

COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 MARCH 2020

Present: Councillor Jenkins(Chairperson)
Councillors Ahmed, Philippa Hill-John, Lister and McGarry

73 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Lent.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Lister to the Committee.

74 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

75 : HRA BUSINESS PLAN 2020/21

The Chairperson advised Members that this item enabled them to carry out pre-decision scrutiny on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2020-2021 which will be considered by Cabinet on the 19th of March.

The Chairperson welcomed Cllr Lynda Thorne Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities, Sarah McGill Corporate Director, Jane Thomas Assistant Director Housing & Communities, Colin Blackmore Operational Manager for Building Improvement and Safety and Gillian Brown, Group Accountant.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Thorne to make a statement in which she said that this plan is provided to Welsh Government every year in a format agreed with Welsh Government that all LA's have to follow, along with a 30 year financial plan. The plan is also for Cardiff's tenants.

Members were provided with a presentation after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments;

Members asked if the Cabinet Member was satisfied that all Cardiff homes are located in an attractive and safe environment. The Cabinet Member stated that they are trying to invest in the communities through a huge amount of Capital Programme Investments. Some houses were built in 1921; estates were built in different ways under different circumstances so it's a case of going back and addressing any issues. A real difference has been made in many communities. Officers added that they survey tenants and 85% say they are happy where they live and only 10% say they are not.

Members noted the 100k requests for repairs per year and asked for more information such as whether these are tracked, if they are major/minor repairs, the costs and what is being done to improve this. Officers noted it was a huge amount, they have encouraged tenants to report everything. They are also looking to move the minor repairs from the repair category to the improvement category. Officers explained the costs including voids is £18 million per year. The Cabinet Member added that in the late 1980's they started the tenant participation and a large number

of tenants did not report repairs in case they were held responsible for them, over the years they have been encouraged to report everything.

Members asked if the Channel View development was replacement housing. The Cabinet Member explained it was replacing what is there but will be double the numbers and mixed development.

Members referred to the RAG analysis and the direct delivery plan noting lots of red/amber categories and asked if there was confidence that this could be delivered. Officers explained they were Amber and were absolutely confident through various routes, 2250 properties have been identified, however timescales were always a potential issue as there are a variety of things that can go wrong with development sites. Officers were adamant that the target would be met in terms of numbers.

Members asked for clarity on the Anti-Social Behaviour Team. Members were advised it was one team working with victims and trying to help perpetrators; there are other teams that wrap around such as tenant sustainability team. Officers explained they don't want to evict anyone into homelessness so they try to support both the victim and perpetrator, bringing in other people if necessary such as victim support as this was a very complicated area.

Members discussed disabled adaptations and officers stated that they review this every year and look at alternative accommodation and the use of more equipment in the hope to control that capital spend.

Members discussed voids and what was being done to get them back in circulation more quickly. Officers explained that they are in a better situation now with regards to voids as they have a significant in-house team in place. It is still higher than previously but they are starting to clear. Going forward, there will be a new framework in 2 years' time, they are working with colleagues in procurement with regards to the Dynamic Purchasing Agreement to support smaller contractors and the in-house team. It was noted that procurement does take a long time but they are looking towards smaller local companies and will come back to committee on this specific issue.

Members discussed the innovative housing scheme using shipping containers, the pilot and the small percentage of the whole scheme that meets the innovative element in terms of zero carbon etc. Members asked if the Council was ready to move on from the pilot. Officers considered they were, the pilot had provided an opportunity for them to test the technology and check what the best investment is to get the best outcome. Members discussed other innovative schemes across the UK such as Goldsmith Street; members were advised that this scheme meets the passive house standard but are very small terraced houses with properties side by side; in Cardiff it is considered important to maintain size/scale of developments whilst meeting and exceeding the Goldsmith scheme.

Members discussed finances, noting that the revenue is based on assumptions and there could be challenges if rents are increased, bad debts may increase and could result in voids. Officers explained that is where mitigation gets put in place; they meet monthly with accountants to review this and come to scrutiny annually, but are also looking at the data continually. Officers added that they look at the finance in intense detail, with detailed monitoring.

Members asked for more information around complaints and what types of complaints are received. Officers explained they could be anything from repairs to anti-social behavior and the reasons behind the complaints are monitored.

Members referred to tenant engagement and wellbeing and considered scope in the annual survey for open feedback to inform future investment. Officers explained that the survey has to comply with Welsh Government., however they do carry out other surveys and focus groups, but with so many tenants they tend to be focused on a particular issue i.e. Anti-Social behavior.

In relation to homelessness and associated issues, Members asked as the Council is a social landlord, if there is correlation between the number of houses available and the support people need in relation to the development plan. Officers stated that homelessness is not a HRA function, however the Council does provide support in many ways such as wrap around support, developing, for example, Ty Tresillian.

Members sought more information on Council Supported Ownership and were advised that it is generally young couples, and they need to put down monies of their own. The Cabinet Member also considered that people in the private rented sector could benefit from this scheme.

AGREED: that the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

76 : ALLEY GATING ON PUBLIC HIGHWAYS - CARDIFF COUNCIL POLICY & STRATEGY 2020

The Chairperson advised Members that this item enabled them to carry out pre-decision scrutiny on the draft proposals for the Alley Gating on Public Highways Policy & Strategy 2020.

