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For all enquiries relating to this agenda please contact Rebecca Barrett
(Tel: 01443 864245 Email: barrerm@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Date: 22nd May 2018

Dear Sir/Madam,

A meeting of the **Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee** will be held in the **Sirhowy Room, Penallta House, Tredomen, Ystrad Mynach** on **Tuesday, 29th May, 2018** at **5.30 pm** to consider the matters contained in the following agenda. Councillors and the public wishing to speak on any item can do so by making a request to the Chair. You are also welcome to use Welsh at the meeting, both these requests require a minimum notice period of 3 working days, and a simultaneous translation will be provided if requested.

All Committee meetings are open to the Press and Public, observers and participants are asked to conduct themselves with respect and consideration for others. Please note that failure to do so will result in you being asked to leave the meetings and you may be escorted from the premises.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chrissy'.

Christina Harrhy
INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

A G E N D A

	Pages	
1	To receive apologies for absence.	
2	Declarations of Interest.	

Councillors and Officers are reminded of their responsibility to declare any personal and/or prejudicial interest(s) in respect of any business on this agenda in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution and the Code of Conduct for both Councillors and Officers.

A greener place Man gwyrddach

Correspondence may be in any language or format | Gallwch ohebu mewn unrhyw iaith neu fformat



To approve and sign the following minutes: -

- | | | |
|---|---|---------|
| 3 | Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 10th April 2018. | 1 - 10 |
| 4 | Consideration of any matter referred to this Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure. | |
| 5 | To receive a verbal report by the Cabinet Member(s). | |
| 6 | Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme. | 11 - 26 |
| 7 | To receive and consider the following Cabinet Reports*: -
1. Corporate Plan Including Well-Being Objectives 2018 – 2023 - 11th April 2018;
2. Property Review Report 2018 - 16th May 2018;
3. Programme for Procurement (Strategy) 2018 – 2023 - 16th May 2018;
4. School's Workforce Flexibilities Policies - 16th May 2018. | |

**If a member of the Scrutiny Committee wishes for any of the above Cabinet reports to be brought forward for review at the meeting please contact Rebecca Barrett, 01443 864245, by 10.00 a.m. on Friday, 25th May 2018.*

To receive and consider the following Scrutiny reports:-

- | | | |
|---|--|---------|
| 8 | Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2018. | 27 - 36 |
| 9 | Flat Accommodation at River Road, Pontlottyn and The Grove, Fochriw. | 37 - 44 |

Circulation:

Councillors M.A. Adams, Mrs E.M. Aldworth, K. Dawson, K. Etheridge, Mrs C. Forehead, Miss E. Forehead, L. Harding, G. Kirby (Vice Chair), C.P. Mann, Mrs D. Price, J. Pritchard (Chair), J. Ridgewell, R. Saralis, Mrs M.E. Sargent, J. Taylor and L.G. Whittle

And Appropriate Officers



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
TUESDAY, 10TH APRIL 2018 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Pritchard - Chair

Councillors:

M. Adams, Mrs E.M. Aldworth, K. Etheridge, Mrs C. Forehead, Miss E. Forehead, L. Harding, G. Kirby, C.P. Mann, J. Ridgewell, R. Saralis, Mrs M.E. Sargent, J. Taylor, L.G. Whittle

Cabinet Members:

C. Gordon (Corporate Services), Mrs B. Jones (Finance, Performance and Governance) and Mrs L. Phipps (Homes and Places).

Together with:

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), F. Wilkins (Public Sector Housing Manager), M. Williams (Interim Head of Property Services), T. Stephens (Interim Head of Planning), G. Williams (Acting IT Operations Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services), C. Evans (Interim Scrutiny Officer), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

Also present:

Councillor L. Binding (Aber Valley Ward), E. Hunt (BT Openreach), M. Groves (Welsh Government)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K. Dawson and Mrs D. Price (Vice-Chair).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 27TH FEBRUARY 2018

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 27th February 2018 (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. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBERS

The Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the reports from Councillors Mrs L. Phipps and C. Gordon, which provided an update on their respective portfolios, and had been circulated to Members in advance of the meeting. Councillor Mrs B. Jones also delivered a verbal update on her portfolio.

The report from Councillor L. Phipps (Cabinet Member for Homes and Places) outlined the latest developments across the Property Services portfolio, including the demolition of the Pontllanfraith Civic Centre, a new classroom block at Newbridge school (which will help to accommodate the additional intake arising from the closure of Cwmcarn High School) and the marketing of the Ty Dyffyn site. Across Caerphilly Homes, Members noted progress made in respect of the WHQS programme, together with the conclusion of the Rowan Place regeneration programme.

A Member queried the potential use of the Ty Dyffryn site, and the Cabinet Member confirmed she would raise this with Officers and ask them to respond to the Member in due course. The Scrutiny Committee were pleased to note the Council's progress and positive position in respect of the December 2020 deadline, and discussed how the Council will fare regarding properties where they are unable to gain access to carry out the improvement works. The Cabinet Member confirmed these will be marked as an "acceptable fail" and that the Council will strive to complete the works when such properties become vacant. Members also placed on record their thanks to all Officers involved in the Rowan Place regeneration programme.

Councillor Mrs B Jones (Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Governance) referred to the Corporate Finance service area and explained that potential savings are already being examined for consideration as part of next year's budget proposals. Members were advised that this will be a challenging year for the Authority, with savings required in excess of £10m, and means that a number of difficult decisions will need to be made in order to achieve this level of savings.

The report from Councillor C. Gordon (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services) updated Members on activities across IT and Central Services, including the preparation for the new General Data Protection Regulations that come into operation on 25th May 2018. The Council are required to establish a new statutory officer role of Data Protection Officer, and Cabinet recently approved the recommendation to allocate the role to Joanne Jones (Corporate Information Governance Manager). Members were also advised of the new Income Management System Replacement which went live on 3rd April 2018.

The Cabinet Members were thanked for their reports.

6. POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Charlotte Evans (Interim Scrutiny Officer) presented the report, which outlined details of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the period April 2018 to July 2018. Members were asked to consider the FWP alongside the Cabinet Work Programme as appended to the report and to suggest any changes.

Members were advised of two forthcoming reports (Flat Accommodation at River Road,

Pontllytyn and The Grove, Fochriw, and New Home Loans Scheme) and were asked to consider whether they wished these to be scheduled as information items, or reschedule other items on the Forward Work Programme in order to accommodate these reports.

Discussion took place on whether there was a need for the report in respect of Flat Accommodation at River Road, Pontllytyn and The Grove, Fochriw to be presented to the Committee for consideration. Officers outlined the content and purpose of the report, in that it will be seeking Cabinet approval of the demolition of flats at both premises. Members were reminded that there are other avenues available to them if they wish to highlight any issues regarding the report (such as the Cabinet call-in process and the opportunity to speak on the matter at the Cabinet meeting). The Scrutiny Committee subsequently agreed that the report be scheduled as an information item for 29th May 2018. It was also agreed that the New Home Loans Scheme report be scheduled as an information item for 10th July 2018.

Members were advised that there would be several external representatives at the next meeting on 29th May 2018 to speak on the items listed in the FWP for that meeting, and were also reminded of the forthcoming workshop (provisionally scheduled for the beginning of June) to consider and agree the Committee's forward work programme for the year ahead.

It was unanimously agreed that subject to the foregoing changes, the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme be published on the Council's 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. BRITISH TELECOM - BROADBAND COVERAGE AND THE DIGITAL PROFILE

The Chair welcomed Ed Hunt from BT Openreach and Michael Groves from Welsh Government, who were in attendance to speak on the report. Councillor Lyndon Binding was also present to speak on the item, having made the original request for the agenda item.

Mr Hunt and Mr Groves provided an update on broadband coverage across the county borough, the progress made by the Superfast Cymru project, and the developments ahead. Superfast Cymru was developed as a partnership between BT and Welsh Government (WG) to provide access to high speed broadband to the majority of homes and businesses in Wales who cannot get it through the private sector's own commercial rollout programmes. Members were advised that across Caerphilly county borough, 97.8% of properties now have access to high speed broadband, which has significantly increased from 46% in 2013.

Welsh Government are now working on the next stage of the rollout of fast reliable broadband to extend coverage even further. Openreach are tackling the remaining areas by encouraging take-up of Community Fibre Partnerships, which is a scheme carried out via a joint funding arrangement with local groups to bring fibre broadband to an area. Within Caerphilly, Welsh Government are liaising with the Council's Regeneration and Planning Officers to discuss the infrastructure available in the county borough in order to maximise the scheme for local residents.

In addition, the Welsh Government have developed their Superfast Business Wales scheme, which is a fully funded support service (via WG and ERDF funding) that helps businesses to understand, adopt and exploit superfast broadband enabled technologies in order to benefit their business. Mr Groves provided an overview of the scheme and the processes involved in reaching out to businesses so that they can take full advantage of the opportunities available to them, including a free programme of support, a tailored one-to-one advice session with a Digital Business Advisor, a free website review, and details of local events and workshops of relevance or interest to the business.

Councillor Binding was invited to speak on the presentation and outlined his concerns over the length of time taken to attain the current level of high speed broadband coverage within the county borough. He queried the reliability of copper wiring for superfast broadband lines and in referring to the current G.fast' technology pilot being undertaken by Openreach across a number of UK locations, queried the selection of the two Welsh locations (Cardiff and Swansea) and the plans for the way forward in respect of this new technology.

Mr Hunt outlined the cost and speed advantages of copper wiring and how it integrates with the new G.fast technology. Welsh Government are aiming to roll this new technology by 2020 but are faced with a number of challenges, including the need for policy guidance in regards to mobile networks and assistance from the regulator in this regard, together with a need for price cuts and investment in the new technology and the development of specific grants for community schemes.

