



## **CABINET**

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN ON WEDNESDAY 28TH OCTOBER 2015 AT 2.00 P.M.**

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PRESENT:

Councillor K.V. Reynolds - Chair

Councillors:

Mrs C. Forehead (HR and Governance/Business Manager), N. George (Community and Leisure Services), D.T. Hardacre (Performance and Asset Management), K. James (Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development), D.V. Poole (Cabinet Member for Housing), T.J. Williams (Highways, Transportation and Engineering) and R. Woodyatt (Cabinet Member for Social Services).

Together with:

C. Burns (Interim Chief Executive), C. HARRY (Corporate Director - Communities), D. Street (Corporate Director Social Services), N. Scammell (Acting Director of Corporate Services & S151).

Also in Attendance:

C. Jones (Head of Performance and Property), P. Elliot (Head of Regeneration and Planning), C. Evans (Committee Services Officer)

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors B. Jones and R. Passmore.

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

#### **3. CABINET – 14TH OCTOBER 2015**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14th October 2015 (minute nos. 1 - 9) be approved and signed as a correct record.

## **MATTERS ON WHICH EXECUTIVE DECISIONS WERE REQUIRED**

### **4. IMPROVING GOVERNANCE PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The report provided Cabinet with an update on the progress of the Improving Governance Programme (IGP), which included the action plan resulting from the Wales Audit Office (WAO) Public Interest Report on the Chief Officers Pay published in March 2013 and the wider Improving Governance Programme (as presented to and approved by Council on 28th January 2014 and Cabinet on 19th February 2014) covering also the action plans resulting from the WAO Public Interest Report on Chief Officers Essential Car Users and Annual Leave Allowance published in December 2013 and the Special Inspection Report published in January 2014.

In addition, the report provided an update on the progress on the more recent action plan approved by Council on 27th January 2015 following the Wales Audit Office Report Follow up of special inspection and reports in the public interest (January 2015).

Cabinet noted that the actions for completion, however, it was recommended that the IGPB be formally concluded and the outstanding minor actions be taken forward by the Corporate Governance Panel (CGP).

- Item 2 – Review of Scrutiny arrangements is now completed.
- Item 4 – Raising awareness of whistleblowing policy amongst staff – is approaching completion.
- Item 5 – An updated and more relevant HR balance scorecard is now completed.
- Item 6 – Programme of ongoing risk management training for Members is now completed.
- Item 7 – Robust action plan to improve Internal Audit is now completed.
- Item 8 – Implementation of a HR strategy is approaching completion.
- Item 9 – Self evaluation is now completed.

Cabinet discussed the report and sought assurance that the outstanding items would be completed and addressed fully and reported back to Cabinet. Officers highlighted that Item 4 is reaching completion, and is pending formal consultation, following which, the HR Strategy would be brought back to Cabinet for consideration and approval. In addition, it was noted that the minutes of the CGP were presented to Audit Committee and Officers suggested that a formal report be presented to the relevant Committee confirming the conclusion of any outstanding items.

Cabinet thanked the Officer for the report and expressed their gratitude for the work undertaken by the IGPB, and staff throughout the Authority in addressing the concerns and recommendations raised by the WAO, which has further been acknowledged within the latest WAO Report.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

**RESOLVED** that for the reasons contained in the Officers report:

- (i) the positive progress (as detailed in the report) in addressing recommendations and proposals for improvements by the Wales Audit Office included in the WAO Public Interest Report on the Chief Officers Pay published in March 2013, the Chief Officers Essential Car Users and Annual Leave Allowance published in December 2013, the Special Inspection Report published in January 2014 and the WAO Report Follow up of special inspection and report in the public interest (January 2015) be noted;

- (ii) the Improving Governance Programme Board be formally concluded and the small number of outstanding actions be transferred to the Corporate Governance Panel as per paragraph 4.6 of the report.

## **5. LAND AT EASTVIEW TERRACE, BARGOED**

The report sought the approval of Cabinet to the principle of disposing of land at Eastview Terrace, Bargoed to United Welsh Housing Association (UW) on terms to be negotiated.

The site was acquitted along with other parcels of land adjacent to the railway line at Eastview Terrace and Aeron Place and is described as wasteland; it has been let for a number of years for grazing purposes, but the tenancy has lapsed. The site has been declared surplus to requirements and is currently held by Property Services, pending disposal.

Members noted that an operational housing requirement for the provision of affordable housing has been identified; the housing waiting list data for the Bargoed area demonstrates that there is housing demand in this area. The 2015 Local Housing Market Assessment identifies a shortfall throughout the County Borough of 526 affordable homes per annum. It also identifies a significant need for affordable housing across the County Borough.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the Officers recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officers report:

- (i) the land at Eastview Terrace be sold to United Welsh Housing Association for the development of affordable housing, on terms to be negotiated;
- (ii) approval of the detailed terms of the disposal be delegated to the Head of Performance and Property Services in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Performance and Asset Management, for the purposes identified in the report.

## **6. RHYMNEY TOWN CENTRE LOANS SCHEME**

The report provided Cabinet with details of repayable funding secured from Welsh Government (WG) towards a long-term town centre loan scheme for Rhymney. The scheme will fund projects that complement the WG Vibrant and Viable Places Tackling Poverty Fund and that seek to reduce the number of empty, underused sites and premises in town centres.

In February 2015 Welsh Government (WG) launched a new initiative offering long term loans to Local Authorities to provide capital funding to towns located within WG's Tackling Poverty Fund areas for key regeneration projects. The loans are available to Local Authorities for a maximum period of 15 years.

Rhymney is the only area within the borough identified within WG's Tackling Poverty Fund. An application was made for funding under the Town Centre Loans Scheme and in July 2015 £500,000 was secured that could be used.

Cabinet noted that there are inherent risks with loan funding from the Welsh Government and also subsequently to the private sector. However these risks will be minimised with secure protocols set up to manage and govern the scheme. Members noted the risks associated with the Town Centre Loan Scheme and were made aware that that the need to operate strict criteria and manage risk may mean that we are unable to allocate all or some of the loan fund. Loans are unlikely to be attractive to Rhymney because most property owners would be unable to meet repayments. Indeed even grant schemes where a property owner has had to make a small contribution have proved problematic in this locality in the past.

Members thanked the Officer for the report and were disappointed to note that Welsh Government had allocated monies in the form of a loan and not a grant. In addition, concerns were raised around the viability of the scheme, which has previously been piloted in more affluent areas.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officers report, the implementation of a Town Centre Loan Scheme in Rhymney be approved.

The meeting closed at 2.29pm

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 11th November 2015.

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CHAIR