



HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY,
19TH OCTOBER 2021 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Ridgewell - Chair
Councillor M. Adams - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

C. Elsbury, L. Harding, G. Kirby, Ms P. Leonard, B. Owen, Mrs M. E. Sargent, W. Williams and B. Zaplatynski.

Cabinet Members:

Councillor L. Phipps (Housing) and Councillor E. Stenner (Performance, Economy and Enterprise).

Together with:

M. S. Williams (Corporate Director for Economy and Environment), A. Dallimore (Regeneration Services Manager), L. Allen (Principal Group Accountant - Housing), F. Wilkins (Housing Services Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer) and J. Lloyd (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, R. W. Gough, A. G. Higgs, Mrs G. D. Oliver and Mrs D. Price.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 7TH SEPTEMBER 2021

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 7th September 2021 be approved as a correct record. By way of Microsoft Forms voting this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 7th September 2021 (minute nos. 1 - 8) 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

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report which outlined details of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the period October 2021 to March 2022 and included all reports that were identified at the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 7th September 2021. Members were asked to consider the Forward Work Programme, alongside the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, prior to publication on the Council's website.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms voting this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme 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. TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUPS

The Cabinet Member for Performance, Economy and Enterprise introduced the report to seek the views of the Scrutiny Committee on a proposed revision to the format of Town Centre Management Groups (TCMGs), prior to consideration by Cabinet. The revised

format is being proposed to encourage business and other stakeholder attendance and involvement in the future development of towns. Members were informed that the number of active Chambers of Trade/retail groups has reduced since 2012 and it has been acknowledged that there has not been an appropriate level of business representation and engagement via the TCMGs. It was highlighted that in order to address this, having regard for the available resources and the need to support post Covid recovery, it was proposed to change the format and operation of the meetings to encourage increased business and other stakeholder attendance and engagement at the meetings. Following successful business networking events held by the Business Enterprise and Renewal Team in 2018 and 2019, it was suggested that the meetings become breakfast/evening events that focus on information sharing and networking opportunities. Members were advised that by holding the events outside of the working day, business owners/representatives are more likely to be able to attend without impacting upon the operation of their business. It was also proposed that the meetings be held at a venue within each individual town centre to make attendance more convenient.

The Regeneration Services Manager provided an overview of the proposed revised format of Town Centre Management Groups (TCMGs) which included the potential content of the meetings. It was highlighted that the proposal is to trial the revised format of TCMGs for a twelve-month period commencing in the new year.

Members sought clarification and further information on a number of issues and the Regeneration Services Manager responded to the points raised. It was confirmed that initially the meetings would be held virtually, whilst Covid-19 restrictions are in place. However, it was highlighted that physical meetings are the preferred option in order to focus on information sharing and networking opportunities. There was general agreement that the process should not be delayed, because of the benefits it could bring to the business community.

A Member raised a number of queries regarding the membership of Town Centre Management Groups. The Regeneration Services Manager explained the reasoning for the agreed list of attendees and assured Members that it would be monitored during the proposed 12-month pilot scheme. In terms of regeneration and the opportunity to attract big businesses, some of the work already being done to attract inward investment through various Regeneration Projects was outlined.

During the course of debate a discussion took place regarding the format and structure of the breakfast/evening events and the Regeneration Services Manager responded to the points raised. The Scrutiny Committee was informed that the programming of events has yet to be arranged and that the views of the business community would be considered by Officers. Members were further informed that there would be consistency for certain issues such as IT training but largely each agenda would be set on pertinent local issues.

A Member asked about the promotion of future Town Centre Management Group events and was advised that mechanisms are in place to highlight the networking and learning opportunities of future events. The Member's suggestion that Councillors promote Town Centre Management Group events on their social media platforms was welcomed by the Regeneration Services Manager. The Chair raised the possibility of having a Joint Management Group meeting for all five town centres at some point in the future and was advised that this had been considered for training sessions but no decision has been reached at this stage.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms voting this was unanimously agreed.

The Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee considered the proposal to trial an alternative model and RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

- (i) A 12-month trial period with the revised format of the Town Centre Management Groups.
- (ii) That a further report, outlining the results of the trial period, be considered after the trial period ends allowing a decision to be taken at that stage on the preferred model of delivery.

8. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET MONITORING – PERIOD 5

The Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the report to inform Members of the projected position for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2021/22 financial year, based on the income and expenditure movements of the first 5 months of the year. Members were informed that the HRA capital programme, which is predominantly funded by the HRA, was also included within the report. It was highlighted that the HRA has a projected underspend of £1.8m for the end of 2021/22 financial year, which represents about 3.6% of the total HRA budget, which is based on the income and expenditure patterns for the first 5 months of the year together with knowledge of the service from the respective managers. It was noted that full financial details are provided in Appendix 1 of the report. The Principal Group Accountant for Housing provided the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the report and highlighted the main areas of the projected underspend. The need to commit £1.05m of this underspend towards two areas as one-off expenditure items was also detailed to Members.

A query was raised regarding the underspend associated with office related costs such as stationery, photocopying and postage, mainly as a result of offices not being occupied because of Covid-19 restrictions. The Principal Group Accountant for Housing advised the Scrutiny Committee that these savings are likely to increase throughout the year until a decision is made on returning to the office in the future. Budgets can then be aligned more appropriately.

In response to a Member's query it was explained that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is ringfenced so the corporate funding cannot be used for any of the services within the HRA. The Principal Group Accountant for Housing provided a brief update on the WHQS programme and the Scrutiny Committee was advised that the internal WHQS programme for the in-house team has been completed with a small number outstanding with one contractor and it is intended that external work will be completed by December 2021.

The Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report.

9. GEORGE STREET REAR WALLS, CWMCARN

The Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the report to seek approval to deploy Private Sector Housing Capital monies to assist private sector homeowners at George Street, Cwmcarn to fully participate in a priority retaining wall and steps replacement programme planned for Council owned properties during 2021/22 and 2022/23. It was highlighted that the scheme will not be able to proceed without inclusion of the privately owned properties.

The Scrutiny Committee was advised that the rear retaining walls and party steps to the 30 Council and 16 privately owned properties at 1 to 46 George Street are in an advanced state of disrepair and are required to be renewed as soon as possible in order to ensure the safety of residents and the wider community, and the integrity of the housing stock. A comprehensive reconstruction scheme has been developed and funding has been identified for the works required to the Council owned homes, however these walls and steps cannot be renewed in isolation from the walls and steps of the adjoining private sector properties. Members were informed that the total cost of the scheme is approximately £1m, of which the HRA will be responsible for £660k, in relation to the proportion of council tenanted properties. The remainder of the scheme relates to the proportion of private owners and will be approximately £352k. Approval was sought to deploy approximately £352,000 of available Private Sector Housing Capital monies for the cost of reconstruction works to the private sector properties by way of a Group Repair Scheme.

The Housing Services Manager further outlined the main priorities and reasons for the report. The Chairperson drew particular attention to Appendix 1 of the report and Members were provided with a detailed overview of the photographs of George Street. A query was raised in relation to a photograph showing an example of a rear retaining wall and the Scrutiny Committee was informed that the repair work has been carried out by Caerphilly County Borough Council to get the properties in a condition to be able to do the drainage and investigation work in order to establish the extent of what is required.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms voting this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

In addition to the Housing Revenue Account funding the works required to the Council properties:

- (i) Financial support be offered to homeowners at 1 to 46, George Street for the renewal of the rear retaining walls and steps and associated works in the form of a 100% grant.
- (ii) Funding for the inclusion of private sector properties in the scheme should be made available from existing Private Sector Housing Capital balances.

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 30th November 2021, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR