

My Ref: Scrutiny/Correspondence/Cllr Jenkins  
13 March 2020



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Councillor Lynda Thorne  
Cabinet Member Housing & Communities  
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Dear Cllr Thorne,

### **COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 4 MARCH 2020**

As Chair of the Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee, I wish to thank you and officers for attending Committee to present Cardiff Council's Alley Gating Policy, HRA Business Plan (2020–21) and to present the Cabinet response to this Committee's Single Persons Gateway report. Members of the Committee have requested that I feedback the following comments and observations to you.

#### **Alley Gating on Public Highways – Cardiff Council Policy & Strategy 2020**

During the meeting concerns were raised over the anticipated timescale of delivery, which as detailed in the Cabinet Report can take, on average, 9 months to complete due to the consultation and prescribed legal processes. Members felt assured that the length of time was recognised by yourself and officers and at the measures in place to try and alleviate constraints and accelerate the process where possible. During the meeting, it was confirmed to Members that it costs on average £3,000 for fabrication and installation of a gate set. Members would appreciate if, in line with the changes in legislation in terms of reviewing PSPOs, a holistic cost which includes the installation of gates, consultation exercise, legal fees, maintenance costs, issuing of keys and resource costs (such as officer time) could be provided to Members in a totality figure for a gate set.

Members were reassured by the comments made at Committee that prevention is always the first avenue when dealing with community safety issues and noted the comments that other measures such as cameras are considered, however we understand that they too present challenges in terms of privacy and cost of response. However, Members would appreciate being provided with comparative costs of these alternative measures, in a totality figure which again captures the full range of costs for such measures such as resource estimates, maintenance costs and so on.

#### **GWEITHIO DROS GAERDYDD, GWEITHIO DROSOCH CHI**

Mae'r Cyngor yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg, Saesneg neu'n ddwyieithog. Byddwn yn cyfathrebu â chi yn ôl eich dewis, dim ond i chi roi gwybod i ni pa un sydd well gennych. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

#### **WORKING FOR CARDIFF, WORKING FOR YOU**

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Members appreciated the overview that was provided at Committee about the criteria which is used in the prioritisation exercise when determining lanes to alley gate and note the full scope of consideration which goes into the process, particularly around consulting with communities and stakeholders.

In terms of the levels of enforcement and maintenance of lanes which have been gated, Members would appreciate further information which includes statistics on enforcement along with details on how lanes which have been gated are monitored and maintained. As mentioned at Committee, as this is an area which falls under the terms of reference of the Environment Scrutiny Committee, I will task this Committee's scrutiny officer with ensuring this information is also shared with Environment Scrutiny Members.

With regard to the draft policy presented to the Committee; paragraph 5.5.6 details that in extreme cases of persistent vandalism to gates the Council may consider revoking the PSPO and permanently removing the gates. Following Members enquires, and the detail provided to Members at Committee as to the steps which would be taken prior to such action, Members would recommended the policy is amended to better outline the steps which would be taken prior to removing a gate. In addition, following the questions raised at Committee regarding the monitoring of keys issued for gates and the absence of its reference within the draft policy, Members wish to recommend amending the policy to include an overview of the existing procedure in place for monitoring keys.

Due to the legislative changes which now require a three yearly review process of all PSPO's and the potential resource and financial implications of this requirement, Members wish to recommended consideration be given to liaising with partners such as the Police and South Wales Fire Authority to identify if they could possibly contribute to the costs to alleviate such pressures.

### **HRA Business Plan 2020/21**

Regarding the format of the Business Plan, Members shared yours and your Cabinet colleagues view over its arrangement and note the comments made that the format is prescribed by the Welsh Government.

During the meeting, questions were raised regarding satisfaction levels that the Welsh Housing Quality Standards objective that households are 'located in attractive and safe environments' is met across Cardiff. Members firstly wish to welcome your candour and willingness to accept and confirm the issues and challenges in meeting such objectives. Members would also like to take the opportunity to reiterate that the benchmark for delivering Council Houses should not be the Welsh Quality Housing Standards, and that all involved should continue to look to go 'above and beyond' such benchmarks in order to deliver exceptional communities, beautiful and high quality homes and a high quality of living for all residents.

As detailed within the report, the Responsive Repairs Unit receives over 100,000 requests for repairs each year which raised concerns amongst Members that this could possibly be an indication over the quality of homes. Although Members were informed that this number of requests is a reflection of the demand from tenants, who are actively encouraged to report and engage with the Council as opposed to the quality of the property. Members were concerned that repairs (including the cost of repairing void properties) costs the Council on average £18m per annum. As such, Members would like further information on how repair requests are monitored and if requests are scaled in order to understand what warrants a repair and subsequent cost. Members would appreciate if they could also have sight of how repair requests are logged along with a breakdown of how decisions on repairs are made. Members appreciate the differences between empty property repairs and those lived in and would appreciate if this information focused on properties lived in.

Regarding the RAG analysis of the new build council homes programme, in previous Committee meetings, when you have been questioned about the likelihood that you would meet your target of delivering 1,000 Council homes by May 2022, you have been adamant that you would meet that target. Members were therefore surprised by its RAG status within the report as it was felt that the potential risks had not been indicated with Members when questioned before. Members understand the reasoning raised for the risks identified around this key project but would like to reiterate and encourage an open, honest relationship and request that possible variables, or anticipated challenges within achieving certain targets are consistently shared with Committee.

