



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
TUESDAY, 19TH JANUARY 2016 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor H.W. David – Chair
Councillor S. Morgan – Vice-Chair

Councillors:

L. Binding, Mrs P. Cook, C.J. Cuss, Miss E. Forehead, C. Hawker, Ms J.G. Jones, C.P. Mann,
D. Rees, R. Saralis, J. Simmonds

Cabinet Members:

Mrs C. Forehead (HR and Governance/Business Manager), D. T. Hardacre (Performance and
Asset Management), Mrs B. Jones (Corporate Services, D.V. Poole (Housing)

Together with:

N. Scammell (Acting Director of Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer), S. Couzens
(Chief Housing Officer), P. Davy (Head of Programmes), L. Lucas (Head of Procurement),
M. Betts (Tenant and Community Involvement Manager), S. Isaacs (Rents Manager), D. Titley
(Corporate Customer Services Manager), F. Wilkins (Public Sector Housing Manager),
A. Price (Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J.E. Fussell, G. Kirby, A. Lewis and J.
Taylor.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S. Morgan declared an interest in Agenda Item 10 (Leaseholder Charges and
Consultation Arrangements). Details are minuted with the respective item.

3. MINUTES – 10TH NOVEMBER 2015

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on
10th November 2015 (minute nos. 1 – 12) be approved as a correct record and signed
by the Chair.

4. MINUTES – 7TH DECEMBER 2015

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Special Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 7th December 2015 (minute nos. 1 – 7) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

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

6. REPORTS OF THE CABINET MEMBERS

The Scrutiny Committee received verbal reports from Cabinet Members D.V. Poole and Mrs B. Jones.

Councillor D.V. Poole (Cabinet Member for Housing) gave an overview on progress in respect of the Welsh Quality Housing Standard programme (WHQS). Over 1,000 properties have benefitted from internal works between April-December 2015, with it anticipated that this will increase to around 1450 properties by March 2016. Although less than the original target set for the year, momentum has been established and if continuity in the issue of contract packages to all contractors is maintained, there can be confidence regarding the delivery of this aspect of the programme.

Members were advised of major challenges and further delays within the WHQS external works, which are partly due to contractor performance and partly due to the need to re-survey and amend the specification for the works. A decision to re-survey Council properties was instigated following concerns raised by the Project Board regarding cost escalation and the finding that some of the early external works were exceeding WHQS requirements. The problems have been further compounded as a result of limited tender returns, prices in excess of pre-tender estimates and instances of contractors declining work at the award stage. Nationally there have been reports of labour shortages within the construction industry which is causing contractors to increase prices and decline work.

The Cabinet Member also outlined resource issues within front-line roles in Housing Services, in that they are having difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified staff to fill these key roles. A number of posts have been filled by agency staff but suitable candidates are not always available, and therefore a number of other options are currently being explored.

Members were advised that a local resident, Lisa Evans, was recently nominated in the Residents and Communities category of the RESOLVE National Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) Awards by the Tenancy Enforcement Team. The Team nominated Lisa for her strength of character and determination when working with them to tackle neighbours who were causing anti-social behaviour in her community. The Safer Caerphilly Community Safety Partnership worked together and with Lisa to resolve the issues. The evidence Lisa gave resulted in a Closure Order being granted by the courts and the person causing the anti-social behaviour being removed from their property.

The Scrutiny Committee were informed of the achievements of the Council's Housing Repair Services. They were recently shortlisted as finalists for an Association of Public Services Excellence (APSE) award for the Best Performing Authority in Building Maintenance. APSE is the UK's largest voluntary benchmarking service for local councils and it works with over 250 councils across the UK. The award is issued in recognition of performance data submitted for 2014/15 which covers a number of performance dimensions. Although Caerphilly did not win

the award it was an achievement to be nominated as one of the top ten best performers in the UK.

Members were advised that the Tenancy Support Officers continue to assist tenants to maintain their tenancies and to support them with the impacts of the welfare reform changes. In the first six months of 2015, the Council's support staff assisted 381 tenants to claim an additional £304,000 of income.