Councillor Binding queried the mechanisms available to individuals who do not have broadband coverage in their area. Mr Groves provided details of the Access Broadband Cymru (ABC) scheme, which provides grants to fund/part-fund the installation costs of new broadband connections for homes and businesses in Wales. New connections through this scheme must deliver a step change in speed, and the amount of funding available depends on the speed of the new connection. It was explained that WG are aspiring to provide coverage to 100% of properties across Wales, and that a new project currently out to tender will see a significant amount of investment in order to facilitate this coverage. Members were asked to note that Caerphilly is in a better position compared to other areas of Wales where the percentage of those without broadband coverage remains significantly higher.

Mr Hunt and Mr Groves welcomed questions from the Scrutiny Committee and discussion took place on a number of topics. A Member expressed a need for the Council to be able to convey the message to residents and local businesses regarding the broadband options available to them. Mr Groves outlined how the WG shares such information with all local authorities in Wales and works closely with relevant Members in order to relay the channels and platforms available. This includes a Working Business Forum between the 22 local authorities and partnership stakeholders.

The representatives also provided clarification on the "drop-off" rate for broadband between green BT cabinets and individual properties, and explained that this is dependent on a number of factors, including the distance between properties, cabinets and the BT exchange. It is anticipated that some new cabinets will be installed once the new WG project comes to fruition. Discussion took place over whether these green cabinets create an obstacle to pedestrians and it explained that these are located so as not to cause an obstruction for the public.

Members welcomed the news of the processes being undertaken to improve broadband availability and expressed the need for residents to be able to access it both in the workplace and at home, particularly if there are occasions where they work from home. It was suggested that it would be useful for the Scrutiny Committee to have a map showing the level of broadband coverage for each ward within the county borough. It was confirmed that WG are in the process of collating this data and would arrange to share it with Members.

Having noted the contents of the presentation, the Scrutiny Committee thanked Mr Hunt, Mr Groves and Councillor Binding for their attendance and informative contributions. Members welcomed the opportunity for a further progress report and it was confirmed that this would be discussed at the forthcoming FWP workshop.

9. REVIEW OF THE RECHARGEABLE REPAIRS AND APPEALS PANEL

Shaun Couzens (Chief Housing Officer) and Fiona Wilkins (Public Sector Housing Manager) presented the report, which had also been considered by the Caerphilly Homes Task Group on 29th March 2018. The report sought the views of the Scrutiny Committee on the review of the operation of the Rechargeable Repairs and Appeals Panel, and the need to consider revising the way in which second stage reviews are considered, prior to these proposals being presented to Cabinet.

Members were advised that the Rechargeable Repairs Policy (approved by Cabinet on 18th March 2015) allows tenants to request an independent review of their recharge if they have good reason to disagree with a previous decision made by officers/managers. The review process comprises of three stages; an informal review by officers, a first stage formal review by a manager, and a second stage formal review by the Rechargeable Repairs and Appeals Panel, who make a recommendation to the Chief Housing Officer (who has the final decision) on whether the recharge should be upheld. The second stage review replaced the second stage of the Corporate Complaints Procedure with regards to recharges only. The Panel was suggested by the Repairs and Improvements Group in August 2014 and was considered an opportunity to involve tenants and Members in reviews.

The report provided information on the second stage reviews considered by the Panel to date and the outcomes of these reviews. Due to the extensive additional resources required in facilitating the panel, cost implications, consequential delays in decision making and the limited number of cases being brought forward, the report proposed that the use of a panel for second stage reviews be replaced with a procedure to mirror the second stage of the Corporate Complaints Procedure, with the final decision being made by the Chief Housing Officer or Public Sector Housing Manager. It also proposed alternative arrangements to ensure that the quality and consistency of decision making in relation to reviews is maintained (including regular meetings by an Officer panel) and to keep tenants informed about decision making in respect of rechargeable repairs.

It was noted that at its meeting on 29th March 2018, the Caerphilly Homes Task Group expressed concerns regarding the costs associated with the Panel meetings given the low cost of the recharges being reviewed. They also suggested that the Panel lacks sufficient tenant representation and that its discontinuation could lessen their role further in terms of tenant voice across the review process. Members further suggested that consideration could be given to call recording to minimise future cases of recharge reviews. The Group subsequently supported the report recommendations by a majority vote, with it noted that there were 5 in favour of the proposals and 4 abstentions.

During the course of the ensuing discussion by the Scrutiny Committee, a Member suggested that an independent arbitrator be included in the replacement second stage of the process, and Officers outlined the practicalities to consider in this respect, given the low level/value of the recharges being reviewed. It was reiterated that the proposed replacement second stage process would mirror the Corporate Complaints process, and that it was also intended for an annual report to be provided to the Repairs and Improvement Group detailing the outcome of any recharge reviews. Members were reminded of the considerable costs in convening each meeting, and that given in the last 18 months there had been only 9 review cases, there was a need to consider on balance whether this was a good use of resources and Member/Officer time.

In response to Members' queries, Officers outlined the invoicing costs associated with recharges and also provided further detail on the list of exceptional circumstances appended to the report which gives discretion to waive recharges in certain cases. Discussion took place regarding recharges arising from wear and tear and the importance of using good quality fittings, which had been discussed at the Task Group meeting. Officers gave assurances that all materials used in Council properties are of a good quality specification and key components have an appropriate level of guarantee/warranty. Reference was made to issues around tenant communication in respect of recharges and Officers outlined procedures that have been put in place to improve these areas (such as proof of visits in cases of failed access and changes to the information included in tenant letters).

Discussion took place regarding insurance policies and Officers outlined the levels of cover that are offered through the Council, which will cover certain repairs and accidental damage. It was confirmed that all tenants are due to receive a letter detailing the various premiums and cover available and it was agreed for this information to also be sent to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee. In response to a Member's query, it was agreed that detail on the number and type of recharge reviews could be incorporated into the annual report that is prepared in respect of complaints and representations across Caerphilly Homes.

Following consideration of the report and in taking into account the views of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group, it was moved and seconded that the following recommendations be referred to Cabinet for approval. By a show of hands (and in noting there was 1 against), this was agreed by the majority present.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:-

- (i) the Rechargeable Repairs and Appeals Panel be discontinued;
- (ii) all second stage reviews of rechargeable repairs be investigated using a process that mirrors the second stage of the Corporate Complaints Procedure;
- (iii) monitoring of consistency of implementation of the Rechargeable Repairs Procedure in relation to requests for review and the application of discretion be undertaken by a Housing Manager Panel on a quarterly basis;
- (iv) an annual report be provided to the Repairs and Improvement Group on the number, nature and outcome of second stage reviews of rechargeable repairs considered under the revised procedure, together with decisions taken in respect of informal and stage 1 formal reviews.

10. AFFORDABLE HOMES IN NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Tim Stephens (Interim Head of Planning) presented the report, which provided an update on the delivery of Affordable Housing through the planning process and other mechanisms.

Members were reminded of the statutory requirement for the Council to submit an Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) to the Welsh Government, which monitors whether the Caerphilly County Borough Local Development Plan up to 2021 is being implemented successfully. The delivery of affordable housing through the planning system forms part of the monitoring process, and the AMR includes figures on the number of affordable units that have been delivered each year, together with the cumulative number of units that have been delivered specifically through the planning system and through all delivery mechanisms.

The Scrutiny Committee have requested that six-monthly updates be presented to consider

the overall delivery of affordable housing and site specific delivery against the area-specific targets set out within the LDP. The report outlined the number of affordable houses built through the planning system during the LDP plan period, together with the amount of affordable housing secured in each year as part of Section 106 agreements, and also contained information on the number of affordable units delivered through other mechanisms.

It was noted that within the LDP, and where there is evidence of need, the Council will seek to negotiate affordable housing targets with developers: 40% of the total dwellings for sites proposed within the Caerphilly Basis (excluding Aber Valley), 25% in the Northern Connections corridor (excluding Newbridge) and 10% in the rest of the county borough (including Aber Valley and Newbridge but excluding the Head of the Valley Regeneration Area). As of the 2017 AMR, 251 affordable units have been built since the start of the plan period, which is less than a third of the overall target of 964 homes, and overall, 498 units have been negotiated as part of Section 106 agreements since the adoption of the LDP in 2010. There are multiple reasons why affordable housing delivery has been lower than expected, but critically the number of Section 106 delivered units is dependent on how many market sector units are delivered. There was a general decline in house building as a result of the economic crash and recession in 2008, as well as a decrease in house prices, which have only returned to 2008 levels in the last year.

It has been established that the Supplementary Planning Guidance on Affordable Housing Obligations (LDP1) indicates that the affordable housing proportions are a target, rather than a mandatory requirement, and where it can be demonstrated that it would be not viable to deliver affordable housing at the levels set out within the LDP, then lower levels may be accepted. A number of planning applications have been submitted for Caerphilly where developers have been able to clearly demonstrate through the submission of a viability assessment that there are viability issues on a site specific basis, and has resulted in instances where there has been a reduction of in the percentage of affordable housing required. All viability assessments are robustly considered by appropriate Officers or independent experts (such as the District Valuer Service), and as part of this, consideration is given to any exceptional abnormal costs linked to ground conditions or other site constraints.

Members were asked to note that affordable housing delivered through the planning system represents only a small proportion of the total delivered overall, as most affordable housing in the county borough is developed by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) through their own build programmes funded by the Social Housing Grant (SHG) Programme. In the plan period up to 2016, 918 new units had been delivered, which widens when the criteria for the Welsh Government Affordable Housing Return is taken into account, and increases this total to 1518 units (including new development, purchase lease or conversion) since 2007. However, this is less than half of the overall target of 3664 units to be delivered through all mechanisms as set out in the supporting text of Policy SP15 (which supports sustainable development).

