

COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 MARCH 2023

Present: Councillor Molik(Chairperson)
Councillors Ahmed, Ahmed, Ash-Edwards, Boes, Lent, Lewis,
Littlechild and McGarry

47 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received.

48 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

49 : CARDIFF & VALE REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP BOARD AREA PLAN 2023

Item deferred.

50 : HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2023-2024

The Chairperson advised that this agenda item allowed Members to consider the use and management of the Council's Housing Revenue Account.

Members were reminded that Appendix 3 in the papers is exempt from publication and so any questions on that must be taken in closed session.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Lynda Thorne, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities and Sarah McGill, Jane Thomas and Colin Blackmore from the Housing & Communities directorate.

The Chairperson invited Cllr Thorne to make a brief opening statement, after which Jane Thomas provided a presentation.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

Members discussed the demand across the city for all types of housing stock and were assured that the types of properties required by those on the waiting list is taken into consideration when pursuing all housing development routes. Members wished to state the importance of ensuring a balance of housing stock to help address issues such as overcrowding. Members stressed that there is housing need right across the City and development should not be concentrated in certain areas. Members felt that this would allow individuals to downsize or benefit from schemes such as older persons accommodation whilst remaining in a close, familiar locality. Whilst officers agreed with this view, Members were informed of the challenges in obtaining sites in the more affluent parts of the city such as site availability, and competition from private developers.

Discussing Void Properties, Members felt that this aspect of the plan would benefit from the following additional information:

- Clarity that the stats provided do not indicate the level of properties void at year end, but rather is presented to highlight the turnover of council properties during the year.
- Further information on the average time it takes to 'turn around' a void property that requires repair/maintenance work before it is offered to new tenants.
- Detail on the number of council void properties back in use at year-end (2022/23).
- The number of any long-term void council properties in the city, whilst appreciating this figure will be ever-changing, a snapshot overview would be welcomed.

Members were aware of the many issues that needed to be considered when dealing with void properties, but given the ever-growing demand, wished to stress the importance of immediate measures in response to the current context, and encouraged such solutions to be pursued, wherever possible.

With reference to Quality of Existing Housing Stock, Members welcomed the emphasis included in the plan around council house repair and maintenance work and highlighted the importance of contract monitoring when such work is carried out, along with the need to ensure tenant satisfaction is continuously sought and utilised.

Members also welcomed the focus in the plan on addressing damp in properties; particularly given the current context where some residents may struggle to afford heating their homes.

Members wished to encourage the development of electric vehicle charging points in council houses, and urged that within all current, and forthcoming housing development opportunities, the inclusion of such facilities be a key consideration.

Members noted that the Welsh Government was due to update the 'Welsh Housing Quality Standards' and sought assurance this would not impact our eligibility toward receiving the Major Repairs Allowance grant (£9.568 million per annum). Members were informed that officers are confident the grant will be attained as grant requirements are for the council to continue meeting the existing WHQS and have the Welsh Government deem this Business Plan as affordable.

In terms of the decarbonisation agenda, concerns were highlighted regarding the scale and subsequent costings of this work, and Members sought to understand why this financial modelling had not been undertaken, albeit on an indicative nature. Officers advised that the modelling referred to in the Cabinet report is in relation to the new WHQS which requires the upgrading of council properties from minimum EPC level rating of a 'B' to an 'A' from 2031 onwards. Members noted that officers were anticipating this to be a significant costing and work is ongoing with the Welsh Government regarding fiscal support. Further, it was confirmed the upgrading of council properties from an 'E' to a 'C' by 2029 and a 'C' to a 'B' from 2029 has been included in the plans financial modelling.

Members noted that the borrowing levels proposed in the plan are substantial, and that a significant element of that borrowing is attributed to the building of new council properties. Members sought clarity on how much income is anticipated as a return of this particular investment. Officers advised that substantial modelling work is undertaken of each development scheme via a viability assessment / toolkit and it is

forecast in thirty years' time, the Council will be in a position where the borrowing is paid back, with a surplus from the rent coming in.

Discussing the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) in the papers and noting that it relates to both the accessibility of the plan and its delivery, Members were concerned about the judgment used in the EIA given that the only disability where an impact has been identified was regarding visual impairment. Members urged that the judgement behind this assessment be reviewed in future years.

Members discussed the reasoning's and identified benefits behind the proposal to restructure the Housing Development and Neighbourhood Regeneration Team and create an Assistant Director (AD) Post. Members were informed a key reasoning for this proposal was to ensure effective delivery of the increased council house new build and regeneration programme, to support delivery of the integration agenda and that the creation of this post was deemed appropriate given the scale of work and responsibility. Members were concerned that considering the recent budget setting process, where the council addressed a shortfall of £24.216m, there was a 172.9 FTE reduction of staff posts and a decision to increase council tenants' rent, that the timing of this proposal, its justification, and the subsequent public perception was unfortunate. Officers explained that the creation of this post had been deemed cost neutral to the council and Members were informed additional external funding had become available, capital funding had increased, and lower-level posts would be removed.

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.

51 : ENERGY EFFICIENCY RETROFIT SCHEMES - LLANDAFF NORTH & RUMNEY

The Chairperson advised that this item provided Members with the opportunity to consider the proposed scheme as detailed in the papers.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Lynda Thorne, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities and Sarah McGill, Jane Thomas and Colin Blackmore from the Housing & Communities directorate.

The Chairperson invited Cllr Thorne to make an opening statement after which she invited questions and comments from Members.

Members welcomed this work and hoped the benefits this scheme identifies, are realised for all occupiers.

Members wished to highlight the need to ensure that residents, residing in the private properties, are provided with a fully certified PRC certificate to ensure no adverse effects when they come to re-mortgage / sell their property.

Members noted there was some uncertainty around costings as the procurement process has not yet begun. Members were advised that should costings come in

higher, Officers have confidence the Welsh Government will increase their grant funding to pay, in full, the work required for the private properties.

In relation to the life expectancy of the properties on completion of this work, Members were informed the wall insulation has a 25year guarantee and it was hoped the longevity and life expectancy would be strengthened for many years to come.

Members were pleased to note during the works there will be little impact for the occupiers as they will not be required to decant. Members wished to stress, quality assurance of the work and tenant satisfaction is at the forefront of the scheme, welcomed that the resident liaison officer will be in regular, direct contact with the occupiers.

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.

52 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received.

53 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Principal Scrutiny Officer provided a draft Scrutiny Annual Report. Members were asked to provide any amendments or additions, there were none.

The Principal Scrutiny Officer asked Members for expressions of interest to take part in the Regional Local Development Plan Task and Finish Group. Cllrs Boes, Ash-Edwards and M Lewis expressed their interest and other Members were asked to let Naomi Tomic know if they wished to take part.

54 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

24 April 2023 at 2.00pm.

The meeting terminated at 4.00 pm