

COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6 JANUARY 2016

Present: County Councillor McGarry(Chairperson)
County Councillors Carter, Chris Davis, Lomax and Sanders

52 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Ahmed. Councillor Davis advised that he would be late for the meeting due to work commitments.

53 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was received from Councillor Lomax.

Councillor Lomax declared a personal interest in Item 5 as he lives in Sheltered Accommodation.

54 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

55 : GYPSY & TRAVELLER HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND SITE SELECTION CRITERIA

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Susan Elsmore, Cabinet Member for Health, Housing and Wellbeing, Councillor Patel, Cabinet Member for Transport, Planning & Sustainability, Sarah McGill, Director Communities, Housing and Customer Services, Andrew Gregory Director City Operations, Jane Thomas, Assistant Director Communities and Housing, Stuart Williams Group Leader City Operations, Ian Ephraim Supported Accommodation & Outreach Manager and Kate Hustler Operational Manager, Assessment & Support to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Members to make statements if they wished. The Cabinet Member for Health, Housing and Wellbeing stated that every five years the local authority must carry out accommodation assessment of gypsy and traveller sites; this report on findings needs to be reported in February and a report on findings and recommendations needs to be reported to Cabinet in July.

The Cabinet Member for Transport Planning and Sustainability thanked Committee for inviting him, and stated that issues are clearly set out in the report and presentation and that he was happy to answer Members questions.

Members were provided with a presentation on Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment & Site Selection Criteria which included information on Background, Legislation, Methodology, Needs Assessment Findings, Site Selection Criteria – Availability, Suitability and Achievability, Overall Assessment and Next Steps.

The Chairperson thanked Officers for the presentation and invited questions and comments from Members:

- Members found the report and presentation very interesting and informative. Members asked when the criteria is applied when the process of consulting local residents and Members would begin. Officers advised that the criteria would establish what parts of the City cannot be considered; it was important to identify a number of candidate sites then apply the criteria; it was a sensitive issue, when candidate sites are identified then consultation would follow once it was clear sites were suitable. In response to what form the consultation would take, the Cabinet Member for Transport, Planning and Sustainability stated that it was too early to talk about consultation, after candidate sites are identified, then the Cabinet would be informed.
- Members asked whether the site assessment criteria applied equally to existing sites such as Rover Way. The Cabinet Member for Health, Housing and Wellbeing stated that the criteria did not apply to existing sites.
- With reference to the Local Government reorganisation, Members asked if Cardiff was working with other local authorities to provide sites, not just within the City boundary. The Cabinet Member stated that this is Cardiff's LDP so Cardiff has to find the sites; when the regional plan is developed then these conversations would need to be had. Officers added that Cardiff is required to provide a Transit site and will be taking a multi local authority approach to this, it would not necessarily be in Cardiff.
- Members were concerned that with the Vale of Glamorgan being reticent in developing a site then Gypsies and Travellers would come to Cardiff. Officers stated that they only allocate to people with a local connection to the area not from other local authorities.
- Members asked if Cardiff was required to have a transit site as well as identifying the need for transit accommodation. Officers advised that it was not, there needed to be a regional site but Cardiff had been identified as having a transit need. The Cabinet Member added that there was a legal duty to meet assessed need.
- Members sought clarification that Welsh Government requires a needs assessment response first then site identified specifics brought back in February and July. Officers advised this was correct and stated that a needs assessment is set in legislation, and it was a requirement of LDP's that they include sites to meet assessed need.
- Members asked that when they have identified the number of pitches needed, whether an extra percentage was built in for future population growth. Officers advised that Welsh Government guidance was to allow growth of 2.25% per year.
- With reference to the full community consultation mentioned in the presentation, Members sought clarification that this was consultation of the Gypsy and Traveller community at this stage and Officers advised that this was correct.

- Members asked if there was joint working in place with Health and Education on local infrastructure and were advised that there were steering groups that met to discuss this, which included representatives from Health and Education.
- Members noted that the reference in the report should be Land Contamination rather than Contaminated Land.
- With reference to the survey responses, Members asked if they knew that all 47 stating they wanted residential pitches were planning on staying in Cardiff; Officers advised that they were.
- Members asked why each individual form was looked at rather than the overall results. Officers advised that it is needs led rather than preference led, they need the information behind the answers such as the length of time on site, desire to move to a local authority site, why they are living in houses etc. and also to address cultural issues. Officers needed to look at each answer.
- Members sought clarification on the number of pitches and numbers of caravans with reference to overcrowding. Officers explained that some pitches can take more than one caravan.
- Members noted that the figure of 23 new households was quoted in the report and then in relation to residential demand the figure of 16 new households is quoted. Officers explained that this is taking into account the 2.25% growth per annum.
- Members were advised that the Seawall site had been taken out for now, not necessarily permanently but the site was being monitored; the erosion issue in Rover Way was being looked at also.
- Members asked whether teenagers in families were questioned about the five year plan in the survey, in order to identify emerging households. Officers advised that families were interviewed as a household.
- Members noted the survey response in relation to preference for living in Bricks and Mortar and asked whether this was based on a sample. Officers explained that it was based on the 172 respondents to the survey. The Cabinet Member added that the level of return was testament to the collaborative working with officers and residents.
- Members asked if Transit sites had a time limit applied to them so it doesn't become a permanent site and were advised that Welsh Government Guidance was that people could stay in transit sites for up to three months.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member, Officers and other witnesses for attending the meeting, giving their presentations and statements and for answering Members questions.

