



SPECIAL CABINET

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN ON WEDNESDAY 16TH DECEMBER 2015 AT 2.00 P.M.

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), Mrs B. Jones (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services), R. Passmore (Education and Lifelong Learning), D.V. Poole (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing), T.J. Williams (Highways, Transportation and Engineering) and R. Woodyatt (Social Services)

Together with:

C. Burns (Interim Chief Executive), C. Harray (Corporate Director - Communities), N. Scammell (Acting Director of Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer), D. Street (Corporate Director - Social Services)

Also in Attendance:

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

MATTERS ON WHICH EXECUTIVE DECISIONS WERE REQUIRED

3. ROWAN PLACE, RHYMNEY – PROPOSED DEMOLITION OF FLATS – BLOCK 69-72

The report sought Cabinet approval to demolish one block of flats in Rowan Place, Rhymney in conjunction with the improvement of the physical condition of the estate.

Officers explained that following the identification of severe damp and external defects to the external fabric of the properties in Rowan Place a major investment programme is currently being undertaken to bring the properties up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS). 48 of the properties are 2 bedroom flats comprising 12 blocks, which is a large concentration in a very small area. One of the blocks currently has no occupiers and an opportunity has therefore arisen to demolish this block, which would address issues relating to anti-social behaviour and create a more open area in the centre of the estate.

Grant funding has been secured from Welsh Government under the Vibrant and Viable Places (VVP) for environmental enhancement works in Rowan Place and the funding will enable works to be undertaken to the site of the demolished block of flats, together with an adjacent site occupied by vacant garages.

Cabinet were informed that the proposed demolition has been discussed with the local ward member, who has raised no objections but requested that residents of Rowan Place be consulted, with particular consideration being given to the after-use of the cleared site. Subject to ratification from Cabinet, the demolition of the block of flats will require the consent of the Welsh Minister and a formal application for consent will need to be made to Welsh Government. This will be accompanied by a statement setting out the purpose of the disposal, a District Valuer's report on the open market value of the property, the financial implications in respect of reduced rent, the Cabinet approval to the disposal/demolition, and the Cabinet report.

Cabinet expressed their support for the proposals and referred to the community benefits of the environmental enhancement works for the residents of Rowan Place. It was confirmed by Officers that the Authority did not have a demolition policy as such but that potential demolitions are considered on their own merits as and when the need arises.

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 Officer's report:-

- (i) a formal application for consent be made to Welsh Government to proceed with the demolition of 69-72 Rowan Place;
- (ii) subject to recommendation 1, and having regard to the views of the local ward member, consultation take place with the residents of Rowan Place in respect of the after-use of the cleared site;
- (iii) subject to recommendation 1, a report be requested from the District Valuer on the open market value of the property as required by Welsh Government.

4. PROPOSED DEMOLITION OF FORMER LANSBURY PARK COMMUNITY CENTRE

The report sought Cabinet approval for the demolition of the former Lansbury Park Community Centre which has been declared surplus to operational requirements.

Officers explained that the former Lansbury Park Community Centre was transferred to Housing Services many years ago and was used as an operational store for the on-site workforce. Following the centralisation of the in-house workforce to Tiryberth Depot, the building has been declared surplus to requirements. As there has been no other service requirements for the building, and due to its poor condition and appearance, it was recommended that the building be demolished.

The removal of the building would contribute to the environmental improvements that are anticipated for Lansbury Park as part of the Council's WHQS investment programme. Following discussions with Welsh Government, there is also an opportunity for CCBC to bid for Vibrant and Viable funding, as there appears to be an underspend on the all-Wales allocation for 2015/16. If successful, Welsh Government would require that the demolition is completed within the current financial year. Any further grant-funded opportunities would also be pursued.

It was noted that agreement on the proposed demolition had been reached following consultation with local ward members and Officers, and that should the proposal to proceed with the demolition be ratified by Cabinet, tenants/residents on the estate would be consulted to establish options for improving the area as a means of determining the environmental programme.