Discussion of the Cabinet Members report ensued and Members extended their congratulations to Housing Repair Services staff on their APSE award nomination. The Scrutiny Committee were also pleased to note the achievement of Lisa Evans and paid tribute to her efforts and tenacity in tackling anti-social behaviour in her community.

Mrs B. Jones (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services) presented her report and informed Members that the 12-week budget consultation period closed on Friday 8th January 2016. Consultation activities were extensive and the feedback received is currently being analysed. Reports will be prepared for Members' consideration as part of the budget setting process at the end of February.

An extensive Microsoft Exchange email upgrade was successfully completed in December 2015, which is providing improved performance and reliability across the Council's IT systems. The remaining departmental office moves arising from the closure of Pontllanfraith House are due to be completed by the end of January 2016, and have been highly successful with minimal impact to Council services. The Council's computer upgrade programme is also now nearing completion, which will improve performance and reduce computer compatibility and associated IT training issues.

Arising from the Cabinet Member's report, a query was raised regarding the costs of extending support for Microsoft XP and Office 2003 packages used by the Council, and it was agreed that this information be circulated to Members following the meeting.

The Cabinet Members were thanked for their reports.

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. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT CHARGES – 2016-2017

Shaun Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), together with Sandra Isaacs (Rents Manager) presented the report, which provided details of the proposed increased charges which are intended to be effective for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2016/17 financial year. The report sought the views of Members on the proposed increases contained therein, prior to its presentation to Cabinet.

Officers summarised the process involved in preparing the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget. Members were advised that a new rent policy came into effect from April 2015 (as part of the Welsh Government's (WG) new Policy for Social Housing Rents) which was

accepted by the Scrutiny Committee in the 2015/16 HRA Charges report. The policy sets a target rent band for each Authority whereby councils will have to adjust average rents for their properties in line with this banding. The uplift on the new rent policy is fixed for five years and uses the previous September Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation figure (as opposed to the RPI inflation figure), plus a 1.5% real increase to the average local authority rent, with further discretion for local authorities to apply an additional £2.00 per week increase. WG have announced the minimum rent uplift for 2016/17 to be 1.4% (which is CPI at -0.1% plus 1.5%). However if this increase is applied it will not meet the rent policy target rent band that has been set for CCBC.

It was therefore proposed to apply a minimum rent increase of 3.5% per property from April 2016 to ensure compliance with the new rent policy and to maintain the viability of the Council's current business plan. Council tenants were consulted on whether the CCBC rent setting policy should change to take into account regional and energy efficiency factors that make up the WG rent matrix, with the majority in agreement that the existing policy should remain unchanged, and hence there is no intention to include these factors within the Council's rent setting policy.

The report also proposed increased service charges relating to the Council's Sheltered Housing Schemes. Officers explained that it was not proposed to increase the current guest room charge in sheltered housing complexes (in that a decrease in charges is being considered in order to increase their demand) and that a consultation exercise on alternative uses for these rooms is being arranged. Also outlined in the report were rent increases for Council-owned garages.

Consideration of the proposals ensued and discussion took place regarding the consultation exercise in respect of the rent setting policy and the mix of Council tenants surveyed. Officers outlined the processes used in contacting tenants to invite them to the consultation events and Members were informed that from 970 tenants who were invited to take part in the consultation, 56 tenants attended the events and a further 17 tenants attended a tenant information exchange. Those in attendance gave constructive and in-depth feedback on the proposals, with representation from a number of areas across the county borough.

Members suggested that it would be useful for the details of the demographic mix of tenants surveyed to be included in the report in order to demonstrate that tenants within the borough were fairly represented. Officers advised Members that the tenants who attended the focus groups were from all parts of the borough, lived in a variety of property types, were of mixed ages and held various employment status.

Discussion also took place in regards to the letting and use of Council-owned garages, the number of vacant garages within the Authority's portfolio, and a recently approved programme to improve and rationalise the Council's garage stock. In response to Members' queries, Officers confirmed that replacement hard standing parking would be considered in those cases where garages are removed, and that a 2% increase in garage rental charges was considered to be appropriate in line with the Council's plans to improve their existing garage stock.