AGREED – That the Chairperson writes on the Committee's behalf to the Cabinet Member to convey their comments and observations

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Susan Elsmore, Cabinet Member for Health, Housing and Wellbeing, Sarah McGill, Director Communities, Housing and Customer Services, Jane Thomas, Assistant Director Communities and Housing, Colin Blackmore Estates Improvements Manager and Anil Hirani Operational Manager Capital and Treasury to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement in which she stated that she believes in Council Housing and that housing is at the heart of community wellbeing; she was committed to sustainable and affordable homes and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2016-17 would provide the detail of this.

Members were provided with a presentation on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2016-17 which included information on the Requirements of the Plan, Delivering on Key Objectives, Improving Existing Council Housing and Neighbourhoods, Estate Regeneration, Work on garages and gullies, Housing Development, Energy Efficiency Schemes, Upgrading internal communal areas to flats, Work on replacing roofing, boilers and lighting, Investing in new build housing, Improving housing services, Advice Hubs, Tenant Participation and Consultation, Defensible Space schemes and Finance.

The Cabinet Member stated that she attended the tenants participation conference at City Hall and that it was very well attended with over 100 tenants staying at the all day conference; she commended the work of Officers.

The Chairperson thanked Officers for the presentation and invited questions and comments from Members:

- Members commended the report and found it very helpful and easy to understand. With reference to the 30 year planning financial model, Members asked, apart from inflation, what other assumptions had been taken into account. Officers advised that they have a database of all council accommodation properties, detailing when any major works had been carried out and when they should need to be redone, this stated that this helped with financial planning. Members noted that this would ensure maintaining the Welsh Housing Quality Standard mark on existing properties.
- Members noted that the key issues were the numbers and whether they were sustainable in the long term with £30m out of £70m allocated to debt repayment; Members also asked how they compared to other local authorities. Officers advised that they have always invested in stock and had always been prudent in repayments; there was work being done on gearing stock to debt level and officers are mindful that debt is sustainable and affordable including what needs to be spent in the future; comparable data was not available but Officers were confident that they were prudent.
- Members noted that repair costs were to remain static for the next five years and asked if tenders could be refreshed in order to ensure best value. Officers advised that they have a framework whereby they are able to go out to mini-

tenders under certain financial thresholds, so in essence there is a continual refresh.

- Members discussed being able to install penalty clauses into contracts so deter delays. Officers advised that there are penalty clauses in the framework currently and if there are major problems there was a process to enable recharge and challenge but this was very complicated and would need to be looked at to ensure future contracts were simpler.
- Members noted that the Welsh Government is allowing a rent increase of 1.4% plus an optional increase of a further £2. Members also noted that Cardiff had chosen to implement both and were concerned at the total increase in rent; Members asked what would slip if the additional £2 increase was not added. The Cabinet Member stated that most people in Council housing would be covered by Housing Benefit; if tenants were subject to the Bedroom Tax then they would only have to pay 14% of the total rent increase of £3.40. Officers added that the increase allows them to move into areas of redevelopment such as Thornhill Road; it allowed the flexibility to build.
- Members asked what benefits would be seen by the Council buying out of the subsidy system. Officers advised that England had done this two years ago; the key benefit was that Cardiff would be £3.4m better off per annum, this would be invested in Council Housing stock. Wider benefits were keeping income generated from new build, wider tenant engagement and local authority responsibility for its own long term investments and strategies. It was noted that the Cardiff Business Plan was used as an exemplar to other local authorities.
- Members asked if interest rates were fixed and were advised that they were; they had had to take the rate prescribed by Welsh Government and Treasury; officers would ensure that it is prudently paid over as short a term as possible; there were some risks including Welsh Government funding for major repair allowance. The Cabinet Member added that all eleven local authorities that are Housing providers had to sign the same deal on the same day.
- Members asked how rent prices for new housing are worked out and if they are high enough to cover investments. Officers advised that there is a viability assessment of what build costs are, costs can be reduced by collaborative working and competition during the tender process. They added that building is a long term investment and that existing stock was built on borrowing; it may cost more in the short term but it is a long term strategy; the collective size of the HRA means that risks and costs are spread.
- Members sought clarification that 40% would be affordable housing as stated in the Cardiff Housing Partnership and that this was written into the contract with partners. Members were assured that it was.
- Members noted that Marland House still had the Advice Centre Sign displayed and that signs redirecting people to Central Library Hub needed to be more prominent.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member, Officers and other witnesses for attending the meeting, giving their presentations and statements and for answering Members questions.

AGREED – That the Chairperson writes on the Committee’s behalf to the Cabinet Member to convey their comments and observations

57 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS REPORT

At the Committee meeting on 16 September 2015 Members discussed how they wished to deal with future reports concerning committee business, such as correspondence reports and work programme reports. Members decided to combine these within an overarching Committee Business report.

This report provided the Committee with the latest update on correspondence. The Committee received copies of correspondence sent and received in relation to matters previously scrutinised by this Committee.

This report also provided the Committee with the report on the deep dive into the management of voids in council housing produced by the Performance Panel. Members approved the report for submission to the Cabinet Member.

58 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members were advised that there was an additional meeting scheduled for 20 January 2016 at 5.00pm in CR4 County Hall.

Members were also advised that the meeting in February was now scheduled for 15 February 2016 at 2.00pm in CR4 County Hall.