

My Ref: Scrutiny/Correspondence/Cllr McGarry

15 March 2019



Councillor Lynda Thorne, Cabinet Member Housing & Communities and
Councillor Susan Elsmore, Cabinet Member Social Care, Health & Well-Being.
County Hall
Cardiff
CF10 4UW

Dear Lynda and Susan,

COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 6 MARCH 2019 – OLDER PERSONS HOUSING STRATEGY 2019 – 2023 AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUSINESS PLAN 2019-2020

As Chair of the Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee, I wish to thank you and officers for attending Committee and providing Members with an opportunity to consider the Older Persons Housing Strategy 2019 – 2023, and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2019-2020 prior to Cabinet consideration by later this year. Members of the Committee have requested that I feed back the following comments and observations to you.

Older Persons Housing Strategy 2019 – 2023

The Committee considered the strategy which described how the accommodation needs and concerns of older residents in Cardiff would be addressed over the next 5 years. The committee welcomed the strategy and the outcomes that were expected.

One of the key elements of the strategy was the consideration of communal facilities, local amenities and support arrangements when developing suitable accommodation for older persons. The committee highlighted the importance of easy access to local facilities such as shops and post offices for older people. The research in the report

indicated that many older people had moved closer to town centres to gain easier access to shops and to maintain their independence.

The committee were keen to ensure that all future accommodation for older persons would equitably support diverse communities and meet their cultural, religious and social care needs. These communities required access to a range of inclusive services and appropriate facilities to ensure that they can live independently as identified in the strategy

The Committee were aware of the current financial position of the Council and that future financial challenges may have an impact on its ability to provide new accommodation. It was suggested that the use of the private public partnership, which supported the sale and rent of properties, could be enhanced to enable the Council to sell some of the properties that it built. This would provide a potential source of income to offset the cost for building council accommodation although the committee were aware that this proposal had some inherent risks.

The Committee commended the Independent Living Service, which provided advice and information to residents, and welcomed the inclusion in the strategy of a new Older Peoples Advice Unit that would extend the range of information which they provided to include; the eligibility criteria for homeowners planning for the future, how quickly older people can be progressed on the housing register and advice regarding the options for downsizing from private properties. Information should also be shared with the private sector to advise estate agents and potential landlords of property options to assist in meeting the private sector housing targets. To share this information effectively, a wider range of engagement would be needed rather than information just being provided in the Community Hubs.

The preference of older person's for 2 bedroom accommodation was identified in the survey. The breakdown of 2 bedroom properties in the 741 properties being developed was queried. It was explained that the detailed plans for each development were still to be finalised. The committee would welcome the opportunity to view the show home that was being provided.

The Committee requested that Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) should be consulted on proposed changes for allocation policy. It was also suggested that an accessible homes register be created to ensure that when adapted homes became vacant they could be allocated to those who needed similar adaptations. The improvements in the monitoring of voids with adaptations was seen as a positive step to ensure the best use of available resources.

The committee were pleased to hear that Cabinet Members were working together to plan and connect services across their portfolios and to meet the range of support for the differing groups in communities. Access to local amenities often required access to good transportation links but with the recent reduction in bus services it was considered by the committee as having a detrimental impact on the older persons in Cardiff. The Committee requested that a letter be sent to the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning & Transport asking him to utilise any funding allocated in the recent budget to support bus routes and in particular those local transport links which were essential to older persons.

The Committee commended the strategy and I would like to thank you again for your attendance at the meeting...

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUSINESS PLAN 2019-2020

Cardiff Council is required to present an “acceptable” Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan to the Welsh Government each year in order for them to assess the maintenance of the Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS) in order to be eligible for the Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) Grant.

The committee commended the Business Plan; however, they requested that the following feedback be considered by Cabinet.

The Committee welcomed the examples of innovative housing, which had been developed in partnership with Cadwyn. The committee concluded that this partnership arrangement should be enhanced to ensure that innovative housing opportunities continued to be provided in the future.

The ambition of the service to provide an in-house solution rather than contracting out the services for building developments was seen as a positive step, which would be supported by the committee.

The committee were supportive of the actions that were being undertaken to address the problems with damp in those blocks of flats where the cladding had been removed. The committee would welcome a briefing when the moisture content report had been provided and options identifying how the current situation could be improved for residents.

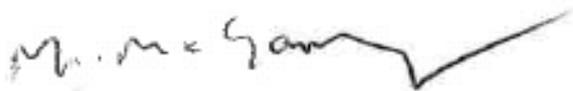
The Committee requested that details of the number of true fails relating to the WHQS be clarified and the level at which the number of fails affected the achievement of the WHQS and the eligibility for the Major Improvement grant from the WAG.

Members of the Committee were reassured with the plans to reduce the improvement works and cut back the staff budget to protect borrowing.

The Committee acknowledged concerns regarding the difficulties with the procurement process and would consult with the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee to determine if there was an appropriate way forward to review the procurement process.

I hope you find the Committee's comments useful and hope that you are able to provide a response to the queries identified above.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary McGarry', with a stylized flourish at the end.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR MARY M^CGARRY
Chairperson - Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee

Cc: Cllr David Walker, Chairperson, Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny
Committee
Sarah McGill, Corporate Director, People and Communities
Claire Marchant, Director of Social Services
Jane Thomas, Assistant Director, Housing & Communities
Colin Blackmore, Operational Manager Building Improvement & Safety
Gill Brown, Accountant
Cabinet Support