During the course of the ensuing debate, Members expressed concerns regarding the lack of new affordable housing, and queried whether firmer scrutiny should be placed upon developers in order to ensure that the targets are met. Officers explained that they examine all the factors associated with each development on a case by case basis, and gave examples where applications had been referred to the District Valuer, who supported the rationale of the developer. It was emphasised to Members that the Council will negotiate wherever possible with developers in order to achieve the target proportion of affordable housing, but where there have been genuine reasons, then the Council have settled below this target. Members suggested that developers should abide by the targets set before them and that this should be reinforced when planning permission is being considered for such applications. Officers reiterated that they have to consider the viability of each proposed development whilst taking into account local and national policy.

A Member sought further information in respect of the process surrounding a viability

assessment and how this can impact on the percentage of affordable housing offered by the developer, the LDP evidence base for affordable housing targets, the number of cases gone to the district valuer, the Authority's current position given the lack of a Replacement LDP, and also expressed the need for consistency given the differing affordable housing levels across the county borough. Officers explained that Welsh Government and Council policy allows developers to put forward a case about viability to support the level of affordable homes that they are proposing to provide as part of their housing development. Members were reminded of the Council's LDP to 2021 and that although the lack of a five-year housing land supply has made the Council vulnerable when objecting to housing developments on unallocated land, such developments still have to comply with the remainder of the policies in the plan. However the weight given to each policy and other material planning considerations will vary from site to site. Officers confirmed that they would arrange to circulate detailed responses on these questions to the Scrutiny Committee following the meeting.

Clarification was sought on the reasons why developers are not always able to supply the target level of affordable housing. Officers explained that developers have their own set fixed costs, including profit margins, and if the developer cannot make a profit and the landowner cannot sell the land at a satisfactory price, then such development will not take place. Members expressed concerns that some developers could be seen to be taking advantage of the situation and thereby circumventing the target level of affordable housing to increase profit margins.

Members queried the feasibility of implementing a mandatory policy in regards to affordable housing targets. Officers explained that this would be contrary to WG guidance and that this would not be workable in that developers could elect to build in other locations instead. A Member queried whether it would be possible to realign affordable housing targets to reduce the level for the Caerphilly Basin and increase then in other parts of the county borough. It was explained that this would be contrary to WG policy and that the tiers have been established as a compromise for the requirement to provide affordable housing. Officers also responded to a number of queries in respect of RSLs, including examples of how RSL housing purchases operate and how affordable housing is distributed through RSLs

In closing, Members expressed concerns regarding the current situation in respect of affordable housing and suggested a need for the district valuer to be engaged in the arbitration of all cases where the developer cannot meet the recommended targets. It was the Scrutiny's Committee view that the number of affordable housing units delivered to date is not acceptable, and that although they recognised that placing a mandatory requirement on developers in respect of affordable housing provision is not feasible, they felt that there needs to be changes to the system in this regard. It was suggested that the topic be revisited at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee and that housebuilders should be invited to attend the Committee to discuss the matter.

Having thanked Mr Stephens for his detailed presentation and for responding to the queries received during the course of the debate, Members noted the contents of the report.

10. PROPERTY REVIEW REPORT 2018

Mark Williams (Interim Head of Property Services) presented the report, which sought the endorsement of the Scrutiny Committee for the Property Review Report 2018, prior to its presentation to Cabinet for approval.

Members were advised that the Property Review Report 2018 (appended to the Officer's report) attempts to provide a succinct overview and record of what is a very large and diverse non domestic property portfolio. It presents some key metrics, highlights in period trends, summarises disposals and acquisitions and sets out some of the challenges that lay ahead. It

makes no recommendations. The report follows on from the State of the Estate Report issued in May 2016 but is based on a more structured format intended to ease updating and comparison with subsequent versions. It is proposed that the Property Review Report is updated and reissued annually.

During the course of discussion on this item, reference was made to the percentage of schools rated as in 'poor' condition (71.24%) as detailed in the report and a Member queried whether this will improve once new methodology for calculating ratings is introduced. Officers explained that this is not expected to create a significant variance, but that by the time the next report is issued, there will be some improvements to this figure arising from the removal of several buildings from the portfolio during 2018/19. Clarification was also provided in respect of the criteria for the condition ratings listed in the report.

Discussion took place regarding the investment potential available for schools and it was noted that a report on 21st Century Schools and Education Band B Proposals is due to be presented to the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet, which will include proposals for refurbishments across a number of buildings and reduce the number of poor condition schools across the county borough. Officers also responded to queries regarding a report listed on the Cabinet Forward Programme in respect of Bedwellty School Site Playing Fields and provided clarification on the current use of these football fields.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the following recommendation be referred to Cabinet for approval. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the Property Review Report 2018 as appended to the Officer's report be endorsed.

The meeting closed at 8.00 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 29th May 2018, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR

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POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 29TH MAY 2018

**SUBJECT: POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD
WORK PROGRAMME**

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR – SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To report the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Forward Work Programmes are essential to ensure that Scrutiny Committee agendas reflect the strategic issues facing the Council and other priorities raised by Members, the public or stakeholders.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The operation of scrutiny is required by the Local Government Act 2000 and subsequent Assembly legislation. The Forward Work Programmes contribute to the following Well-being Goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2016 by ensuring there is an effective scrutiny function and that council policies are scrutinised against the following goals:

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
- A globally responsible Wales

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee forward work programme includes all reports that were identified at the scrutiny committee meeting on 10th April 2018. The work programme outlines the reports planned for the period May 2018 to July 2018.
- 4.2 The forward work programme is made up of reports identified by officers and members and has been prioritised into three priority areas, priority 1, 2 or 3. Members are asked to consider the work programme alongside the cabinet work programme and suggest any changes before it is published on the council website. Scrutiny committee will review this work programme at every meeting going forward alongside any changes to the cabinet work programme or report requests.

4.3 The Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme is attached at Appendix 1. The Cabinet Forward Work Programme is attached at Appendix 2.

5. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

5.1 This report contributes to the well-being goals as set out in links to strategy above. It is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in that by ensuring the scrutiny function is effective when reviewing services and policies and ensure it considers the wellbeing goals.

6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no specific equalities implications arising as a result of this report.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no specific financial implications arising as a result of this report.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no specific personnel implications arising as a result of this report.

9. CONSULTATIONS

9.1 There are no consultation responses that have not been included in this report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 That Members consider any changes and agree the final forward work programme prior to publication.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 To improve the operation of scrutiny.

12. STATUTORY POWER

12.1 The Local Government Act 2000.

Author: Charlotte Evans, Interim Scrutiny Officer

Consultees: Shaun Couzens, Chief Housing Officer
Catherine Forbes-Thompson, Interim Head of Democratic Services
Lisa Lane, Interim Monitoring Officer

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme.

Appendix 2 Cabinet Work Programme.

APPENDIX 1

Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme April 2018 to June 2018			
Meeting Date: 29th May 2018			
Subject	Purpose	Key Issues	Witnesses
Homelessness Review and Strategic response Members Request	To provide Members with the Council's new Gwent Regional Homeless Strategy and Caerphilly Homelessness Action Plan: Operational date December 2018	To introduce to Members the new local homelessness action plan for the delivery of homelessness prevention and reactive services. Members will be informed of the key indicators used to inform the strategy development and the local delivery mechanisms and partnerships created to respond to housing need.	Shaun Couzens - Chief Housing Officer Suzanne Cousins-Principal Housing Officer Cornerstone Support Services
Flat Accommodation at River Road, Pontllytyn and The Grove, Fochriw	To seek Members views on proposals to demolish the block of flats known as 1 to 9, River Road, Pontllytyn and to take 3 to 6, The Grove, Fochriw, out of the Housing stock with a view to demolition of the block in future years	Demolition is being considered due to lack of demand for this type of accommodation in this area, costs of refurbishment and antisocial behaviour associated with the blocks. Deferral of demolition is requested for The Grove in recognition of the presence of a successful shop business operating out of the building.	Shaun Couzens – Chief Housing Officer

Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Meeting Date: 10th July 2018			
Subject	Purpose	Key Issues	Witnesses
Year End Performance for Corporate Services 2017/18 (P2)	Performance of Corporate Services for 2017/18	Highlighting the exceptions and looking forward to 2018/19. The future challenges, setting out key objectives/priorities for the next twelve months, and identifying areas for improvement.	Nicole Scammell – Head of Corporate Finance and S151 Officer.
Wellbeing Objective WO5 – Investment in Council Homes (P1)	To provide an update of progress against the Councils highest priorities identified within the Councils Corporate Plan 2016.	To provide an update against the Well-being Objective action plan using the Council Ffynnon scorecard which provides PI data regarding completion of internal and external works programmes and adds information on peoples satisfaction with the internal works. The update of the WBO should also identify any emerging slippage or additional progress against the action plan	Shaun Couzens – Chief Housing Officer
Year End Performance Housing Services (P1)	Performance Monitoring	An update on performance of the Housing Service during 2017/18, to set out the key service objectives for 2018/19 and highlight any potential challenges that may affect delivery of these objectives.	Shaun Couzens – Chief Housing Officer Christina Harray – Corporate Director Communities
Disabled Facilities Grant – Performance (P2)	Information report to provide Members with an update regarding Performance Monitoring of Disabled Facilities Grant and the information regarding the implementation of ENABLE.	An update on performance of Disabled Facilities Grants during 2017/18 and highlight any potential challenges that may affect delivery of the Performance Indicator. Identify any areas of improvement linked to the implementation of ENABLE.	Shaun Couzens – Chief Housing Officer/Claire Davies – Principal Housing Officer
New Build – Options for Delivery (To be agreed) (P1)	To advise Members of the new funding stream for Local Authority house building and to outline a development programme for new build Council homes. The report sets out how we will maximise the funding opportunities available over	To confirm the new build Council Housing programme, including the preferred delivery option in order for the Council to utilise the Affordable Housing Grant funding that has been allocated to CCBC.	Shaun Couzens - Chief Housing Officer/Claire Davies – Principal Housing Officer/ Kevin Fortey – Housing Development Officer

Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

	<p>the next three years and deliver up to 46 new build homes, with an indicative total grant of £3,893,923 and indicative overall investment of £6,713,791. The report also confirms the sites available to develop, and the proposed specification for new build.</p>		
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Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Meeting Date: 2nd October 2018			
Subject	Purpose	Key Issues	Witnesses

Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Meeting Date: 13th November 2018			
Subject	Purpose	Key Issues	Witnesses

Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Meeting Date: 15th January 2019			
Subject	Purpose	Key Issues	Witnesses

Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Meeting Date: 26th February 2019			
Subject	Purpose	Key Issues	Witnesses

Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Meeting Date: 9th April 2019			
Subject	Purpose	Key Issues	Witnesses

Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Meeting Date: to be confirmed			
Subject	Purpose	Key Issues	Witnesses
Supported Accommodation (P3)	This information report will update members on the progress of supported accommodation	To advise members on the progress of supported accommodation.	
Local Housing Strategy			
Shared Resource Service (SRS) (Special Meeting) (P1)	To present the proposal in respect of the Authority joining the SRS.	The SRS is a joint committee that presently included Gwent Police, Torfaen CBC, Newport CBC, Blaenau Gwent CBC and Monmouth CBC. This collaboration provides IT Services to its Members.	Matthew Lewis SRS
Property Review			Mark Williams
Poverty Strategy			Rob Hartshorn

Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

<p>Remodelling and Redesignation of Older Persons Accommodation (P1)</p>	<p>To provide members with proposals for remodelling a small number of sheltered housing schemes in the eastern valley and the re-designation of a number of schemes and units of older persons accommodation</p>	<p>For members to consider a number of options in relation to our sheltered housing schemes which may include improvements remodelling, alternative use and possibly demolition. For Members to consider re-designation of a number of older persons schemes and individual units of older persons accommodation to meet service needs.</p>	<p>Shaun Couzens – Chief Housing Officer/ Fiona Wilkins – Public Sector Housing Manager/Angela Hiscox – Elderly Persons Housing Manager</p>
<p>Customer Services Review</p>	<p>To review the Authority’s current Customer Service provision across all Directorates and access channels. To identify opportunities for reshaping Customer Services throughout the Authority to deliver enhanced services, reduce costs and to future proof a sustainable service through embracing digital opportunities.</p>	<p>To provide A clear vision & structure for the delivery of Customer Services across the authority for the next ten years.</p>	<p>Liz Lucas – Head of Procurement</p>

Cabinet Forward Work Programme (Scrutiny)

APPENDIX 2

30TH MAY 2018	Key Issues	Service Area
Future Regeneration Projects Governance Arrangements.		M. S. Williams
Flat Accommodation At River Road, Pontlottyn and The Grove, Fochriw		M. Williams
Foster Carer Fee Levels.	To seek Cabinet approval to implement a revised fee structure for Caerphilly Foster Carers which will bring the Council in line with other Local Authorities in South Wales and will assist Children's Services to recruit additional Foster Carers.	G. Jenkins
Oakdale Business Park Plateau one – Potential sale of Council Owned Land to Welsh Government. EXEMP ITEM.		D. Whetter

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13TH JUNE 2018	Key Issues	Service Area
Welsh Language Annual Reports.	To update Members on the progress made during the financial year 2017/18 against targets in the Council's current Welsh Language Scheme and seek Cabinet approval for submission of the annual monitoring and improvement reports to the relevant commissions before the deadline date.	Policy
Appointment of Public and Agricultural Analysts.	To seek Cabinet approval to appoint the Public and Agricultural Analysts	R. Hartshorn
Risca – Tesco Development Section 106 Agreement – Commitment Of Funding.	To seek Cabinet approval of the priority projects to be implemented in Risca utilising the Section 106 (S106) funding resulting from the large Tesco store development.	R. Kyte

27TH JUNE 2018	Key Issues	Service Area
Sport and Leisure Strategy	To Seek Cabinet approval to go out to Consultation.	R. Hartshorn
Provisional Outturn for 2017/18.	The report will provide Cabinet with details of the provisional revenue budget outturn for the 2017/18 financial year prior to the annual audit by the Authority's External Auditors Grant Thornton.	S. Harris

Cabinet Forward Work Programme (Scrutiny)

APPENDIX 2

Cwmcarn High Closure – Update.	To provide an update to members on the closure of Cwmcarn High School. This will include financial projections, pupil transfers and the plan for closure of the school site.	S. Richards
Federation of Schools.	To seek cabinet approval to move to formal consultation, in partnership with each Governing Body, for the federation of the following groups of school: Park Primary School and Gilfach Fargoed Primary School. Fleur de Lys Primary School and Pengam Primary School Bedwas Junior School and Rhydri primary School Ynysddu Primary School and Cwmfelinfach Primary School	S. Richards

11TH JULY 2018	Key Issues	Service Area
Corporate Risk Register.	To provide an update of the Corporate Risk Register in accordance with the Council's Risk Management Strategy. The updated Corporate Risk Register (CRR) is presented to Audit Committee so there is opportunity for the Committee to satisfy itself that appropriate arrangements are in place for the council's risk management processes to be regularly and robustly monitored and scrutinised.	Public Protection
Street Lighting.	To agree a future strategy.	M. Lloyd
Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre.	To agree the future of the Leisure Centre in the context of the Leisure Review.	M. S. Williams
Decriminalisation of Parking Proposals (Stage 2).	To confirm the full scope for CPE implementation, timescale, how any related issues are to be addressed, further delegations required and what level of public engagement is appropriate.	M. Lloyd
Recreation Ground Charities	To obtain Cabinet approval to endorse that Officers enter into correspondence and discussion with the Charity Commission as to the possibility of making an application for scheme altering or replacing the governing documents of the Charities.	M. Headington
Review of Town Centre Management.	To seek Cabinet approval for revision of the Council's current Town Centre Management model.	R. Kyte
Home Loans Report		S. Couzens

25TH JULY 2018	Key Issues	Service Area
Sheltered Accommodation		
Asset Management		

Cabinet Forward Work Programme (Scrutiny)

APPENDIX 2

Affordable Homes		
19TH SEPTEMBER 2018	Key Issues	Service Area
Air Quality Options Appraisal.		Public Protection
Strategic Equality Plan – Annual Monitoring and Improvement Report 2017-2018.	To update Members on the progress made during the financial year 2017/18 against targets in the Council's current Strategic Equality Plan and seek Cabinet approval for submission of the annual monitoring and improvement reports to the relevant commissions before the deadline dates.	Policy
14TH NOVEMBER 2018	Key Issues	Service Area
Sport and Leisure Strategy.	To seek Cabinet's endorsement of the Draft Sport and Leisure Strategy.	Public Protection
Town Centre Events Programme.	To seek Cabinet approval for revision of the Council's current Town Centre Management model.	R. Kyte

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POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 29TH MAY 2018

SUBJECT: HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2018

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR - SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Following a request from the Policy and Resources Committee this report is to provide Members with an overview of our homeless services and introduce the emerging areas of focus we will include in our forthcoming Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan. Members will be informed of the key indicators used to inform the strategy development, the existing local delivery mechanisms and partnerships created to respond to housing need. The report will also highlight areas where more collaboration will be needed both within existing council services and with external partners and stakeholders.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 requires all Welsh local authorities to undertake a homelessness review and produce a four year homelessness strategy from that review. The five local authorities in Gwent have responded to the requirement to produce and publish a four year homelessness plan by working together to produce a regional strategy, delivered through local and regional action plans. A regional approach was approved by Welsh Government and this takes into account the need to consider more partnership and cross boundary working.
- 2.2 Early findings of the homeless review are:
- The number of households requiring homeless advice and assistance has increased by 72% in the past 12 months.
 - Single person's and smaller units of accommodation do not meet demand,
 - We have seen an increase in the number of homeless cases with mental health conditions
- 2.3 The homeless review will enable us to develop our Action Plan which will be presented to Members later in the year.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 requires all Welsh local authorities to undertake a homelessness review and produce a four year homelessness strategy.

- 3.2 The production of a Homelessness Strategy and the delivery of services through a local action plan contributes to the Well-being Goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015:

*A prosperous Wales** P2: **Improve standards of housing and communities, giving appropriate access to services across the county borough.**

Improving Lives and Communities: Homes in Wales 2010 which sets out the national context on meeting housing need, homelessness and housing related support services.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 Further to the Housing (Wales) Act 2104, Local Authorities in Wales must carry out a review of homelessness in their area, and must adopt a strategy to reduce homelessness based on their review. The strategy must address the issues identified in the review and must be formally adopted and published by 31st December 2018. A further report will be submitted prior to December to seek member approval of the proposed strategy for CCBC. In practical terms, several key stages of the strategy development have been completed including the review of homelessness in our area, a stakeholder survey has been completed, and focus group sessions with professionals and support organisations have been held.
- 4.2 Detailed information is still being collected at the time of writing and the final review report cannot be provided at this time. However, we do have a good insight into the information which we can summarise within this report as follows:
- 4.3 The number of households requiring housing advice and assistance has gradually increased since the Housing Act (Wales) 2014 'duty to prevent homelessness' was enacted in 2015. Since that time, welfare reform changes have reduced the Local Housing Allowance rates for single people under 35yrs, the 'bedroom tax' has been introduced for those under-occupying properties and housing benefit caps implemented for larger families. Universal Credit has been introduced to certain households but the full implementation will take place in September 2018. These changes in many cases have added to the existing financial pressures on households resulting in affordability issues for existing rented accommodation.
- 4.4 The most commonly reported cause of homelessness in the borough is loss of rental accommodation, typically through falling into rent arrears. However, rent arrears cases have increased throughout all tenures of housing, not just in the private rental market.
- 4.5 Our Civica housing register is used to record all cases of application to the council for housing and homelessness and this system can provide us with detailed information relating to household's reasons for requiring our services. In 2017/18, 2,224 households approached the council for housing advice and assistance due to the threat of homelessness, which is a threefold increase on the number of presentations received in 2015/16. A breakdown of these presentations shows that - single males (37%), female single parent families (23%) and single females (20%) accounted for 80% of all cases.