Following consideration of the report, 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 abstention), this was agreed by the majority present.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:-

- (i) a minimum rent increase of 3.5% per property be applied from April 2016 to ensure compliance with the new rent policy and to maintain the viability of the current business plan, which is equivalent to an increase of CPI plus £1.63 (52

week basis);

- (ii) the current rent setting policy agreed in December 1997 remains in place;
- (iii) the variable service charge at sheltered complexes with communal facilities be set at £28.18 (bronze service), £30.63 (silver service) and £34.20 (gold service) over a 48 week basis from April 2016;
- (iv) the variable service charge in the four declassified sheltered schemes without communal facilities be set at £10.31 (bronze service), £12.76 (silver service) and £16.33 (gold service) over a 48 week basis from April 2016;
- (v) the service charge payable by residents of Tredegar Court be increased to £65.26 over a 48 week basis from April 2016;
- (vi) the meal cost at Tredegar Court be increased to £35.89 based on a 48 week basis from April 2016;
- (vii) the guest room charge for sheltered housing complexes be not increased from April 2016;
- (viii) the garage charges for Council and non-Council tenants be increased to £7.96 based on a 48 week basis from April 2016.

9. SMALL LOTS – REVIEW OF CONTRACT ARRANGEMENTS

Phil Davy (Head of Programmes) presented the report, which had been previously considered by the Caerphilly Homes Task Group on 10th December 2015. The report proposed changes to the contract arrangements for external works in the Eastern Valleys and sought the views of Members on these proposals prior to its presentation to Cabinet.

Members were informed that the external works within the Eastern Valleys are being undertaken through a series of small lots contracts. Experience over the last 2 years has given rise to concerns that if continued reliance is placed on this method alone there are significant risks that this part of the WHQS programme will not be delivered by 2020. A review of the contract arrangements has concluded that the external works on 2 large estates (Cefn Fforest and Ty Sign) should be undertaken by alternative means and there is an opportunity to link this with the procurement of new contract arrangements for external works in the Lower Rhymney Valley.

Officers referred to Section 4.17 of the report, which suggested that the Caerphilly location restriction remain for the residual value of the small lots work. Members were advised that it was proposed to make an amendment to the report in that this location restriction be removed (and that therefore tender invites for small lots contracts would be extended to include contractors located outside the county borough).

During the course of the ensuing debate, discussion took place regarding the rationale behind the proposal to remove the Caerphilly location restriction and Members sought assurances that the change in these contract arrangements would be of long-term benefit to the Authority. Officers explained that due to a change in the market conditions, there is a shortage of local contractors to fulfil the available small lots contracts (and therefore a need to extend the location criteria to include a wider geographical area).

Members expressed a wish to see local contractors used wherever possible to fulfil small lots contracts and discussion took place as to the feasibility of preference being afforded to such

businesses. Officers outlined the associated procurement process, explaining that should the location restriction be removed, all bids would be assessed using a fixed set of criteria and that priority could not be given to local Caerphilly contractors. Members were reminded of the support and encouragement given by the Authority to local businesses and were assured that this would continue. Members requested that their views on this matter be reported to Cabinet.

Arising from discussion during the course of the meeting, and in taking into the recommendation of Officers in respect of the removal of the Caerphilly location restriction for small lots contracts, it was moved and seconded that an amendment be made to Recommendation (iii) of the Officer's covering report to reflect this proposal.

Subject to this amendment, and by a show of hands and the majority present (and in noting there was 1 abstention) it was agreed that the Review of Contracts Arrangements in relation to Small Lots be supported. As such, it was

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:-

- (i) there be a reduction in the amount of work to be procured via small lots over the remaining period of the programme in view of the risks of not completing this by March 2020;
- (ii) the external works on the Ty Sign and Cefn Fforest estates be incorporated within the procurement of new contract arrangements for external works in the Lower Rhymney Valley;
- (iii) the adoption of 2 value bands be supported for small lots contract packages over the remainder of the programme period, subject to review in light of tender returns, and the Caerphilly location restriction for the residual value of the small lots work be removed;
- (iv) the Project Board continue to endorse the award of any small lot contract with a final tendered sum that exceeds the upper limit of either value band range where appropriate.

10. LEASEHOLDER CHARGES AND CONSULTATION ARRANGEMENTS

Councillor S. Morgan declared a prejudicial interest in that he is a property landlord and owns a leased premises, and left the meeting during consideration of the item.

