need for transit provision. Members are grateful for the clarification that, following Hearing Session 11, the Planning Inspector required assessment of the need for transit sites in Cardiff but that the actual provision to meet this need can happen at a regional level. Members note that meetings are being held with neighbouring local authorities to discuss a regional response to transit site provision. Members are pleased to hear that powers exist to ensure that those who use the transit sites move on, in order to ensure that transit sites do not become permanent sites by default. However, Members note that the Accommodation Assessment does not specify the number of pitches needed for transit provision and we are surprised at this, as it should be possible to determine the number required from the information available.

With regard to the Site Assessment Criteria, Members note these have been updated to take into account good practice from other local authorities, national planning guidance and the latest guidance from the Welsh Government relating to the design and management of sites. As mentioned at the meeting, Members recommend that the wording 'contaminated land' be checked, given the previous comments of the Planning Inspector at Hearing Session 11 requiring this wording to change to 'land contamination'. Members think this may be due to the sentence construction used in the original policy which may not apply in this case but think it would be wise to check this, in case the wording would need to change.

Members wish to receive an indication of the weighting that will be applied to the various site assessment criteria when determining site suitability. Members also wish to receive an explanation of how the views of statutory providers will be included in the assessment of sites, for example with regard to acceptable and safe access to local services and facilities,.

With regard to the financial aspect of providing new sites, Members note the answer provided at the meeting that the costs will be covered 100% by Welsh Government grant, with no capital funding required by the Council.

Members note that a further report is scheduled to come to Cabinet in July 2016 with details of the site assessment and proposed sites. Members of this Committee would like to carry out pre-decision scrutiny of this report and therefore request that officers liaise in good time with Scrutiny Services to enable this to happen at our scheduled meeting on 6 July 2016.

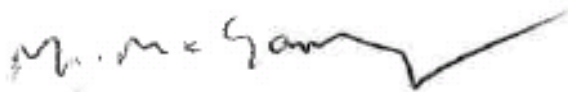
As raised at the meeting, Members are very interested to know what the process will be for consulting with ward councillors and local communities on proposed sites and would be grateful to receive details of this in your response to this letter.

Finally, regarding the Rover Way local authority site, Members understand the coastal erosion report has been received and that work is underway to address issues raised in the report. Members would be grateful to receive details of the issues and actions being taken to address these, in your response to this letter.

To summarise, I look forward to hearing back from you on the following:

- Recommendation – to include additional wording to explain the reasoning behind concluding there are 17 overcrowded pitches
- Recommendation – to include additional wording to explain the reasoning behind including both 16 new households over the next five years and 23 new households over the next five years in the total for unmet need
- Recommendation – to check use of the wording ‘contaminated land’ in the site assessment criteria and whether the Planning Inspector would require this to be changed to ‘land contamination’.
- Request for information – clarification on the occupation levels allowed on the local authority site pitches and the difference between overcrowding and over-occupancy
- Request for information - indication of the weighting that will be applied to the various site assessment criteria when determining site suitability
- Request for information - an explanation of how the views of statutory providers will be included in the assessment of sites.
- Request for information – details of the consultation process that will be followed with ward councillors and local communities regarding proposed sites
- Request for information – details of the issues identified by the Rover Way coastal erosion report and the actions being taken to address these.

Yours sincerely,



COUNTY COUNCILLOR MARY M^CGARRY

Chairperson - Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee

Cc: Andrew Gregory Sarah McGill Jane Thomas Kate Hustler Ian Ephraim
Stuart Williams Heather Warren Liz Patterson
Claire Deguara Matt Swindell

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**SWYDDFA CYMORTH Y CABINET
CABINET SUPPORT OFFICE**



Fy Nghyf / My Ref: CM33202
Eich Cyf / Your ref: Scrutiny/Correspondence/
Cllr McGarry

Dyddiad / Date: 14 January 2016

Councillor Mary McGarry
Chair, Community & Adult Scrutiny Committee
Scrutiny Services
Room 263
County Hall
Cardiff
CF10 4UW

Annwyl / Dear Mary

**Pre-Decision Scrutiny of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation
Assessment and Site Assessment Criteria**

We are writing in response to your letter dated 08 January 2016, concerning the above.

