



HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY,
26TH JANUARY 2021 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

R. W. Gough, G. Kirby, Ms P. Leonard, Mrs M. E. Sargent, W. Williams and B. Zaplatynski.

Cabinet Members:

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

Together with:

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer), R. Kyte (Head of Regeneration and Planning), L. Allen (Principal Group Accountant – Housing), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer).

RECORDING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chairperson reminded those present that the meeting was being recorded and would be made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items. [Click here to view.](#)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bevan, D. Cushing, C. Elsbury, L. Harding, A. G. Higgs, Mrs G. D. Oliver, B. Owen and Mrs D. Price.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 13TH OCTOBER 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 13th October 2020 (minute numbers 1 - 9) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. MINUTES – 9TH DECEMBER 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the special meeting of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 9th December 2020 (minute numbers 1 - 4) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

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

6. HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Cath Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager) presented the report which outlined details of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the period January 2021 to April 2021 and included all reports that were identified at the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 13th October 2020. Members were asked to consider the Forward Work Programme, alongside the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, prior to publication on the Council's website. The Scrutiny Manager outlined additional reports to be added to the Forward Work Programme.

Following consideration of the report, and subject to the additional reports proposed, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of electronic voting this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme be published on the Councils' website.

7. 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.

8. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2020/21

Cllr. S. Morgan (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Enterprise) presented the report to inform Members of the most recent budget monitoring position for 2020/2021 for the Communities Directorate Service Division. The Housing and

Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Members were requested to note the contents of the report and the detailed budget monitoring pages in respect of the Regeneration & Planning Division.

In response to a Member's query the Scrutiny Committee was advised that the delayed filling of vacant posts was due to issues regarding recruitment and that a number of the vacant posts have now been filled.

The Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report and the detailed budget monitoring pages in respect of the Regeneration and Planning Division.

8. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET MONITORING – PERIOD 7 2020/21

Cllr. L. Phipps (Housing and Property) presented the report to inform Members of the projected revenue expenditure for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2020/21 financial year. It was noted that the HRA capital programme which is predominantly funded by the HRA was also included within the report. The report outlined the projected outturn for the HRA based upon the expenditure and income for the first seven months of the year. It was highlighted that the HRA is currently projecting a £827k net under-spend, which represents approximately 1.6% of the total HRA budget.

In response to a Member's query, the Scrutiny Committee was advised that the Welsh Government have extended the deadline for the completion of the WHQS programme to December 2021. Members were further advised, indications are that the external works should be completed by the end of March 2021 and the internal works should be completed by August 2021.

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

9. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT CHARGES – 2021/22

Cllr. L. Phipps (Housing and Property) presented the report for Members to consider and take a view on the increased Council Housing rent charges proposed in the report, prior to consideration by Cabinet on the 10th February 2021. It was highlighted that the charges predominantly focus on council house rents, but also include garages, and are intended to be effective for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2021/2022 financial year.

Members were advised that the officer preferred recommendation of 1.5% will be the lowest rent increase set by the authority for a number of years. It was recognised that an increase could cause concern to tenants and assurances were given that the Tenancy Support Team will be available to work with tenants should they require any advice or support.

During the course of the debate Members raised concerns regarding the increased council housing rent charges proposed in the report, in particular for those tenants who have been affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. A Member enquired as to whether there were any other funds available in other budget areas or reserves in order to consider no increase in council housing rent charges. An Officer advised that the HRA is ringfenced so typically no additional funding can be sought to support the HRA except for further borrowing. The main source of income that supports service delivery within the HRA comes from rental income.

The Scrutiny Committee was advised that 72% of tenants are already supported with their rent through housing benefit or universal credit. An Officer drew particular attention to the

report in relation to a tenants affordability survey which indicated 56% of tenants think the rent is fair and affordable and 60% of tenants are very or fairly satisfied that their rent provides value for money. Furthermore, the results of a survey to tenants on their satisfaction of the housing service confirmed 87% were very or fairly satisfied with the service provided by Caerphilly Homes, and 87% were also very or fairly satisfied that their rent provides value for money.

Having considered the recommendations, it was moved and seconded that the following recommendation be approved. By way of electronic voting this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:

- (i) the level of increase per property from April 2021 is 1.5% (CPI plus 1%) – (£92.02/52 week – additional £1.36/wk) the maximum allowed under the rent policy which will set our rent just within the low end of the previous year's policy target rent band but, will reduce our income by £0.5m to that assumed within our business plan, compounded year on year.

The meeting closed at 6.05 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 9th March 2021, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR