

COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6 MARCH 2019

Present: Councillor McGarry(Chairperson)
Councillors Ahmed, Carter, Goddard, Jenkins, Lent and Molik

66 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received.

67 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

68 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 21 January 2019 and 18 February 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

69 : OLDER PERSONS ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY - PRE DECISION

The Chairperson advised Members that this item enabled them to carry out pre-decision scrutiny of the Older Persons Accommodation Strategy 2019 – 2023 which was expected to be considered by Cabinet on the 21 March 2019.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Lynda Thorne (Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities); Councillor Susan Elsmore (Cabinet Member Social Care, Health & Well Being) Sarah McGill (Corporate Director, People and Communities) and Claire Marchant (Director of Social Services) to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Thorne to make a statement in which she said that she was pleased to be able to present the Older Persons Housing Strategy to Committee. She noted that there is an ageing population and meeting these needs in a sustainable way is a major challenge. Good quality housing can help older people to remain independent for longer, improve quality of life and also reduce pressure on budgets. The Strategy sets out how a range of housing options will be provided to meet both the needs and aspirations of the older population. There are exciting proposals for the development of new homes and for improving existing homes.

The strategy also sets out how the Council will support older people to live independently and, very importantly, stay linked to their community. Councillor Thorne added that she was particularly pleased with the new proposals set out in the strategy to improve advice and support for older people, to help them make the right housing choices at the right time.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Elsmore to make a statement in which she said that she wished to join Cllr Thorne in commending the strategy to Committee. If the Council are to meet the future challenges of its older population, especially those with Dementia, then it needs to take a whole council approach and work closely with its

partners in Health and the third sector. This Strategy sets out an excellent framework for taking this joint working forward.

Members were provided with a presentation on the Older Persons Accommodation Strategy, after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members;

Members asked if there were any plans for Care Ready homes in the Cyncoed area and were advised that there is a lack of land in Cyncoed, if land was available then they would be built. There was more provision in the North of the City; most Council homes are built on land that the Council owns.

Members noted the community aspect and that older people need to be closer to shops and bus routes, noting that there needs to be cross departmental work to address such issues as shops closing down and bus routes being stopped. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities noted the issue with transport across the City and stated that although not in the Strategy work was being done to look into the issue. The Cabinet Member shared the concerns over cutting bus services as this directly affects older people, she added it would be good to include this in the recommendations to go to the Cabinet Member for Transport although the Council is somewhat limited on this issue. The Cabinet Member for Social Care, Health & Well Being added that they were already looking at how the Council meets the needs of individuals and different groups across the City; the way work is planned across portfolios to connect services so they are locality based around communities, making it easier for people to stay in their communities for longer.

Members noted the diverse communities' element and considered there needed to be a focus on this for the provision of care for the elderly across Cardiff. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities stated that they have included the need to address ethnicity groups especially for dementia sufferers and this would be looked into shortly as far more needed to be done.

Members considered the strategy was very positive in general, but noted the issue with regards to bungalows and how the market could be pump primed in terms of specific types of accommodation; noting that the Council could potentially build and sell bungalows if they believed there was a high enough demand for them. Officers said they would encourage partners to have older person's homes for sale; new communities were being built and there needed to be elements of affordable/social housing as well as older person's accommodation for sale; Officers added that bungalows are more expensive to build.

Members were concerned about the amount of care ready versus extra care homes and asked for the rationale around that decision. Officers explained what they mean by care ready and extra care; stating that the standards are exactly the same, what is different is the provision of facilities such as a restaurant, which actually hasn't worked very well in some models. Care Ready homes have all the aspects of Extra Care but it gives the opportunity of building them in blocks.

Members noted that adaptation for homeowners often take a long time and asked how this was being addressed since the loss of the contractor. Officers explained that they have employed a third contractor to help with getting them done more

quickly; the Tender Evaluation Process had been completed and the appointment was about to be made. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities added that it was frustrating that they had lost the contract and she had written to the Chair of Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee (PRAP) to investigate why it takes so long to go through the procurement process; Members asked if this could once again be reinforced as a concern to PRAP.

Members considered that some older people who own their homes are unaware that they have the option to apply for older person accommodation and asked about the eligibility criteria. Officers explained that this was one of the points of setting up the unit, to provide the right advice and support for all older people; Older owner occupiers are eligible to apply for accommodation and are assessed on their need including their Health need; there are a myriad of complexities to consider and the unit could provide advice for the over 65s in good health to plan for the future too.

Members asked where the 45 Wales and West units were going to be built in Roath, Officers believed it to be the site next to the CRT but would confirm this.

Members considered that older person's religious needs including Christianity, should also be taken into account and Officers stated that Strategy would help how the Council gets to the point of meeting people's needs and the unit should also help to address this; needs to be met on an equitable basis.

Members reiterated the concern that there should be more houses built by the Council for sale. Officers stated that the key question in terms of houses for sale is how to incentivise the market; developers are nervous and assume there is no market but this has proved to be wrong as properties have sold off plan; this evidence will give confidence to developers that there is appetite across the City.

Members noted the engagement with Housing Associations but asked if there was any engagement with other organisations such as pension advisors or estate agents. Officers explained that they cannot give financial advice but if an older person wants to downsize they can provide help with showing them how to look at this digitally such as using Rightmove etc.

Members considered that the advice and support provided by Hubs should be communicated better as there seemed to be a misconception that these services are only for people who are Council tenants or are on benefits.

Members considered it was an excellent strategy but sought clarification on the split of housing types, asking if this split would be reflective of the consultation. Officers advised that bungalows were too expensive to build; there would be 1 bedroom flats but the flats are very generous in size and are in fact built on the same footprint of a 2 bedroom flat, so there is plenty of storage and larger bathrooms and kitchens. Officers further advised that there would be a show home available if Members wished to visit.

Members referred to the Allocations Policy, noting that Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) had been consulted on the proposals and asked if there was likely to be a change in the Policy. The Cabinet Member stated that it was difficult to specify what the Policy would be, it needs to take into account the individuals needs and

requirements and at the moment the policy doesn't allow that to happen; the intention is that older persons consideration is to be taken outside of the policy and each one taken on individual needs and requirements.

Members discussed adaptations and asked what happens when properties become vacant, asking if they are void for some time. Officers explained that they do try and allocate/match properties using the accessible homes register when they become available but it is not always possible. They look to recycle adaptation provisions and they work with Care and Repair on this.

Members noted that the Tai Pawb logo was not on the presentation; Officers said there was no specific reason for this but they are involved.

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.

70 : HRA BUSINESS PLAN - PRE-DECISION

The Chairperson advised Members that this item enabled them to carry out pre-decision scrutiny of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2019-2020 which was expected to be considered by Cabinet on the 21 March 2019.

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

The Chairperson invited Councillor Thorne to make a statement in which she said that this was an Annual Report; the restriction on the rent increase this year had had a major effect on the business plan and should it continue there would be major implications for building new accommodation in the City.

Members were provided with a presentation on the HRA Business Plan, after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members;

Members were concerned about the interest on borrowing especially with the risks identified and discussed such as rent arrears, the rent cap and the unknown impact of Universal Credit. Members asked what planning and mapping had been done in respect of this. Officers stated that they had made a significant provision of £1billion in the 2019/20 budget for the arrears issue and this would be kept under review as Universal Credit is rolled out. It was noted that 30 years is a long time to plan for; with regard to Interest, the forecast is based on existing Capital Programme, some schemes are already committed to, others may slip or drop out if they become unaffordable, this would be constantly reviewed. Officers maintained that if CPI plus Inflation stays at 2.5% then it is affordable.

Members further discussed rent arrears and the issue of the delay in processing Universal Credit applications. The Cabinet Member added that the benefits within the Universal Credit payment have also reduced, as well as some applicants having to wait up to 8 weeks for their application to be processed, so they are indebted from

the start of the process; this has seen an increase with people using foodbanks to feed their families. The Cabinet Member added that it was important to help and support people and that was what the Hubs and Employment Services are about.