The Chairperson welcomed Cllr Lynda Thorne Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities, Sarah McGill Corporate Director, Rebecca Hooper Operational Manager in Neighbourhood Regeneration

Members were provided with a presentation after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments;

Members discussed the process and were advised that there are various legal stages, such as notices; responses are required from consultation with residents; there are internal and external partners involved in the consultation too and then there is the final legal stage for the sealed orders.

Members noted the cost of £3k and asked if this included the consultation. Officers advised that this amount is purely capital costs for fabrication and installation for an average 2 gate set.

Members asked if alley gating had been looked at in connection with Waste with the possibility of camera installations etc. The Cabinet Member explained that had not been done and noted the issues with alley's are not solely fly tipping, it's also anti-social behavior. Officers added that in certain places where gating is not possible, cameras have been considered, however there is a significant issue with privacy and a response is required if something happens. It was important to look at other approaches alongside prevention.

Members asked for more information on the criteria for choosing the alley's to gate. Officers explained that the criteria is a mix of statistical evidence such as crime and reported incidents, scored against various figures to prioritize the schemes; this is done with partners.

Members asked about cyclists and pedestrians using the alleys and officers explained that one of the scores was 'connectivity' and they seek advice on the impacts of closing the alleys.

Members noted that sometimes there is still fly tipping in the lanes and asked how this would be dealt with and if anyone has been prosecuted for damaging any gates. The Cabinet Member explained that fly tipping would be an issue for Waste; officers explained that vandalism is not a common problem, however when it does happen it is difficult to know who did it to prosecute. Officers do write to residents if the gates are left open etc., however there is no problem with repeated vandalism at the moment. If any gates are removed then officers work with the residents to keep them there.

Members asked for more information on keys, issuing and monitoring etc. Officers explained that they will add this information into the policy; there is an existing procedure for key drop; residents sign a key holder agreement, they provide evidence of address, a log is kept of the number of keys issued and there is a fee for repeated lost keys.

Members asked if the process could be speeded up, especially the consultation with stakeholders. Officers explained that they take a pragmatic approach to consultation, it's usually 50% but more transient in areas such as student areas, where the percentage is lower to speed up the process; stakeholders are given time to respond, then it moves to the next legal stage. Officers explained that the legal process is the real challenge and there are some stages that absolutely cannot be changed.

Members asked if there were enough resources, noting the high number of gating orders to be reviewed in October 2020. Officers explained they have only started the PSPO process recently, there will be resource issues and costs to the legal process as there are hundreds of orders to review.

AGREED: that the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

77 : CABINET RESPONSE: "TEMPORARY AND SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION - THE SINGLE PERSONS GATEWAY"

The Chairperson advised Members that this item provided them with the Cabinet Response following this Committee's Short Scrutiny on The Single Persons Gateway.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Thorne to make a statement in which she thanked Committee for the short scrutiny which highlighted the challenges faced by the service. 8 recommendations had been agreed, with 1 agreed in principle while they seek to determine a way forward. The Cabinet Member stated that there was work underway to tackle issues but there is no simple fix. There will be a fundamental review of the service based on good practice around the UK; a new approach would ensure that all clients have the level of support they need. The Cabinet Member was pleased to say that the working arrangements with Health had improved considerably

and this along with the work of the MASH and improved emergency accommodation offer had meant that rough sleeping had been reduced this winter; there was more work to do, some of which would take along time.

Members were provided with an outline of the recommendations and responses after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments;

Members noted that on a former short scrutiny, it felt like there was lots of attention on the City Centre and rough sleeping being compared to downtown Los Angeles. Members considered there seemed to be fewer rough sleepers at present and asked if lessons had been learned and if the Council was prepared for another spike. Officers advised that the numbers of people presenting has actually increased by 18%, however due to the work of the outreach team many are engaged with services. Numbers of rough sleepers are the lowest they have been for six years. There are lots of people currently in emergency accommodation, and there is more work to be done to meet the increased demand. Changes to services continue in order to meet that demand and stop the revolving door effect; this would be part of a longer term review.

Members referred to the 270 cases with the multi-disciplinary team, only 50 of which were closed and asked if the rest were ongoing cases. Officers explained that they were, or the person has moved away and are still being supported once in accommodation. It was noted that not all cases are closed successfully, but if there is any hope then they are kept open and the team keep trying to help.

Members asked how Officers assess if services are meeting current needs. Officers explained that people come through the gateway, so they have all the data including eviction/abandonment rates etc. and also information on what clients have said about types of accommodation. There are some services that need to be moved away from, this is not necessarily the providers fault but clients change and then the focus also needs to change.

AGREED: that the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

78 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Members were provided with an update on correspondence and task and finish inquiries.

It was noted that Appendix A provided items for consideration for the next four meetings.

Members were encouraged to consider items for future inquiries.

79 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received.

80 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee is scheduled for 6 May at 4:30pm in Committee Room 4, County Hall, Cardiff.

81 : CORRESPONDENCE FOLLOWING COMMITTEE MEETING

The meeting terminated at 6.55 pm