



HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY,
13TH OCTOBER 2020 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor A. Whitcombe - Chair
Councillor Mrs C. Forehead - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

J. Bevan, C. Elsbury, R. W. Gough, L. Harding, G. Kirby, B. Owen, W. Williams,
B. Zaplatynski

Cabinet Members:

S. Morgan (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Enterprise), Mrs L. Phipps
(Housing and Property)

Together with:

Mark S. Williams (Interim Corporate Director – Communities), S. Couzens (Chief Housing
Officer), R. Kyte (Head of Regeneration and Planning), A. Dallimore (Regeneration Services
Manager), P. Rossiter (Energy and Water Officer), S. Jones (Supporting People Manager),
M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer), R. Barrett
(Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D. Cushing, A. G. Higgs, Ms P.
Leonard, Mrs G. D. Oliver, Mrs D. Price, and Mrs M. E. Sargent.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations received at the commencement or during the course of the
meeting.

3. MINUTES – 17TH SEPTEMBER 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 17th September 2020 (minute nos. 1 - 9) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

5. HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

M. Jacques, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report which outlined details of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the period September 2020 to November 2020. Members were advised that the next Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee, to be held on the 24th November 2020, may be cancelled as there are currently no items listed on the Forward Work Programme for the meeting.

The Committee was informed of a joint meeting with the Environmental and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee, to be held in mid-December on a date to be confirmed, to discuss the findings of the Task and Finish Group on the management of highway owned Council car parks.

Members noted the update from the Scrutiny Officer and by way of Forms voting (and in noting there were 8 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) it was unanimously agreed that the Forward Work Programme, as appended to the meeting papers, be published on the Council's website.

6. CABINET REPORTS

None of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda had been called forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

7. REDUCE, PRODUCE, OFFSET, BUY (A DECARBONISATION STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN FOR CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL)

Councillor S. Morgan, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Enterprise, introduced the report to update the Scrutiny Committee on the work undertaken since 11th June 2019, when the Committee were presented with a report setting out the Council's intention to develop a carbon reduction plan that would concentrate on tackling the decarbonisation agenda in order that the Council can achieve its goal of becoming net carbon neutral by 2030.

Members were informed that since June 2019, Officers have produced a draft Decarbonisation Strategy as the main tool to achieve its decarbonisation objectives. This strategy is supported by a detailed Action Plan which gives more granular detail on what actions the Council can take in the short, medium and long term to achieve this goal. It also presents an Energy Prospectus which outlines potential commercial projects that will also help towards these goals.

Councillor S. Morgan drew Members attention to recommendation number five and advised that each project will come with its own Business case.

Reference was made to the Decarbonisation Strategy for the Council which focuses on reducing the Council's own carbon footprint. In response to a Members query, it was outlined that the predominant carbon tax within the authority was via the Carbon Reduction Commitment Scheme and was in the region of £240,000 per year. The last payment was for 2018/19 when the scheme ended. Members were advised that Welsh Government were yet to announce a replacement for the commitment scheme, but it is likely to be an additional tax on utility bills.

One Member requested an update on developing future wind and solar farms. The Regeneration Services Manager advised Members that the Council is working closely with the Welsh Government Energy Service on an assessment of Council-owned land in the local authority. Five sites had been identified as potential locations for solar farms but there are potential commercial challenges around connecting to the National Grid. During the course of the ensuing debate, Members made enquiries about the inclusion of solar panels on new homes and suggested that there is potential for their inclusion in future planning requirements.

A query was raised in relation to LED lighting and solar panels being put on Council buildings leased to the community, such as Community Centres. Officers advised that low operating hours in Community Centres meant that it was not economical in terms of the payback rates. However, those leasing buildings could approach their energy provider directly about LED lighting options. Members discussed the preference of purchasing energy from carbon neutral providers and the feasibility and cost of the Council meeting the target of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. Officers outlined that projects were currently at the feasibility stage so did not have definitive costings. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Enterprise advised that eventually each project would have a specific business case before going to the Regeneration Project Board. The Regeneration Services Manager advised that he would commence dialogue with Cllr B. Owen and Cllr A. Whitcombe on the allocation of capital to some of the projects as per point 11.2 under the Financial Implications section of the report.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By way of Forms voting (and in noting there were 8 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee:

- i) Provided its views on and support for the draft Decarbonisation Strategy and supporting documents prior to consideration by Cabinet.
- ii) Acknowledged the milestones for adoption of this document by the Council.
- iii) Acknowledged the wide and diverse range of activities that the Council will need to implement to achieve the Decarbonisation objectives.
- iv) Recognised that the actions, targets and contents contained within the supporting Action

Plan and Energy Prospectus are fluid and will respond to external pressures and opportunities as they occur. In particular, it will be necessary to react to changing legislation from Welsh Government and Central Government.