Thank you for your comments. We have set out below a response to each of your recommendations and requests for information:

Recommendation – to include additional wording to explain the reasoning behind concluding there are 17 overcrowded pitches

This conclusion takes into account advice contained in paragraphs 194 to 200 of Welsh Government guidance on “Undertaking Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments” and is derived from an analysis of the survey forms. This guidance states that overcrowding exists where family numbers have grown to the extent that there is now insufficient space for the family within its mobile home accommodation and insufficient space on the pitch or site for a mobile home. Questions B2 and B3 of the survey form address this issue and ask respondents whether is there enough sleeping areas for all residents and is there room on the pitch to safely station additional trailers to prevent overcrowding. Where respondents answered no to both of these questions they were included in the 17 overcrowded pitches identified in the assessment. As recommended we confirm this explanation will be included in the final assessment report.

ATEBWCH I / PLEASE REPLY TO: Swyddfa Cymorth Y Cabinet / Cabinet Support Office,
Ystafell / Room 514, Neuadd y Sir / County Hall,
Glanfa'r Iwerydd / Atlantic Wharf, Caerdydd / Cardiff,
CF10 4UW Ffon / Tel (029) 2087 2479

Recommendation – to include additional wording to explain the reasoning behind including both 16 new households over the next five years and 23 new households over the next five years in the total unmet need

These conclusions take into account advice contained in paragraphs 201 to 210 of Welsh Government guidance on “Undertaking Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments”. The figure of 23 new households over the next five years is the current known demand identified through information contained in the questionnaire responses, through the waiting list, caravan count and partnership working with Local Authorities in the region. The figure of 16 new households over the next five years is a calculation as per the Welsh Government guideline that assumes a 2.25% rise per year. It is the following calculation:

Current Residential Supply	= 92
Current residential demand	= 48
Total	= 140

2.25% accumulative rise for 5 years = 11.77%

140 * 11.77% = **156 (an increase of 16)**

Given this the figures relate to different sources of growth in this five year period and as set out in Welsh Government guidance it is appropriate to include them both within that period. As recommended we confirm this explanation will be included in the final assessment report.

Recommendation – to check use of wording ‘contaminated land’ in the site assessment criteria and whether the Planning Inspector would require this to be changed to ‘land contamination’

In order to accord with the LDP Inspectors recommendation we confirm that the wording in the site assessment criteria will be changed from ‘contaminated land’ to ‘land contamination’ as recommended.

Request for information – clarification on the occupation levels allowed on the local authority site pitches and the difference between overcrowding and over occupancy

The methodology for calculating overcrowding on pitches is set out in our response to the first recommendation above and we confirm this explanation will be included in the assessment report. For the purposes of the assessment over occupancy relates more to the number of vehicles on the pitch which can be safely accommodated as some pitches are big enough for more than one caravan and some are not, whereas overcrowding relates to the bed spaces within the pitch.

Request of information – indication of the weighting that will be applied to the various site assessment criteria when determining site suitability

In terms of weightings we consider that it is better to look at the findings of the assessment in the round rather than saying some criteria are more important than others. In this respect it is important to note that Welsh Government do not suggest weightings in their guidance and such weightings could also lead to the methodology being challenged.

Request for information – an explanation of how the views of statutory providers will be included in the assessment of sites

The assessment process over the next 6 months will be guided by a Steering Group which will include representatives from education and health and their input will be sought when assessing the sites and making appropriate recommendations to Cabinet.

Request for information – details of the consultation process that will be followed with ward councillors and local communities regarding proposed sites

As set out at the meeting in the first instance the findings and recommendations of the assessment process will need to be considered by Cabinet in July 2016. Prior to Cabinet local ward Councillors will be consulted on the contents of the report. Formal consultations as part of the planning application process will include local communities with the precise details to be confirmed as part of the cabinet process in July.

Request for information – details of the issues identified by the Rover Way coastal erosion report and the actions being taken to address these.

The issue of coastal erosion and the Rover Way site is recognised. In order to identify appropriate coastal defence solutions for the wider Pengam Green area the Council is undertaking a feasibility study of the coastal defences along the Pengam Green stretch of the coastline which includes the Rover Way site. It is anticipated that this report will take 18 months to complete and when complete the Council will need to review how the findings affect the existing Rover Way site

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yn gwyir,
Yours sincerely,



**Councillor / Y Cynghorydd Susan Elsmore
Cabinet Member for Health, Housing & Wellbeing
Aelod Cabinet dros lechyd, Tai a Lles**



**Councillor / Y Cynghorydd Ramesh Patel
Cabinet Member for Transport, Planning & Sustainability
Aelod Cabinet dros Drafnidiaeth, Cynllunio a Chynladwyedd**

cc. Andrew Gregory
Stuart Williams
Claire Deguara

Sarah McGill
Heather Warren
Matt Swindell

Jane Thomas
Liz Patterson

Ian Ephraim

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