Types of emergency accommodation provision:

- 4.6 If a household is actually presenting as homeless on the day, or, the homeless prevention team are unable to relieve or prevent a household from becoming homeless and the household is in a priority need group and eligible for assistance they will be offered emergency accommodation in one of the supported schemes in various locations around the borough. Each of the supported schemes is staffed and managed by Supporting People funded services for example Solas and the Wallich. Each of the four accommodation schemes has different acceptance criteria for age groups and household types to ensure the right balance of need and risks are managed. The schemes are not able to accommodate high risk clients for example with high level social care or substance abuse needs and who are referred to specialist providers for assistance.

- 4.7 There are 55 bed spaces available across the four supported accommodation schemes. Once these are fully utilised, any additional demand for emergency accommodation has to be provided through local bed and breakfast providers. The Wallich support all individuals in B&B accommodation to ensure there is a level of housing related support provision. Over the years, we have, as a last resort, had to rely on bed and breakfast providers to assist us with emergency accommodation needs.
- 4.8 The costs of homeless emergency and supported accommodation provision is paid through housing benefit, however there is a shortfall between the housing benefit and the actual accommodation charge which has to be paid for by the individuals placed. At the end of each financial year the shortfall in payments owed by homeless households has to be paid from the homeless budget, and this has increased year on year. To date we have had financial assistance from Welsh Government to assist with shortfalls in payments owed by our clients. As emergency accommodation provision is more costly, we make every effort to secure move-on accommodation options when we are aware that they are owed a duty of to be housed to reduce any financial burden where possible.
- 4.9 Unless we can secure immediate final housing options, we utilise temporary interim accommodation provision in the private sector which comprises of a mixture of 48 houses and flats, leased by a partner housing association, for the sole use of the council's homelessness service users. We are contracted to pay void costs on these units in the event that we have no homeless household suitable for the accommodation. Last year the void costs for the 48 property scheme was a negligible £3,110 for the whole year, demonstrating near full occupancy throughout the year.

Rough sleeper provisions

- 4.10 In Caerphilly we have not seen evidence of high levels of rough sleepers in the area as is typically reported in the city and port authorities. In the last three years, the annual rough sleeper count, which is conducted on the same night across the whole of Wales for consistency, Caerphilly has identified gradually reducing numbers of actual rough sleepers, whereas the Wales averages are reported to be rising. The statutory requirement to conduct a rough sleeper count is relatively new and the three years worth of data is reported as follows:

Annual Rough Sleeper returns	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Caerphilly	3	4	1
Wales	82	141	188

- 4.11 Whilst we received reports and notifications of rough sleepers throughout the year and work in partnership with a Rough Sleeper team, the annual rough sleeper count provides us with only a one-off snap shot and should not be taken out of context. This point should be considered alongside the number of self reporting cases of rough sleeping, sofa surfing and applicants stating they have no fixed abode. We have been made aware of rough sleepers and street begging in and around town centres however, these are followed up by our rough sleeper coordinator partners Cornerstone Support Services Ltd who make contact with the person, assess their situation, establish what services they may benefit from, such as healthcare, and assist with practical support to access such services.
- 4.12 During the cold weather winter periods, the Caerphilly Churches Night Shelters have been operating to provide a safe, warm overnight place to stay with food and support from a group of volunteers. Initially the night shelters started with a pilot scheme 6 years ago with 3 churches in the Pontllanfraith/Blackwood area. This year 10 churches and their volunteers came together and provided up to 8 bed spaces every night from December 2017 through to just after the recent heavy snowfall in March 2018.

- 4.13 The housing of those leaving custody has changed over the last few years and new arrangements to make early referrals to all agencies have proven to be effective: only those with a vulnerability leaving prison, without accommodation to return to are owed the full housing duty. This has reduced the number of ex-offenders presenting to the council considerably. Where we do have a duty to accommodate, we have early notice that our assistance is needed and additional time to plan for housing.

Partnership working

- 4.14 We actively seek to work with housing related partners. Within the Housing Advice Centre office, we host several colleagues from other service areas:

- Llamau Mediation officer - supports young people to remain in the family home rather than present as homeless. The Llamau Mediation officer routinely achieves an 88% success rate of successful mediation and homelessness prevention.
- Gofal mental health officers - support to anyone facing homelessness to engage with housing professionals. Failure to manage rent accounts and respond to contact from professionals often leads to eventual eviction proceedings going ahead that might have been avoided earlier. The Gofal mental health officers achieve an excellent level of engagement with clients and prevent many cases of eventual eviction.
- Llamau Women's Services DV specialist: who intervenes and responds to any request for help and housing in a DV environment. Although a presentation for housing as a result of fleeing domestic violence is a priority need category, the Llamau DV officer works with these households to remain at home and improve safety so as to prevent the upheaval of having to uproot the whole family wherever possible.
- Cornerstone Support Services, our Rough Sleeper coordinators are based in our Caerphilly family accommodation unit, assisting with housing support and street homelessness incidents. Cornerstone colleagues and Rev. Phillips also work with us each winter to accommodate rough sleepers as described above.
- Pobl Bond Scheme: the bond scheme officers are present in the Housing Advice centre for one day per week and assess applicants seeking financial assistance to access the rental market.
- We actively collaborate with Supporting People who provide contracted support providers to both manage and provide housing related support to all clients in our emergency and temporary accommodation. Additional support from Supporting People for homelessness prevention officers to be seconded into our team has been pivotal in the achievement of our positive homeless prevention results.
- Shelter Cymru provide housing advice surgeries once a week in the Bargoed Citizens Advice Centre, which has been cut from 4 surgeries per week and a weekly presence at the Housing Advice Centre due to staff shortages. Shelter also has an on-line housing advice service.
- Caerphilly Homes Tenancy Support Officers provide early intervention support to help sustain tenancies and avoid evictions. Where tenancy engagement is proving difficult, assistance from the Homeless Prevention team has been very effective to ensure all evictions are prevented where possible.
- Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), work with us to help our clients with budgeting help, mortgage rescue, debt relief financial capability skills.
- Our Supporting People Gateway provide us with the opportunity to refer any homeless service user with a recognised support need through the Gateway service: this mechanism identifies support needs and aligns those needs with the most appropriate agency to provide support. The homeless team referred 51 cases through the Gateway in the last 12 months.

Costs and Funding Pre and Post 2018

- 4.15 Although the introduction of the new homeless prevention duties in November 2015, gave rise to an increase in cases, the number of staff resources has remained the same: 4 Housing Advice officers, who are responsible for investigating and assessing all potentially homeless cases presented to the Council. The only area of staff increase has been through the benefit of homelessness transitional funding which was allocated to assist local authorities to transition from the old legislative regime to the present legal framework. The transitional funding allocation has been generous, allowing us to employ an additional homelessness prevention officer and has given us much needed funding to assist with homeless prevention financial assistance to prevent or relieve homelessness. We have used this funding to train staff on the interpretation of the new housing duties and implement the new code of guidance. With the vast majority of presentations to the service having housing affordability issues, finding alternative affordable accommodation has become increasingly more difficult to achieve and the transitional funding has made it possible for us to demonstrate positive homeless prevention returns for the last few years. Other uses of the transitional funding have been to develop social lettings with a partner housing association, however, the scheme was not successful in attracting sufficient landlords from the private sector so this has discontinued. The winter night shelters for rough sleepers and all associated costs with the annual rough sleeper count have also been resourced through the transitional fund.
- 4.16 For 2018/19 and thereafter, the homeless prevention service has become part of the Authority's core funding arrangements and this will enable us to continue to develop and expand on wider housing options and focus on the necessary resources we need to ensure we provide a full and responsive service. The Homeless Strategy Action Plan will provide details of the areas we will need to focus on in light of the homeless review. Early indications are that we will need to increase the number of officers in response to the 72% increase in new cases in the last 12 months. In addition, we will need to resource access to more single person's housing in the private and social rented sector and shared housing initiatives in all sectors.

Housing Opportunities

- 4.17 On 6th December 2016 the council's housing waiting list changed to a common housing register, incorporating all housing applications for all social housing providers in the Caerphilly borough. Historic council waiting list applications were transposed on the register and the old waiting list points were transferred into one of three bands. The table below (the register dated 16th May 2018) shows the split between the three bands and the numbers of homeless and general housing applicants on the housing register. It must be noted that the housing register changes on a daily basis as new applications and the various back office decisions are determined and recorded.

Band	Homeless Applicant	Housing Register	Total
Band 1	30	89	119
Band 2	39	1744	1783
Band 3	12	2911	2923
Total	81	4744	4825

- 4.18 On average, 50 new on line general housing applications (including requests to transfer housing) are received each week. Weekly homeless applications vary from as few as 20 to as many as 80 requests for homelessness advice and assistance per week. Not all of the homeless cases result in a statutory homeless duty being owed but all cases do require consideration and a decision as to what service the applicant is entitled to receive. Some applicants will be advised that they are not homeless or threatened with homelessness, others will be owed a duty to help to prevent a homeless event occurring, others will be imminently homeless or homeless on the day and emergency assistance provided. The homeless applicants who are recorded in the table above have been assessed as owed a housing duty and have been placed in a band in accordance with the urgency in each case.
- 4.19 Band 1 homeless applicants are those with an urgent need to move, who are in priority need and owed a duty to secure housing, or are owed a duty as a result of violence.
- 4.20 Band 2 homeless applicants are homeless or threatened with homelessness and owed a duty to help to secure accommodation.
- 4.21 Only one suitable offer of accommodation is given to homeless applicants, which if refused can be reviewed. However, if the original offer is subsequently found by the reviewing officer to be suitable, then the homeless duty will end and no further homeless priority banding awarded. If this occurs, homeless applicants can remain on the register, but will be moved down to band 3. During the last 12 months, 6 requests to review the suitability of the homeless offer were received. All 6 of the cases were held: the properties offered were suitable and the homeless duty properly administered.
- 4.22 The duty to accommodate homeless applicants does not have to be through the social housing route. Indeed, those who are currently on the register are in many cases suspended from offers because they have an outstanding former housing debt which excludes them from housing offers until their debt is below £500. Whilst we have a duty to help to find a suitable housing solution, social housing is not an option for most applicants however, there is an overriding expectation that a 'council' house will be provided. As the numbers on the general housing register demonstrates, social housing is in such high demand that we have to administer the limitations on the allocations policy equally for all general and homeless applicants, and, whilst homeless applicants may be in greater need, they are not entitled to social housing if they are unable to comply with the debt criteria within the allocations policy. For those with former housing debts over £500 and without providing evidence of proactively reducing their debt, the only access to housing will be through the private rented sector.
- 4.23 The private rented sector in the borough varies both in rent levels and availability depending on area. In the more sought after towns, rents are much higher and usually unaffordable for many people, especially single people under the age of 35 years. The local housing allowance rate for single people under 35 yrs. is £53.05 per week. For a family with 2 children needing a 3 bedroom house, the local housing allowance would be a maximum of £103.56 per week. A search on the internet is what we recommend applicants do to widen their opportunities for housing but this will often reveal less than a handful of properties that are affordable and usually in areas far from their preferred locations. With the limitations of the private rental market and the limitations of availability on the housing register, homeless applicants have fewer and fewer housing options in the locations they would like to be.
- 4.24 As a Gwent region, the variations of housing opportunities differ across all boroughs. The Newport area generally has good housing options for single people but less so for families. Families in the Caerphilly area are easier to accommodate in social housing stock, providing they will be prepared to move out of their preferred area of choice. The Bl. Gwent county borough area's social housing stock is more expensive than private rentals in the area, and therefore they have greater opportunities for social housing. The Caerphilly area has pockets of low demand and very high demands across the borough so housing opportunities are better in some areas than others.

Recognition:

- 4.25 In November 2017, members of the homeless prevention team, working with Charter Housing Rents team won the Wales Chartered Institute of Housing Innovation Award for the early intervention approach taken and partnership working to prevent homelessness. The same team were asked to present their private sector landlord incentive scheme at the Cymorth Cymru Housing Conference earlier this year to share good practice with other homeless colleagues in different areas of Wales. In relation to other partnership working our Young Person's Accommodation Officer has recently had a examples of her work with Children's Services published in the Wales Housing Quarterly publication, again an example of good practice and coordination, putting the service user at the heart of our service provision.

5. WALES AUDIT OFFICE REPORT ON HOMELESSNESS DEMAND

- 5.1 In January 2018, the Wales Audit Office published a comprehensive report on how local government manages homelessness demand. Whilst the auditors visited several local authorities across Wales to establish an understanding of how various services are achieved locally, Caerphilly was not one of the authorities visited. The statistics reported in the report are taken from the publically available information on the internet. Caerphilly has always achieved a good level of homelessness prevention in comparison to the rest of Wales; however, prevention work can only be achieved with sufficient financial commitment to enable us to provide a variety of solutions to our local homelessness demand. The Audit Report recognises that homelessness is typically a result of:-

- poverty,
- lack of affordable accommodation,
- unintended welfare benefit policy misalignment from Westminster to our devolved state,
- low educational achievement
- high unemployment
- substance misuse and other addictions
- mental health
- Additionally in Wales the homelessness legislation promotes the use of the private rented sector as an effective solution to homeless prevention when the national welfare reform policy has reduced the housing benefit entitlement to this group to levels where rents are massively unaffordable and unsustainable.

6. FUTURE HOUSING CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 To access private rental properties, the only affordable and potentially sustainable housing solution for many single people in the Caerphilly borough is to share their housing costs with others. Whilst house sharing in city based authorities and areas with university and college accommodation is accepted as normal, people do not aspire to share housing as a solution to their needs. As noted in the Wales Audit Report, single people account for half of all homelessness applications across wales, and in Caerphilly this is no different.
- 6.2 The general social housing demand is increasing as reflected by the single person applicant numbers recorded on our housing register: up from 1,755 (48.55%) of all applications in Jan 2017 to 2,187 (49.85%) in January 2018. The Local Housing Market Assessment 2018 (currently in draft) tells us that the majority of properties in the county borough are semi-detached (40%) or terraced (35%), at proportions significantly higher than the Welsh average. There is a high proportion of pre-1900 terraced housing in the former mining communities, as is the case in other valleys authorities. There are also a number of large social housing estates comprising predominantly of 2 and 3 bedroom semi-detached properties, which would account for a large proportion of the semi-detached housing stock, particularly in some areas. There are a much lower proportion of detached dwellings in the county borough when compared to the Welsh average (16.3% compared to 27.7% across Wales). The proportion of flats/single person's accommodation is also lower than the Welsh average.

6.3 The single person's social housing stock levels in the borough do not meet demand now and are unlikely to do so unless we can:-

- make shared housing a realistic option,
- re-designate under-utilised stock,
- Insist that housing provider partners who are planning to build social housing have a substantial percentage of single person's housing planned within their schemes.
- Develop new council housing targeted at meeting demand.

Several of the above points are already under consideration by officers and will be reflected and actions monitored through the Homeless Strategy Action Plan and the forward work of the Housing Strategy team.

6.4 The fundamental purpose of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, Part 2 in Wales is to prevent homelessness occurring in the first instance, or relieve it by finding a sustainable alternative solution. Sourcing properties in the private sector requires us to provide ever increasing financial incentives to encourage private landlords to accept people, usually on benefits, without guarantors, with poor tenancy management skills and a history of debt. Whilst we have relied on the transitional funding grant for the past three years to help us achieve and maintain good levels of homelessness prevention, we will not be able to sustain this level without either more single person's accommodation options in the (more affordable) social housing arena, the provision of house sharing opportunities with social and private housing providers and more staff resources to take earlier action to retain existing tenancies and support new tenancies. We are unable to respond to central government welfare reforms for single people in the private rented sector unless we can do more to encourage shared housing options, with both private landlords and our housing customers. We have shown to good effect that homelessness prevention and relief can work and we will continue to focus our resources to reduce actual homelessness at every opportunity.

7. HOUSING (WALES) ACT 2014, SECTION 95: DUTY TO CO-OPERATE

7.1 In developing the 2014 Housing Act, the Welsh government recognised that tackling homelessness needs a multi-agency response in order to be effective. It introduced a specific duty under Section 95 for local authority social services and housing associations to co-operate with homelessness services. The Wales Audit report summarises that the new duty to co-operate is not working consistently across Wales and that key partners are not always effective in supporting homelessness prevention.

7.2 It can be seen in the all Wales statistical information that presentations from households in rent arrears in the social housing sector in Caerphilly increased from 12 cases in 2015/16 to 60 cases in 2016/17. The 2017/18 data on social housing evictions is currently unavailable. Whilst a duty to co-operate to prevent as many households from becoming homeless as possible, all landlords have a responsibility to manage their revenue account in order to provide a full housing service (including repairs and improvements to its stock). An in-depth analysis of what has led to the 5 fold increase in rent arrears cases in social housing in the borough cannot be considered within the confines of this report; however, there is a case to consider in more detail how our local social landlords are demonstrating their compliance with the Section 95 duty to co-operate to assist us to prevent homelessness in our area. In relation to the Caerphilly Homes social housing providers, a team of Tenancy Support Officers are employed within the Rents Service to identify and take early intervention actions to sustain council tenancies. This team works closely with the Homeless Prevention team to resolve and alleviate the threat of homelessness wherever possible.

8. FURTHER LEGISLATION CHANGES PLANNED

- 8.1 It is the intention of the Welsh Government to remove 'intentionality' from the definition of homelessness for families with children. From 2019, local authorities will have a duty to provide accommodation for intentionally homeless families unless they have previously been found to be intentionally homeless in the past five years.
- 8.2 In effect, any family with children must be accepted as owed a duty of housing and we must disregard the reasons why they lost their former accommodation. It is not possible to estimate the impact that this change in homelessness definition will have at the present time because we are yet to understand the full implications that Universal Credit will have on future homelessness presentations by families with children. However, we have seen from the 2017/18 annual statistical return that single parent families with children are more likely to be threatened with homeless than any other of the client groups recorded.

Caerphilly Homelessness Annual returns 2017/18

	Couples with children	Single parent household Male	Single parent household Female	Single male	Single female	Other households	Total
Rent arrears Social housing	15	3	47	14	11	11	101
Rent arrears private housing	4	1	17	4	6	5	37
Loss of rented or tied accommodation	44	7	69	32	32	27	211

- 8.3 Overall, the Council has been effective in providing a service to those affected by the threat or actual homelessness and through the knowledge base and commitment of funding to this statutory service, we are in a good position to develop an effective Homeless Strategy Action Plan, which will be presented to Members in the autumn.

9. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 9.1 This report contributes to the Well-being Goals as set out in Links to Strategy above. It is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act in that:

Long Term – supports the sustainability of cohesive communities for tenants and residents; providing a fair and transparent service to promote a stable community environment.

Prevention – supports tenants and assists in the prevention of eviction and homelessness. It supports the well-being of tenants and residents.

Integration – works alongside a wide range of support initiatives

Collaboration – joined up working arrangements within the organisation and with outside agencies to make every effort to work with their tenants and assist them to sustain tenancies.

Involvement – Engages tenants, residents and support agencies in relation to sustainment of tenancies.

10. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 This report is for information purposes only. There are, therefore, no equalities implications arising from the report.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are financial implications to funding the future of the homelessness service for the county borough. With the change in the funding arrangement from a protected grant basis to an allocation as part of the overall grant to the Authority, Members and officers must balance the need to provide a statutory service to prevent homelessness and provide accommodation under emergency and temporary circumstances alongside other financial commitments. Debt recovery from customers whose accommodation costs are not provided for under housing benefit entitlements is essential to the overall budget management of the homeless service as a whole: unless maximum recovery can be achieved, the costs to the remainder of the service may in effect reduce the overall budget by more than half.

12. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 There will be personnel implications as a result of the increase in homeless requests for service in the past 12 months and a review of personnel resources will be addressed as part of the Homeless Strategy Action Plan.

13. CONSULTATIONS

- 13.1 There are no consultation responses that have not been reflected in this report.

14. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 14.1 It is recommended that Members note the contents of the report.

15. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 15.1 The purpose of the report is for information only.

16. STATUTORY POWER

- 16.1 Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

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Consultees: Cllr. L. Phipps – Cabinet Member for Homes and Places
Cllr James Pritchard -- Chair of Policy and Resources Committee
Cllr. K. Etheridge -- Councillor, Blackwood Ward
David Street – Director of Social Services and Housing
Shaun Couzens – Chief Housing Officer
Fiona Wilkins – Public Sector Housing Manager
Lesley Allen – Housing Group Accountant
Shelly Jones -- Supporting People Manager
Claire Davies -- Interim Private Sector Housing Manager



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 29TH MAY 2018

**SUBJECT: FLAT ACCOMMODATION AT RIVER ROAD, PONTLOTTYN AND
THE GROVE, FOCHRIW**

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR – SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING

- 1.1 The attached report, which was presented to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group on 17th May 2018, sought the views of Members on proposals to demolish the block of flats known as 1 to 9, River Road, Pontlottyn and to take 3 to 6, The Grove, Fochriw, out of the Housing stock with a view to demolition of the block in future years. It was noted that following consideration by the Task Group, the report would be presented to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee as an item for discussion, prior to its referral to Cabinet for a decision on the recommendations contained therein.
- 1.2 Officers explained that issues associated with lack of demand are being experienced by all partner landlords with housing stock in the Upper Rhymney Valley. Whilst there is unmet need for single person accommodation throughout the county borough, demand for two and three bed flats in the Upper Rhymney Valley is low with waiting lists regularly exhausted.
- 1.3 Members were advised that 1 to 9 River Road comprises a mix of 1, 2 and 3 bed flats, and 1 to 6, The Grove comprises two active shop units at ground floor, trading as a single business, with two 2 bed flats located on each of the upper floors. Both blocks have been affected by high levels of antisocial behaviour, crime and substance misuse. In addition, the flats are very hard to let due to their location and property mix, in recent years have largely been home to transient households, and are not conducive to community cohesion. Both blocks are currently vacant and have been secured, and surveys have identified that significant investment is required due to the external and internal fabric and boundaries in order to bring them up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.
- 1.4 The report therefore recommended the demolition of both blocks, but that in recognition of the presence of a successful business operating out of The Grove, the demolition of that block be deferred until such time as the current lease expires or other arrangements transpire. It was noted that consultation had been carried out with the local and neighbouring ward Members and police, who had actively supported the proposal.
- 1.5 Discussion took place regarding the general store operating from The Grove and Members expressed the need to protect its occupants and maintain local amenities and services in the village. Officers confirmed that the leaseholders are supportive of the proposals, and it was noted that there are approximately 22 years left to run on the lease. It was explained that the Council recognises the value of the store to the community and are seeking to provide alternative accommodation for the occupants, although there are limitations to what funding can be obtained for commercial premises. Officers also provided clarification on the Council's ownership of Flat 1, River Road.
- 1.6 Members of the Task Group expressed their support for the proposals but suggested that the Housing Revenue Account should not be used to meet the costs of providing a replacement

shop facility. Officers confirmed that they are looking at alternative funding sources in this regard, but the store did support the local community which was predominantly council owned properties and that the income received from the commercial lease was retained within the HRA. A Member also suggested that it would be useful for a map/photograph of the relevant area to be incorporated into any similar reports in the future.

1.7 Following consideration of the report, the Caerphilly Homes Task Group unanimously recommended to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee (and thereafter Cabinet) that for the reasons contained therein:-

- (i) the block known as 1 to 9 River Road be demolished;
- (ii) the principle to proceed with demolition be agreed in respect of 1 to 6, The Grove, Fochriw, but that the demolition be deferred until the current lease of 1 and 2, The Grove expires, a suitable alternative premises is identified for the business currently operating out of the block or the ongoing liability incurred by the Council in maintaining the mothballed building is no longer considered financially viable.

1.8 The Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider the recommendations.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Report to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group on 17th May 2018 - Agenda Item 4



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 15TH MAY 2018

SUBJECT: FLAT ACCOMMODATION AT RIVER ROAD, PONTLOTTYN & THE GROVE, FOCHRIW

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR - SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks the views of members on proposals to demolish the block of flats known as 1 to 9, River Road, Pontlottyn and to take 3 to 6, The Grove, Fochriw, out of the Housing stock with a view to demolition of the block in future years, prior to the report being presented to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee for information and thereafter to Cabinet for a decision.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Issues associated with lack of demand are being experienced by all partner landlords with housing stock in the Upper Rhymney Valley. Whilst there is unmet need for single person accommodation throughout the County Borough, demand for two and three bed flats in the Upper Rhymney Valley is low with waiting lists regularly exhausted.
- 2.2 The block of Council owned flats known as 1 to 9 River Road comprises a mix of 1, 2 and 3 bed flats. The block known as 1 to 6, The Grove comprises two active shop units at ground floor, trading as a single business, with two 2 bed flats located on each of the upper floors.
- 2.3 Both blocks have been affected by high levels of antisocial behaviour, crime and substance misuse. In addition, the flats are very hard to let due to their location and property mix and in recent years have largely been home to transient households. All flats in both blocks are currently vacant and the blocks have been secured.
- 2.4 Surveys of the blocks have identified disrepair to the external and internal fabric and boundaries, and significant investment is necessary to bring them up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.
- 2.5 The report recommends that both blocks be demolished, however, in recognition of the presence of a successful business operating out of The Grove, it is recommended that the demolition of that block be deferred until such time as the current lease expires, alternative funding becomes available, a suitable alternative premises is identified for the business, or the ongoing liability incurred by the Council in maintaining the structure and exterior of the building whilst the flats are 'mothballed' is no longer considered financially viable.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 **Improving Lives and Communities; Homes in Wales** (WG 2010) sets out the national context on improving homes and communities.

- 3.2 The **Caerphilly Delivers -Single Integrated Plan 2013-2017** has a priority to “improve standards of housing and communities, giving appropriate access to services across the County Borough” and ensure people are supported to live in their own homes and communities in safety.
- 3.3 The **Community Strategy: Living Environment Objective 1:** Encourage the development and maintenance of high quality, well designed and efficient, sustainable homes and environments which can meet all needs.
- 3.4 Caerphilly County Borough Council **2013/17 Corporate Priorities** include: CP7 - Invest in our Council homes and their communities to transform lives.
- 3.5 Caerphilly County Borough Council’s **Well-being Objectives in 2017/18** include: WBO5 – Investment in Council homes to transform lives and communities.
- 3.6 The **Wellbeing of Future Generation (Wales) Act 2015** is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. It requires public bodies to think more about the long-term, working with people and communities, looking to prevent problems and take a more joined up approach. This will create a Wales that we all want to live in, now and in the future. The content of this report links to the following Act well-being goals:
- A prosperous Wales.
 - A resilient Wales.
 - A healthier Wales.
 - A more equal Wales.
 - A Wales of cohesive communities.
 - A globally responsible Wales.

4. THE REPORT

River Road Flats

- 4.1 River Road is located within the Pontlottyn ward. The block of flats known as 1 to 9 River Road is a traditional brick built block comprising three floors, each containing one 1 bed, one 2 bed and one 3 bed flat. It is the only block in the Council’s stock with this configuration. The block is fully owned by the Authority.
- 4.2 Flat 1 had previously been sold in June 2000 under the Right to Buy, and later sold on several times by subsequent owners and in July 2017 it was put up for auction in poor condition. In light of officer and local residents’ concerns about the block’s detrimental impact on the local community and future viability for residential use it was determined that it would be appropriate for the Authority to try to regain full ownership and control of the block by purchasing the flat. It was subsequently bought by the Council for £17,000 at auction.
- 4.3 In recent years there have been instances of antisocial behaviour, crime and substance misuse in the vicinity of this block which has contributed to the flats becoming difficult to let. This block of flats has been very hard to let due to its location and property mix and is reported by local residents to be regarded locally as a ‘no go’ zone.
- 4.4 The mix of accommodation in this block is not conducive to sustainable and cohesive communities and results in households with very different lifestyles and priorities sharing a living environment. The stigma associated with these flats has led to potential tenants refusing offers of accommodation despite the accommodation lending itself to families, couples and single people who may have been affected by welfare reform. In the last five years the average void period for this block has been 155 days compared with 25 days for a neighbouring block in Broad Street. In recent months the number of let flats reduced to four, with one of those being investigated for non-occupation.