Cabinet expressed their support for the proposals and made reference to the positive impact of the proposed demolition on the surrounding community. Members asked that their appreciation for the work of Officers in respect of facilitating environmental improvements within the Lansbury Park estate be placed on record.

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 Officer's report, the proposals for the demolition of the former Lansbury Park Community Centre be supported.

5. WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS – COMPLIANCE AND CHALLENGES

The report provided Members with an update regarding the Welsh Language Standards and where the Council now stands in terms of the 172 Standards that were issued to it by the Welsh Language Commissioner on 30th September 2015.

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 included a commitment to set a common standard for Welsh Language service across public bodies, thus facilitating the public's understanding and access to those services. The related action plan and requirement to comply with the Standards will replace the Council's Welsh Language Scheme from 30th March 2016 and is a corporate objective under the draft Strategic Equality Plan 2016-2020, which is currently out for consultation.

The report set out the position of the Council as of 30th September 2015, noting the changes made to the specific Caerphilly County Borough Council (CCBC) set of Standards following the evidence submitted during the consultation period and covering an initial set of Standards that can be challenged further.

The final Compliance Notice from the Welsh Language Commissioner (contained within Appendix 1 of the report) outlined the 172 Standards and the exemptions where relevant, together with the timescales for implementation. Appendix 2 identified which Standards had changed and which had remained the same since the summer's consultation period. Appendix 3 documented the 6 Standards currently being recommended by Officers for a formal challenge, following receipt of the final compliance notice.

Cabinet were advised that in addition to the 6 Standards already identified by Officers, there were an additional 5 Standards that could be considered for further challenge. Standards 112, 112A, 114 and 115 require CCBC to allow staff members to be able to make complaints on any work related issues in Welsh to the relevant services within the organisation, and it was the view of Officers that these could be challenged in respect of the required timescales for compliance. Standard 139 (which requires CCBC to conduct all staff recruitment interviews bilingually) was also recommended for challenge in that there was believed to be confusion with Standard 138 (offer and provide on-request simultaneous translation service), which CCBC already comply with.

Subject to ratification from Cabinet, the 6 original challenges and the additional 5 challenges would be put in motion and submitted to the Welsh Language Commissioner, prior to further work being undertaken on any other potential challenges identified by Cabinet Members.

Cabinet noted the extensive amount of work undertaken by Equalities and Welsh Language staff in examining the Standards, identifying those considered to be difficult or impossible to achieve, and collating supporting evidence in this respect. Members requested that their appreciation for the work of these Officers be placed on record.

A query was raised in respect of compliance with the Standards and the penalties faced by the Council if these could not be achieved following the implementation date of 30th March 2016. Members were advised that there were financial implications in respect of non-compliance with the Standards but that there would be an opportunity to challenge or appeal any breaches prior to reaching this stage. Officers added that an annual report would be produced by the Council to demonstrate how the Standards were being met, and Cabinet were also provided with examples of the assessment process carried out by WG to determine compliance with these standards.

An additional recommendation to the report was moved and seconded, in that the submission of evidence to challenge the additional 5 Standards (112, 112A, 114, 115 and 138), as identified by Officers, be approved. As such, and subject to the inclusion of this additional recommendation, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the Officer's report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officers report:

- (i) the submission of the evidence to challenge the 6 Standards as outlined in Appendix 3 of the Officer's Report be approved;
- (ii) the Standards shown in Groups A – G, excluding any specific standards that Cabinet wish to consider for challenge, be formally agreed as reasonable and proportionate;
- (iii) that, following on from the above, after due consideration of the other Standards, shown mainly (but not necessarily exclusively) in Groups H, I, J and K, any further challenges agreed upon by Cabinet be progressed in accordance with the evidence available;
- (iv) the submission of evidence to challenge an additional 5 Standards (112, 112A, 114, 115 and 138) as identified by Officers and outlined at the meeting be approved.

The meeting closed at 2.32 p.m.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 20th January 2016.

CHAIR