Members noted that some work was being done to have rent directly paid and they hoped that this would go some way to address the arrears issue.

Members were surprised that there had been an expectation placed on the rent increases and wondered if it was a rallying cry to be more innovative in how the Council meets the targets of building more Council homes. Officers explained that if income is not received then they will need to review what can be delivered, adding that housing needs to be affordable, the level of rent over the past 40 years has impacted on this. The Cabinet Member explained that the money for housing is ring-fenced and anything you need to do can only be done from the income – rent; adding that Cardiff rents are lower on the second band of rent levels and are relatively cheap for a Capital City. The reduced income will have an impact on building homes for the most vulnerable people on the housing waiting list; currently people are private renting, they are being kept out of work as they couldn't afford the rent if they were working, more council homes are needed. The Cabinet Member highlighted the Cardiff Living Programme as an innovative housing initiative.

Members asked why more detached properties were not built and Officers explained that they are expensive, one unit of accommodation and this would mean a set rent price.

Members asked if there were options for HRA debt restructuring on an annual basis. Officers explained that it was one general fund and the HRA would benefit from interest rates.

Members asked if the levels of acceptable fails affected the major repairs allowance and were advised that they would not.

Members discussed the issue of damp and that some tenants are saying since cladding has been removed from blocks of flats they are experiencing damp in their properties. Officers explained that there had been pressure to remove cladding when they found combustibility and there have been referrals for damp issues since the winter. Tenants have been compensated for any extra heating needed over the winter and insurance forms have been issued for damage to properties due to mould. A consultant had started to monitor the moisture using thermal imaging and a report was expected in May with recommendations for improvements, it is thought these will include improved ventilation and windows.

Members noted that of the 1000 homes, there would be 50 temporary units and were advised that these were Meanwhile Use homes, built from shipping containers, which in theory could be moved from location to location around 5 times and they meet current standards such as having sprinklers etc.

Members noted that the Cardiff Living Scheme had 40% affordable housing as average over the whole scheme.

Members discussed anti-social behaviour and noted that there had been 7 evictions; Members asked what happens to the people who are evicted, wondering if they then enter a cycle of being homeless and rehoused. Officers explained that it would depend on each individual circumstance, in the event of anti-social behaviour people would be regarded as making themselves intentionally homeless; more detail on specific cases could be provided to Members outside of the meeting if they wished.

Members sought assurance on the quality of the new homes being built so that they stand the test of time. The Cabinet Member gave assurances on the quality of the housing to Members.

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.

71 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received.

72 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Members were advised of the current Forward Work Programme (FWP) and the planned items for the meeting in April were outlined. Members noted that there were two other possible items for this meeting but that they would not be in their final form; Members agreed that these items could wait until a later committee meeting.

Members were advised that the Performance Panel (currently made up of Cllr McGarry and Cllr Lent) would meet soon and provide feedback to the next meeting.

Members noted that the Closer to Home Task & Finish group (made up of Cllrs McGarry, Lent, Ahmed, Molik and Goddard) would meet soon and provide feedback to a future meeting; Members noted that a session held recently was useful and information on this would be shared with Committee Members.

Members were asked how they would like to develop the ongoing FWP and they considered that all Members of the Council should be written to for ideas, these could then be pointed to the correct Scrutiny Committee and prioritised.

Members were advised that the Calendar of meetings was provisionally set until 3 July 2019; more dates and times would be confirmed in preparation for the Annual Meeting of Council. Members were keen to keep meetings on the first Wednesday of the month at 4.30 but noted that this would sometimes need to change to align with Cabinet meeting dates.

It was confirmed that Cllr Kelloway was no longer on the committee and a replacement was awaited. Members were advised that there would be a review of political balance and appointments would be progressed with Whips.

Members were updated on the position with regards to the Principal Scrutiny Officer post and were advised that the replacement would be in place for the next CASSC

meeting on a phased introduction; their role would be; Developing the FWP; Closer to Home T&F; Performance Panel and to Develop the Annual Report.

73 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 3rd April 2019 at 4.30pm, Committee Room 4, County Hall, Cardiff.

The meeting terminated at 7.15 pm

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