- 4.5 In addition there are wider issues of low demand being experienced by all partner landlords with stock in the Upper Rhymney Valley. Whilst there is unmet need for single person accommodation throughout the County Borough, demand for two and three bed flats in the Upper Rhymney Valley, including Pontlottyn, is low. Traditionally flats have always been lower demand than houses as they are not considered by all to be suitable family accommodation, particularly flats above ground floor. As a result, families willing to move into low demand flats tend to stay only a short time, as a stepping stone into a house, particularly if subjected to antisocial behaviour.
- 4.6 Between January 2016 and November 2017 the Police and the Tenancy Enforcement Section received 19 reports of anti-social behaviour related to River Road and 7 crime related reports, including criminal damage, theft, burglary and vehicle related crime. Despite a multi-agency approach to offending, the provision of security doors and the strict enforcement of tenancy conditions, Police officers were still required to regularly patrol the area as many of the flats remained unoccupied and the location was being used by youths to congregate. A decision was therefore taken in late 2017 to relocate the few remaining tenants of the block to alternative accommodation in order to secure the building and reduce the likelihood of incidents of crime and antisocial behaviour in the locality.
- 4.7 Surveys of the block have identified disrepair to the external fabric and boundaries and a significant investment is necessary to bring it up to the WHQS. Whilst a small number of the flats have benefitted from some investment most of them require significant internal repairs and improvements to meet the WHQS. This work will be required to be fully completed if the flats are to remain as part of the Council's stock, despite significant concerns about future demand and associated housing management implications of letting the flats.
- 4.8 Initial consideration has been given to redesigning the interior layout of the block to facilitate a better household mix and/or an alternative use but costs are considered prohibitive and options are limited, particularly in an area where demand is low for all property types.
- 4.9 If demolished a significant open space would be created that could be considered for sale or for a use that would enhance the quality of the local environment and complement improvements being made to other Council owned stock within the community. Local residents have already enquired as to the possibility providing additional car parking for the Boys and Girls Club situated directly opposite the block, thereby improving a local community facility and this would be given consideration if approval were to be given to proceed with demolition.
- 4.10 In November 2017 the local ward Member presented a petition at Council, signed by 341 local residents. They believed that the Authority may have been considering alternative uses for the block known as 1 to 9, River Road, and called for it to be demolished, highlighting the negative impact the block was having on the community. The petition contained allegations of anti-social behaviour, drug dealing and drug use within the flats, and associated concerns for child safety. The petition was accompanied by many letters and comments from local residents, detailing their personal experiences of the flats, fears and concerns and highlighted residents' perception that since many of the tenants had been moved out of the block the situation had improved.
- 4.11 Following a review of available information and discussions with Police and the local Ward Member, together with consideration of the expenditure required to bring this block up to the WHQS, officers have concluded that Members should give consideration to the demolition of this block of flats.

The Grove

- 4.12 The Grove, Fochriw is a three storey block located within the Darran Valley ward. It comprises two shop units at ground floor with two 2 bed flats located on each of the upper floors. The block has a central internal stairway providing access to the flats via the front of the building between the two shop units. Two neighbouring three storey blocks of flats were

previously demolished by Rhymney Valley District Council due to problems with anti-social behaviour and low demand but this block was retained, due in part, to the presence of the shops.

- 4.13 The two shop units known as 1 and 2, The Grove are currently let on a single 25 year lease, running from 2015, to a local company who operate a thriving general store and Post Office out of the premises. This is the only such enterprise within the village, located centrally, and officers recognise that the shop is an important local amenity, supporting sustainability of the community.
- 4.14 In addition to these flats the Council have 12 two bed bungalows, 34 two bed and 104 three bed houses in Fochriw. As highlighted in paragraph 4.5 there is very little demand in the Upper Rhymney Valley, including Fochriw, for first or second floor two bed flats, from couples or families, with waiting lists for two bed houses in the area also regularly exhausted. The location of the flats at The Grove is a traditional and natural congregation point within the village and they have previously been a repeated focus of anti-social and nuisance behaviour, thereby impacting on both tenants and the wider community.
- 4.15 In the last five years of letting the 4 flats had 16 different tenants with 10 ending their tenancies within a year highlighting the ongoing transient nature of these tenancies. Due to the anti-social behaviour, together with lack of demand and the need for significant investment prior to them being re-let, the flats have now effectively been 'mothballed', having been void and secured since April 2015, to prevent illegal access and discourage anti-social behaviour in the area.
- 4.16 If it were to be re-let the block now requires significant investment in order to achieve WHQS, which is likely to include renewal of the roof and external render and removal of the chimney stacks. The interior of the flats themselves are now in poor condition having had no WHQS investment to date, low rates of repair reporting and having been void for a considerable period of time.
- 4.17 The local ward Member and leaseholders of the shop are supportive of the flats remaining mothballed and have indicated that there has been a significant reduction in antisocial behaviour experienced in the vicinity of the block since the flats have been secured, which has had a positive impact on the ground floor business. The leaseholders have also demonstrated a willingness to consider relocation if required, to facilitate refurbishment or demolition of the block were the Council able to provide suitable alternative premises within the local community, but to date no such suitable alternative has been identified.
- 4.18 The potential feasibility of retaining the ground floor of the building for the shop business, whilst removing the structure of the upper floors and associated ongoing liability has been considered. Whilst it has been established that it would be technically possible to demolish the upper two floors whilst retaining the shops it is not considered a cost viable option at present. The demolition would need to be slow and measured and the shops below would need to shut for the duration for safety reasons. It is recognised that it may be cheaper option to demolish the block in its entirety and build a new shop if a funding opportunity arises in the future and it is hoped that opportunities may present themselves for this latter option, perhaps as part of a wider regeneration initiative.
- 4.19 Officers consider that demolition of the whole block would be an appropriate course of action but recognise the importance of supporting, as far as possible, the successful business currently trading out of the premises to the benefit of the local community. It is therefore, requested that Members consider approving the principle of demolition of the block but that the flats remain mothballed for the time being and that this decision to demolish not be implemented at least until the current commercial lease expires, a suitable alternative premises is identified for the business, or the ongoing liability incurred by the Council in maintaining the structure and exterior of the building whilst the flats are mothballed is no longer considered financially viable. During this interim period officers would also continue to actively investigate funding opportunities that may become available to the Authority in relation to the block and/or the shop business that would enable the business to remain in the community whilst allowing for demolition of all or part of the block.

5. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

5.1 This report contributes to the Well-being Goals as set out in Links to Strategy above. It is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act in that it is:

- Long Term – supports the sustainability of cohesive communities for tenants and residents.
- Prevention – recognises and addresses the impact of low demand properties and anti-social behaviour on the wider community.
- Integration – provides for balanced and sustainable communities where people want to live.
- Collaboration – Joined up working arrangements within the organisation and with outside agencies to provide sustainable, stable and cohesive communities in pursuit of shared objectives.
- Involvement – Engaging with tenants, residents and local stakeholders in determining the most appropriate course of action.

6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

6.1 An EIA screening has been completed in accordance with the Council's Strategic Equality Plan and supplementary guidance. No potential for unlawful discrimination and/or low level or minor negative impact has been identified, therefore a full EIA as not been carried out.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The anticipated cost of internal and external repairs and improvements to achieve WHQS at 1 to 9, River Road has been calculated at £150,000. This would be off-set by the demolition and clearance of the site which is broadly estimated at £100,000 inclusive of fees. There would therefore be a potential net saving of £50,000 however consideration will need to be given to possible future uses of the site. Landscaping of the site footprint has been estimated at £35,000.

7.2 The anticipated cost of internal and external repairs and improvements to achieve WHQS at 3 to 6, The Grove has been calculated at £135,000. This would be off-set by the demolition and clearance of the site which is broadly estimated at £50,000, inclusive of fees. There would therefore be a net saving of £85,000 however consideration will need to be given to possible future uses of the site.

7.3 The ongoing voids in River Road and The Grove have resulted in an ongoing loss of rental income. Anticipated rental loss for 2018/19 is £32,879 for River Road and £16,435 for the Grove. The reduction of thirteen flats would result in a minor adjustment to the housing stock which will have minimal impact in respect of rental income in view of the previous history of the areas.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Due to the specialist nature of the demolition work at River Road and The Grove an appropriate contractor would need to be appointed.

9. CONSULTATIONS

9.1 The proposal to demolish the block of flats known as 1 to 9 River Road has been discussed with and actively supported by the local ward Member and Police. There are currently no tenants in the block with whom to consult, however, as mentioned previously, a petition has recently been received, signed by 341 local residents, calling for the demolition of the block.

- 9.2 Initial discussions have been held with the leaseholder of the shops and will continue at the relevant time should the property be demolished or refurbished.
- 9.3 Comments received from the Consultees listed below have been incorporated into this report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 CHTG are asked to provide their views on the recommendations as set out below which will be provided to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee for information and presented to Cabinet together with the recommendations below:
- 10.1.1 That the block known as 1 to 9 River Road be demolished.
- 10.1.2 That the principle to proceed with demolition be agreed in respect of 1 to 6, The Grove, Fochriw, but that the demolition be deferred until the current lease of 1 and 2, The Grove expires, a suitable alternative premises is identified for the business currently operating out of the block or the ongoing liability incurred by the Council in maintaining the mothballed building is no longer considered financially viable.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 Demolition is recommended due to a recognition of the ongoing lack of demand for such accommodation in the Upper Rhymney Valley, the level of investment required in order to achieve WHQS in these low demand blocks prior to them being re-let, and the significant impact of crime and antisocial behaviour associated with the letting and management of these blocks which is detrimental to the local communities.

12. STATUTORY POWER

- 12.1 Housing Act 1985.

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Consultees: Christina Harrhy, Interim Chief Executive,
David Street, Director of Social Services and Housing
Councillor Lisa Phipps, Cabinet Member for Homes and Places
Councillor Gaynor Oliver, Local Ward Member, Pontlottyn
Councillor David Hardacre, Local Ward Member, Darran Valley
Shaun Couzens, Chief Housing Officer
Rachel Thornett, Tenancy Enforcement Manager
Sandra Isaacs, Rents Manager
Debbie Bishop, Area Housing Manager
Mandy Betts, Tenant and Community Involvement Manager
Paul Smythe, Housing Repair Operations Manager
Richard Crane, Senior Solicitor
Anwen Cullinane, Senior Policy Officer, Equalities and Welsh Language
Lesley Allen, Principal Accountant
Natalie Kenny, Community Safety
Lisa Lane Interim Monitoring Officer