- v) Acknowledged that business cases associated with Energy Prospectus projects will be reviewed by the CCBC Regeneration Project Board with recommendations being made to Cabinet where required.

8. VALLEYS TASK FORCE – ACTIVITY IN CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH

The report provided Members of the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of activities being progressed within the County Borough as part of the Valleys Task Force Initiative. It informed Members that the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys (Valleys Taskforce) was set up by the Welsh Government in July 2016. The Taskforce is in place until 2021 so is now in its final delivery phase. In 2019 the Taskforce agreed to focus on seven priority areas, each driven by a subgroup of relevant experts that are responsible for taking forward the work. The report provided an overview of activity in the county borough against the seven priority areas.

A Member drew particular attention to the report which listed a range of VTF activities taking place throughout the county borough under the seven VTF priority areas. In response to a query, it was confirmed that St Martins Comprehensive School and Idris Davies School are the pilot of the alumni in the county borough.

Reference was made to the Corporate Well-being Objectives and Members requested detailed reports which reflect what has been achieved. Officers advised that there are regular six-month reports which are presented to Scrutiny Committee, however it was acknowledged that the 19/20 ones were delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Officers also advised that the Annual Performance report is due to be presented to Cabinet and Council in the coming weeks, where all the information will be presented.

Having fully considered the report, the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee noted the contents.

9. HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

Councillor L. Phipps, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property, presented the report to provide members with an update on the Homelessness situation within the Caerphilly County Borough together with information on the actions and challenges faced during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Members were informed that following the lockdown arrangements implemented as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, Welsh Government also issued new guidance in relation to how local authorities should manage homelessness and support rough sleepers. The Minister for Housing and Local Government issued a statement on the 28th April 2020, making it clear that no one should be without suitable accommodation and support during this pandemic, including rough sleepers. This has resulted in approximately 196 homeless households being placed in emergency or temporary accommodation, including some out of borough placements. The majority of these placements, approximately 149, have been for single persons.

The actions taken to mitigate the increase in homelessness were highlighted, which includes use of the private rented sector, Housing Association premises, B&Bs and hotels and a review of the allocations policy to ensure support is provided through social housing.

The report also included some of the challenges faced during the pandemic as many of the individuals concerned are vulnerable and have complex needs, e.g. substance misuse, alcohol dependency, poor mental health, which is in addition to the limited availability of suitable accommodation within the borough to meet demand.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Property thanked the team for their fantastic efforts during the pandemic to help the homeless. Members were reminded that there is a statutory duty to provide advice, assistance and where necessary accommodation to those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The support of all Members and communities was acknowledged at this very difficult time. The Chairperson also thanked the Officers for their work.

A Member raised concerns regarding the re-designation of a number of one-bedroom properties from older persons to general needs. Officers advised that there is a surplus of older persons accommodation within the borough and there is also a number of vacancies within the sheltered housing schemes. However, there is a shortfall on single person accommodation at present and it was highlighted that the majority of placements have been for single persons. Officers further advised that they are looking to increase the single person accommodation and re-designating some of the older person housing will help in that regard. Members sought clarification on Table 1 in the report and were advised that that it provides a snapshot of the position at a particular point in time.

In relation to the empty homes situation Members were advised that there has been a lot of focus on empty properties recently, both locally and within Welsh Government. Members were advised that Cabinet recently approved some additional funding to set up an Empty Homes Team within the Private Sector Housing Division, which is in the process of being recruited. In addition, Members were also advised of the participation in the Valleys Task Force initiative to bring empty homes back into use.

Clarification was sought on Table 3 in the report which shows the number of households that have been provided with emergency temporary accommodation by each of the regional authorities and were informed that the format of the report is in line with Welsh Government and used as comparison data with other authorities.

In response to a query on what happens if a homeless person will not be moved into temporary accommodation, Officers advised that engagement is key issue, different models of support is offered, but ultimately it is down to the individual.

Having fully considered the report, the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee noted the contents and endorsed the actions taken.

The meeting closed at 6.33 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 26th January 2021, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR