



HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 18TH JULY 2023 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor A. Whitcombe - Chair

Councillors:

G. Ead, L. Jeremiah, A. McConnell, L. Phipps, J. A. Pritchard, S. Williams, W. Williams and J. Winslade.

Cabinet Members:

Councillors P. Leonard (Planning and Public Protection), J. Pritchard (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change) and S. Cook (Housing).

Together with:

N. Taylor-Williams (Head of Housing), R. Kyte (Head of Regeneration and Planning), J. Roberts-Waite (Head of Strategy and Development), A. Dallimore (Regeneration Services Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer) and R. Barrett (Minute Taker).

RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live-streamed and recorded and would be made available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#) Members were advised that voting on decisions would be taken via Microsoft Forms.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chair made reference to this being the last meeting of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee in its current format and expressed his thanks to Councillor P. Cook (Vice-Chair), Members and Officers for all the support that had been given to him as Chair and for their involvement and contributions to the meetings.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P. Cook (Vice-Chair), D. Cushing, C. Forehead, A. Hussey, C. Mann, B. Owen, and Mrs D. Price.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 27TH FEBRUARY 2023

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 27th February 2023 be approved as a correct record and by way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 7 for, 0 against and 2 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 27th February 2023 (minute nos. 1 – 8) be approved as a correct record.

4. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

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

5. HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Cath Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager) presented the report, which outlined details of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the period July 2023 to March 2024.

Members were asked to consider the FWP alongside the Cabinet work programme and suggest any changes prior to publication on the Council's website. Members were reminded of the changes to the scrutiny committee structure from September 2023, with it noted that new FWPs are currently being drafted which will be brought to the first meeting of the new committee for approval, and therefore the items listed may be subject to change.

It was moved and seconded that the report recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 9 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Forward Work Programme as appended to the meeting papers be published on the Council's website.

6. CABINET REPORTS

It was confirmed that there had been no requests for any of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda to be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

7. COVID 19, ECONOMIC RECOVERY FRAMEWORK - MONITORING REPORT

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change presented the report, which provided an update on the Council's economic recovery framework, comprising three distinct phases; Restart, Revive and Renew. The report focused on the Revive and Renew Phases which follow on from an initial 'Government led' response (the Restart Phase) that delivered financial and employer support at pace in response to the pandemic. The Scrutiny Committee were asked to acknowledge the progress made against the agreed action plan for economic recovery as set out at Appendix 1 of the report and to provide any comments on the report and action plan prior to the matter being considered by Cabinet.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the localised actions and positive interventions made against the Council's "Foundation for Success; Delivering Prosperity After Covid" Plan which had been approved by Cabinet in December 2021 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Members were reminded of the complex challenges which have impacted businesses across the whole of the UK, including inflation, high utility bills, the prolonged cost-of-living crisis and a potential recession ahead. The Council has an obligation to rise to these challenges with meaningful and continued support for the long-term ambitions for the county borough and this requires working together and making the case for long term economic prosperity in the region, and these localised actions have clearly served to sustain businesses through a period of unprecedented turmoil. There is now a need to develop a new economic regeneration strategy that aligns with the Cardiff Capital Region's growth agenda. The new strategy will create and further develop skills in the local workforce, which align with the buoyant job market in the county borough and in the CCR, in order to improve the prosperity of local communities in the longer term.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the report and a Member referred to the recent CCR Unleashed Conference held in Bargoed and asked if there are plans to hold more events of this type. It was confirmed that this was the first regional event held and that Bargoed was selected as the host location in order to support businesses across the Heads of the Valley area. It is intended to hold more events across the Cardiff Capital Region, with further events anticipated across the county borough.

The Scrutiny Committee sought further information on the Covid business rates grants, the research carried out during the height of the pandemic, whether any follow-up research had been conducted, and the effectiveness and impact of these grants on businesses. Officers confirmed that research was carried out to understand the likely survival rate of businesses, and the Covid grant support was rolled out at a significant rate during this time with a 100% take-up. These grants helped to sustain businesses through a challenging period and although a subsequent audit has not been carried out at Council level, it is understood that a national audit was carried out, and Officers confirmed they would arrange to provide further information to the Member following the meeting.

Further information was sought on the proposed hotel development in Caerphilly as part of the Leisure Quarter proposal. The Scrutiny Committee were advised that it is proposed to locate the Leisure Quarter along Cardiff Road, as it is more suitable in terms of location than the previously proposed Park Lane site. Cabinet approval for a

Property Acquisition Fund totalling £5.6m has been secured to acquire the properties along Cardiff Road to make way for the new Leisure Quarter, and the Caerphilly 2035 Programme Manager is in discussion with the owners of these properties. Clarification was sought on whether compulsory purchase powers would be used to acquire this area, with it noted that although this is a possible option, the Council will seek to negotiate with the property owners in the first instance. This will be a lengthy process and significant work is still required to identify which properties along this area will be needed to take forward the proposal, and in terms of governance Cabinet would need to agree the use of compulsory purchase powers if necessary.

A query was received on the Caerphilly Enterprise Fund and Members were informed that that £2.36m has been distributed to businesses across the county borough to support employment and services during a very difficult period. A question was also received on what is being done to improve the transport links between the north and south of the county borough. It was confirmed that the WG Bus Emergency Scheme funding has been renewed and it was acknowledged that the public transport network, particularly from east to west, remains limited. Further reference was made to the Unleashed Conference at Bargoed and the efforts to regenerate the north of the county borough. The transport issue needs to be led by the CCR approach as it cannot be resolved by Caerphilly Council working alone.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the following recommendation be approved, and by way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 8 for, 0 against and 1 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee acknowledged the progress made against the agreed action plan for economic recovery as set out at Appendix 1 and provided comments on the report and action plan prior to the matter being considered by Cabinet.

8. DRAFT DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE STRATEGY 'BUILDING TOGETHER'

The Cabinet Member for Housing presented the report, which sought to address the ongoing housing crisis in Caerphilly and provide much needed affordable homes for those residents who are waiting on the Common Housing Register, including 360 residents in temporary accommodation who are awaiting homes that better suit their needs and requirements.

The report detailed the content of the first Development and Governance Strategy for Caerphilly Homes and proposed the creation of a Development and Governance Project Board (DGPB) that will oversee the delivery of the development programme. The Board will meet monthly and report annually against the core areas of the development programme to the relevant scrutiny committee, with an annual report to be presented to Cabinet. The report also sought approval for the creation of 100 low carbon affordable homes per annum over the next 10 years and to agree that Caerphilly Homes adopts the Design Commission for Wales' Placemaking Charter, which sets out high level quality and design standards that will inform and underpin each Caerphilly Homes development.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the report and Officers responded to queries regarding building standards across private developments and Caerphilly Homes, the use of factory builds, and whether solar measures would be utilised in new builds. It was noted that Caerphilly Homes already conform to Welsh Development Quality Requirements, particularly in terms of space standards, which sets Caerphilly Homes

apart from private developers. Within the Strategy, Caerphilly Homes will be building to Building Regulations 2025 as a minimum, which is well above the current standard, and the homes will be as fabric efficient as possible. The current schemes in the pipeline for outline planning permission focus on a fabric-first approach, and therefore the use of solar panels is not being deployed. However, this may potentially be explored across future developments and retrofitting of solar panels has already been applied to some older sheltered stock schemes. In terms of factory-built properties, these could potentially be utilised in time once there is a critical mass of users, but the Council are not currently seeing demonstrable cost efficiencies with the cost of build and delivery.

Clarification was sought on why the number of new homes had been set at 100 units per year. Officers explained that having looked at the overall landscape of partners that are delivering, together with internal capacity across Caerphilly Homes, it is felt that a target of 100 houses per year is achievable in terms of managing expectations. There are a number of sites and schemes taking shape in the background, and the intention is that over the course of the 10-year strategy, 1000 low carbon affordable homes will be delivered by 2033, which would be a very good target to achieve.

One Member asked if the new homes would comprise 2 or 3 bedrooms, highlighted the overwhelming need for 3-bedroom properties in his ward, and asked how many 1, 2 and 3-bedroom properties were in the Council's housing stock. Officers confirmed that Caerphilly Homes use the Local Market Housing Assessment to identify the level of housing need across its communities, which is consulted as part of the planning process. Although WG have recently made some changes to the LHMA, the fundamental need is for 1-bedroom properties, although there may be particular need for 2 or 3-bedroom properties in certain areas that the Council will look to address as a developer. It was confirmed that Officers would provide detail on the number of bedrooms across its current housing stock to the Member following the meeting.

Another Member what the Council are doing to encourage tenants with surplus bedrooms to move into a home more suited to their needs and to free up these homes for other families. Offices confirmed that the Council have commissioned research with their housing association partners to examine the needs of older people and find out what will encourage them to "right size" and consider moving into a smaller property. The Council is also looking to improve its later living offer, including a proposal to redevelop Ty Darran Care Home, and a comprehensive report will be brought to Scrutiny Committee in the autumn regarding the types of accommodation that may encourage older people to right size and move out of family housing.

A Member asked whether the Council's Monitoring Officer had provided views in relation to the establishment of the Project Board, and how the Design Commission for Wales' Placemaking Charter would benefit residents if adopted by the Council. It was confirmed that the Monitoring Officer is content with the Board proposals, and both he and the Section 151 Officer would need to agree the financial threshold before any decision-making is undertaken. It was explained that the Placemaking Charter will focus on community involvement in the development of proposals, ensuring that any locations for new development are suitable in terms of the existing public amenities (such as transport) and are able to cohesively fit together with existing communities.

A Member expressed concerns that the Project Board might lose some oversight in terms of the decision-making process around housing delivery, and asked whether the risk of overdevelopment in some areas would be recognised. Officers gave assurances that the Project Board (including Cabinet Members and the Chair of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee) will examine feasible development

opportunities as they arise, with any contentious proposals being subject to further review. Any issues around overdevelopment will also be addressed through the normal planning process. The Council will use the LHMA to ascertain those areas in need of development and will encourage housebuilding towards the north of the county borough. It was emphasised that the Council is facing a housing crisis and therefore it is imperative that they explore every development opportunity that comes their way.

In response to a query around land viability and the role of the Project Board in finding this land, Officers outlined the processes that are used to identify appropriate land supply. It was noted that the Board will assist with the processes, the speed of the decision making, the financial thresholds and viability assessments. Potential sites will be examined on a regular basis as they come through the various routes, and the Board will then make decisions on whether these proposals are taken forward. Clarification was also sought on the emerging Land Prospectus and Officers explained this is currently in the preparation stages, and although it does not form part of the report recommendations, the document will detail the sites within the Council's land portfolio that are considered developable and offer the best chance of development.

One Member suggested that the Council should be more ambitious in its housing targets and also raised a query regarding Section 106 agreements and the variance of affordable housing obligations across different parts of the county borough. Officers emphasised the need to be realistic in terms of aspirations and confirmed that the build targets will be reviewed if these are continually being exceeded across the course of the delivery programme. Members were advised that the affordable housing obligations are taken from the Local Development Plan adopted in 2010 and have been derived from the need in each area, together with land viability, and these targets vary because the Council is not able to justify high targets in more deprived areas where the land may be less viable. These targets are subject to negotiation with developers and may be increased if viable to do so; however, the target will take account of Section 106 agreements and all other requirements through the planning process, such as the Community Infrastructure Levy.

A Member asked if the Council are on target to create 400 homes by 2025 and Officers confirmed that there are currently around 160 homes in the outline planning stage and another 45 homes to be brought forward in the next few months. Meeting these numbers will be very much dependent on the ability to bring forward land in the county borough and obtaining support both internally and from Members in bringing forward some of these sites.

Members congratulated Nick Taylor-Williams and his team on the production of the report and the much-needed Strategy to address the housing crisis across the county borough.

Following consideration of the report and having noted its comments, it was moved and seconded that the following recommendations be forwarded to Cabinet for approval, and by way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation (and in noting there were 9 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that: -

- (i) the establishment of the Development and Governance Project Board (DGPB) be approved;

- (ii) the responsibilities of the Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) Board are assumed by the Development and Governance Project Board;
- (iii) the delivery of 100 low carbon affordable homes per annum be approved;
- (iv) the Design Commission for Wales' Placemaking Charter be adopted by the Council as it underpins the design quality for all Caerphilly Homes Developments, and the Council are a signatory to the Charter.

The meeting closed at 6.46 p.m.