

COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 MARCH 2021

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

6 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Carter he may be late attending.

7 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

8 : HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2021-22

The Chairperson advised Members that this item enabled them to carry out pre-decision scrutiny on the Housing Revenue Account's Business Plan before it is considered by Cabinet on the 18th of March.

The Chairperson welcomed Cllr Lynda Thorne, Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities; Sarah McGill, Corporate Director People & Communities; Jane Thomas, Director for Adults, Housing & Communities; Colin Blackmore, Operational Manager for Building Improvement & Safety and Gill Brown, Group Accountant to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement and Members were provided with a presentation after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments;

Members discussed red RAG risks and mitigation asking how much work is involved and what can be done beforehand to mitigate risks. Officers explained that discussion takes place regularly with finance officers to review the RAG analysis; the Plan is written annually but RAG analysis is a live document; not everything can be predicted as the last year and the pandemic has shown. The RAG rating is intended to identify that can vary the performance across the piece; there are lots of meetings regarding the Revenue side and the Capital Programme side and lots of work go into reviewing these.

Members referred to the Decarbonisation Strategy and noted that some council properties were having new gas boilers installed; Members asked if work had started on the decarbonisation of 10,000 properties as yet. Officers explained that they have started looking at alternatives but they are currently very expensive and often involve digging up parts of the properties. Officers are looking at renewable technology on roof tops and energy efficient walls. Boilers remain a challenge however. The Cabinet Member added that they need to ensure heating is affordable to tenants so it was a balancing act; as new technology is introduced things will change at pace.

Members noted that bad debt is shown as a risk but is not mentioned in the sensitivity analysis. Officers explained that the sensitivity analysis is a snap shot in

time; there is provision for bad debt and it is monitored; there was a need for flexibility to be built in due to Universal Credit and Covid and they would look at outcomes and monitor progress against the budget.

With reference to Major Repairs Allowance, Members noted that visits to properties cannot currently take place due to Covid and asked if quality standards were still being maintained. Officers explained that there had been some impact on some properties, but over the last year they have focussed on external improvements such as fire safety, courtyards and external works; there would now be an accelerated programme to catch up on internal works. Members noted that property condition checks were currently on hold but were assured that gas safety checks were still ongoing.

Members asked if there had been a construction price increase during the pandemic. Officers explained it was a difficult time at the moment with the pandemic and furlough and even Brexit; they did not have any detail but agreed to get the information for Members.

Members asked if the Council would be putting in a bid to the Welsh Governments Warm Housing Programme. Officers advised that they liaise with colleagues who are constantly looking for funding mechanisms as not everything can be done from rent receipts.

Members asked if there was any scope to refine the format of the report any further. Officers explained that it was a set format with the financial model being the same for every local authority to enable comparisons; in effect it is the tenant's business plan but it can only be changed within reason. There has been a change from lots of figures to RAG ratings, good ideas from other local authorities have also been used and Cardiff has been highlighted as the best returning local authority.

Members asked if the Tenant Participation Survey had been carried out in the past year and Officers explained it had not due the pandemic, in line with most other local authorities. Welsh Government expect the survey to be conducted every two years; Cardiff has done it annually usually as it is useful to track services and how tenants feel.

Members referred to the Prevention of Homelessness and asked how these services could be promoted. Officers agreed that prevention is key and it will continue to be a real drive this year. Prevention advice will be provided in Hubs with the advice teams so it is more accessible; the Council has written to private sector landlords regarding tenants in difficulty. It is important to identify and target those who are less likely to ask for help too. The Cabinet Member considered there was an onus on all Members to promote prevention services.

Members asked if an amber RAG rating for decarbonisation mitigation was realistic as so many challenges had been discussed and it was unlikely that much headway would be made in the near future. Officers explained that Welsh Government say the SAP rating should be 65 and Cardiff are 71.5 with the Wales average being 61.; so Cardiff is ahead and hoping to get to 75; it is a challenge but Officers want to achieve it; it is like the WHQS, some local authorities are not there as yet but Cardiff reached them 10 years ago. Officers did agree that maybe it should be a Red/Amber.

Members noted that the level of debt projections were set to double in a few years. Officers explained that debt projections do include new capital stock. The revenue and capital budgets are completely aligned; there is some flex as some schemes

have been put on hold and some have been brought forward this year, it is under constant review. Borrowing is always monitored and reviewed throughout the year and annually to ensure it is affordable. The Cabinet Member considered it was better to be ambitious and fail than not to be ambitious, she added she considered Amber to be the appropriate RAG rating.

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.

9 : COUNCIL HOUSE BUILD PROGRAMME UPDATE & ACQUISITION OF NEW BUILD HOUSING THROUGH A PACKAGE DEAL ARRANGEMENT - WYNDHAM CRESCENT

The Chairperson advised Members that this item enabled them to carry out pre-decision scrutiny on the acquisition of property at Wyndham Crescent. Members were advised that due to confidential information contained in the Appendices this item would be considered in two parts and any questions which relate to the detail of the Appendices must be asked during the closed session.

The Chairperson welcomed Cllr Lynda Thorne, Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities; Sarah McGill, Corporate Director People & Communities and Dave Jaques, Housing Development Manager for this item.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement and Members were provided with a presentation after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments;

Members referred to the design guide and the vision and considered that the housing should be timeless, attractive and liveable rather than modern. Officers explained that by modern they mean there will be space for modern day living such as home working space, they would consider using different wording to reflect this.

Members discussed development timelines and Officers explained the process of engagement with developers and that due diligence happens after the package deal is offered; some are not to the Council's standards and they are subsequently turned down. This scheme is well thought out and fits well for the high demand properties and location. The Council is limited to how much impact it has as the project has to be developer lead.

Members asked if this was at planning stage as yet and whether Local Members views had been sought. Officers explained it was not at Planning as yet, it was at pre-application stage. There is a recognition for the housing need in the ward especially for older person housing; there are some concerns but these need to be discussed with planning officers.

Members asked if design was a pull factor when a package deal is offered. Officers said it was as well as meeting the Council's standards, it needs to be something the Council can put its name to.

Members were reminded that Committee are required to consider questions on the Appendices in a closed session to discuss information deemed exempt, in

accordance with paragraphs 14 and 16 of Part 4 and paragraph 21 of Part 5 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

RESOLVED: to exclude the Press and Public from the meeting

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.

10 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None

11 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Members were updated on correspondence sent and received and the Committee's work programme.

It was noted that a briefing note on Socio-Economic Duty had been shared with Members and there was no Committee in April.

May's Committee's meeting would be a deep dive into drug-related crime in Cardiff following Covid-19, including first-hand accounts; Members discussed at length the potential witnesses and the meeting objective.

12 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 10 MAY 2021 AT 4.30PM

The meeting terminated at 6.45 pm