With regard to the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour team, Member would like to request further information on how the roles of the team, which includes providing support to the victims, working with the perpetrators and acting against the perpetrator could be perceived as conflicting, and would like to request information on the team, including the number of staff, how it functions and how these priorities and roles are managed given the complexities and sensitives explained at Committee.

In terms of void properties, Members are of course aware of the challenges within this field however do still hold concerns that currently there are 874 void properties. Being mindful to the challenges and sensitives in engaging with residents, particularly those who are most vulnerable, Members would like to enquire what measures can be put in place in order to mitigate the risk of properties falling into a state of disrepair. Members were pleased to note the comments made about the positive developments within this area for instance the significant development of the in-house team along with development of the Dynamic Purchasing Arrangement and procurement processes. Members welcome the offer made at Committee to present back on the developments and would be interested in aligning it with how the area is looking at working with local trade and businesses. Members will include this for consideration during their Work Programme Forum 2020-21 later in the year.

Whilst Members appreciate the comments made about the consideration which needs to be included when developing innovating Housing schemes, I again wish to take the opportunity to reiterate the importance of looking at best practice across the county and being willing and open to being inspired by it. For example, at committee I highlighted the award-winning Goldsmith Street development in Norwich as possible inspiration, but you were very quick to highlight that the development would not meet WHQS owing to some of the properties being too small. However, there are many other aspects about that development, and other developments across the country, that demonstrate what can be achieved when there is a focus on high quality, innovate housing and I urge you to take inspiration from such schemes so that the new generation of Council houses in Cardiff really are as good as they can be.

In terms of the fiscal elements of the Business Plan, Members felt assured by the high level of monitoring and mitigation which is conducted by officers on a frequent basis with a proactive nature.

In terms of the Wales Audit Office WHQS Review (2017-18) which stipulated that 62% of respondents felt that the Council listens to them and acts on their concerns, although Members appreciate the comments made at Committee that developments have been made since this review, Members firstly wish to note the importance of ensuring that residents feel that the Council is open and responsive to any issues they may raise. In line with this, the Plan states the Housing & Communities section received 479 complaints between April 2018 and March 2019. Members would appreciate if further information on how tenants' complaints are managed and organised, for instance if complaints are tiered and if this corresponds with how they are then responded to.

Members were pleased to note the level of engagement with tenants documented within the plan which was elaborated on at Committee where officers advised of the ongoing surveys and focus groups currently in hand. In line with this work, Members would request consideration be given to running a focus group and/or survey which focuses on tenant well-being.

### **Cabinet Response to the Single Persons Gateway**

Members firstly wish to thank you and officers for your positive response to the Committee's work. Members also wish to take the opportunity to reflect, commend and encourage further positive work in supporting those individuals sleeping rough detailed at Committee. Due to the ongoing and complex work currently being taken forward in this area Members would appreciate a progress report on the agreed recommendations in six months times and have tasked the Committee's scrutiny officer with taking this request forward.

Thank you once again to you and your officers for attending Committee. To confirm, as a Committee, we request further information or make recommendations on the following:

## **Cardiff Council Policy & Strategy 2020**

- To receive a holistic cost of alley gates which includes the cost of installation, consultation exercise, legal fees, maintenance costs, issuing of keys, resource costs (such as officer time).
- To receive a holistic costs of alternative measures such as cameras, which is again provided in totality, including costs of maintenance, resources etc.
- Information on the levels of enforcement and maintenance of lanes which have been gated.
- As a Committee we recommended the draft policy be amended to better reflect :
  - What steps would be taken prior to removing a gate and to also include detail on the existing procedure in place for the monitoring of keys.
- As a Committee we also recommend that given the known resource and financial implications due to required three yearly review, consideration be given to requesting partners such as the Police and South Wales Fire Authority to assist in easing such pressures.

## **HRA Business Plan 2020/21**

- Further information on how repair requests are monitored and if requests are scaled in order to understand what warrants a repair. Members would further appreciate if they could have sight of how repair requests are logged which also includes a breakdown of how decisions are made.
- An overview of the Council Anti-Social Behaviour team which includes the number of staff, how it functions on a day to day basis and how the priorities within their roles such as supporting and/or taking action against a perpetrator are managed given the complexities and sensitives explained at Committee.
- If measures are, or can, be put in place in order to mitigate the risk of properties falling into a state of disrepair and turning void.
- How complaints are managed and organised, within Housing & Communities for instance if they are tiered and if this corresponds with how they are then responded to.
- As a Committee we recommended that in line with the ongoing work of tenant participation, consideration be given to focusing on tenant well-being.

Yours,



**COUNCILLOR SHAUN JENKINS**

**Chairman - Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee**

Cc: Sarah McGill, Corporate Director  
Jane Thomas, Assistant Director Housing & Communities

Cllr Ramesh Patel, Environment Scrutiny Chair  
Rebecca Hooper, Operational Manager, Neighbourhood Regeneration  
Colin Blackmore, Operational Manager, Building Improvement & Safety  
Gillian Brown, Group Accountant  
Richard Bowen, Principal Scrutiny Officer  
Cabinet Office.