Mandy Betts (Tenant and Community Involvement Manager), together with Shaun Couzens (Chief Housing Officer) presented the report, which had been prepared following a Member's request at a previous Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting for information on leaseholder charges and consultation arrangements. The report focused on leasehold arrangements within block of flats and outlined the types and proportion of charges payable by leaseholders, the options available for payment of charges and the process followed to comply with the legal requirement to consult leaseholders when charges for works are likely to exceed set thresholds.

Of the 417 flat leaseholders within the Council's housing stock who have subsequently bought their property under the Right to Buy scheme, approximately 50% of these properties are sub-let, bringing in rental income for the leaseholder. The Council has continuing responsibilities to maintain the external structure and communal areas of the blocks of flats and the leaseholder has responsibility for maintaining the inside of the flat. A list of general repair responsibilities was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

Chargeable items are determined by the leaseholder's lease, which also stipulates the share that the leaseholder has to proportionally contribute towards repair charges for their building. This contribution is towards charges for any repairs to the outside of the block and to communal areas within the blocks. Charges are billed annually for response repairs, ground rent, building insurance and a management fee. Response repairs are now charged using the schedule of rates as this will provide a more accurate charge for the actual work undertaken, and ground rent is currently a maximum of £10 per year. The current management fee of £10 per year, which is very low compared with other social landlords (some charge £80-£100 per year), is currently under review.

Major maintenance works are billed separately at the end of the contract, with chargeable items determined by the lease. However, there are variations in the types of lease in existence and full details of these were outlined in the report. The administration charge for major works is levied at 10% which is also currently under review but compares favourably with fees charged by other services. With the external works undertaken as part of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) investment programme, major works costs could be substantial in some cases as they could include rectification of structural defects, re-roofing, re-rendering, replacement doors, paths, fences. There are, however, payment options in place to assist leaseholders with these costs, and details of these were contained within the report.

The consultation arrangements for leaseholders are set out in legislation and the processes to be followed have a specific order and timescale. If any work is likely to result in a re-charge of £250 or more for an individual leaseholder the consultation process must be followed (if not, the amount charged is capped at £250 irrespective of the actual cost of the work). The consultation process can only be by-passed if an emergency repair is needed.

Leaseholders have the opportunity to nominate contractors for consideration for any work where their individual contribution would be estimated at more than £250 or the estimate for their block is more than £1,000. Details of these arrangements are outlined in the Notice of Intention to carry out works (with an example attached as Appendix 2 to the report). However, contractors have to meet the same requirements as those who would be appointed by the Council. Major works are tendered competitively and leaseholders are given information on the quotes returned, their estimated contribution and the appointed contractor in the Section 20 Notice sent out before works start (an example was attached as Appendix 3 to the report).

Members thanked the Officer for the report and discussion took place regarding best value in respect of tenders received for maintenance works. A Member queried Appendix 3 of the report (an example of a Section 20 Notice to leaseholders) in that the contract listed as an example had been awarded to the lowest tendering contractor, but had not been reflected in the tender figures listed. Officers confirmed that the contract in this instance had been awarded to the lowest tendering contractor in accordance with the listed tender figures (and not the party named in the example). Members also expressed a need for leaseholders to be afforded a choice in respect of the selected contractor and for contractors to be challenged in respect of chargeable amounts. Officers outlined the procurement process in respect of tender bids and explained that a detailed breakdown of costs associated with the tender were also made available to leaseholders.

A Member raised concerns regarding leaseholders being charged for repairs arising from damages caused by other parties and cited an example of where a leaseholder was charged for the repair to a damaged letterbox within their block. It was agreed that the Member would liaise separately with Officers regarding the details of this matter. Discussion took place regarding the remit of repair charges to leaseholders in the event of damage by other parties and Officers outlined details of the avenues available should these parties be identified.

Arising from the course of the debate, Members expressed the need for an exercise to be undertaken in respect of the charges passed from the Council to leaseholders, for good working practices and charges across partner organisations to be examined, and for contractor charges to be challenged to avoid the possibility of overcharging leaseholders. A Member indicated that they would wish to receive a further report addressing these points, and was asked to affirm this request later in the meeting upon consideration of Agenda Item 15 (To record any requests for an item to be included on the next available agenda).

Following consideration of the report, and in taking into account the comments received at the meeting, Members noted its contents.

11. ROWAN PLACE – PROGRESS REPORT AND SENSITIVE LETTINGS POLICY

Shaun Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), together with Fiona Wilkins (Public Sector Housing Manager) presented the report, which had been previously considered by the Caerphilly Homes Task Group on 10th December 2015. The report provided an update on the progress made in relation to delivering a targeted regeneration programme in Rowan Place, Rhymney, and sought the views of Members on the adoption of a sensitive lettings policy and introductory tenancies specifically in relation to Rowan Place, prior to its presentation to Cabinet.

Members were advised that following the identification of severe damp and external defects to the fabric of the properties in Rowan Place, Council approved a £4.2m budget to undertake a comprehensive refurbishment of the 72 Council properties on this estate. This regeneration programme has commenced and has been supplemented by funding from the Welsh Government which will facilitate environmental enhancements within Rowan Place. To date, internal works have been completed to 16 bungalows and 14 flats and the majority of external works to the bungalow have been completed. External wall insulation has been completed in 5 blocks of flats, groundworks are ongoing in 3 blocks, and roof work has commenced to 6 houses.

Officers explained that in previous years, Rowan Place has been plagued by high levels of anti-social behaviour, crime and drug and alcohol abuse. Consequentially, it was proposed to introduce a Sensitive Lettings Policy (attached at Appendix 1 of the report) which will cover all 2-bedroom flats in Rowan Place. The Policy incorporates a strict set of criteria against which applicants will be assessed prior to the granting of a tenancy, and will include introductory tenancies for new allocations. This will facilitate a 12-month trial period before a secure tenancy is awarded and include a provision for the tenancy to be brought to an end during this time, should the tenant breach the tenancy requirements. It was noted that introductory tenancies would only apply to new tenants and that any current tenant of Caerphilly Homes who transfers into Rowan Place will continue on an existing tenancy.

During the course of the ensuing debate, it was queried as to whether the Council's existing Sensitive Lettings Policy or Common Allocation Policy could be adapted to incorporate the proposed criteria instead, and concerns were raised as to whether the proposed Policy could be viewed as discriminatory to those residents of Rowan Place residing in the eligible properties. Officers highlighted the need for a separate Policy in order to address specific reputational problems associated with Rowan Place and improve demand for housing in the area. Members were also advised that an Equalities Impact Assessment of the Policy had been undertaken (attached at Appendix 2 of the report).

A query was raised regarding the criteria timeframes listed within the draft Sensitive Lettings Policy (in that some made reference to the last 12 months and others to the last 2 years). Members also expressed the need for cases of historical chaotic behaviour to be considered

sensitively in that this could have arisen from underlying mental health issues. Officers confirmed that all listed criteria should refer to the last 2 years and that this amendment would be made to the draft Sensitive Lettings Policy prior to its presentation to Cabinet.

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 Sensitive Lettings Policy (including introductory tenancies for new tenants in Rowan Place) as set out in the Appendix to the report be adopted.

12. RE-PROFILING OF WHQS PROGRAMME AND HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2016-17

Phil Davy (Head of Programmes) presented the report, which had been previously considered by the Caerphilly Homes Task Group on 10th December 2015. The report highlighted the changes to the Welsh Quality Housing Standard (WHQS) programme and set out the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme 2016-17, and sought the views of Members on the proposed adoption of these programmes, prior to its presentation to Cabinet.

Members were reminded of the major slippage to the WHQS programme during 2014/15 which necessitated a review of the investment strategy, and which was approved by Cabinet in February 2015, together with the Capital Programme for the 2015/16 financial year. The new programme was front-loaded in an attempt to catch up on the slippage but has led to resourcing issues (particularly in the Eastern Valleys) and has caused problems for the WHQS team due to the number of properties being worked on across the county borough.

It was explained that the number of the properties in the internal works programme reduces in the later years of the programme and a further re-profiling is advocated to have a more consistent number of properties each year. This is a benefit to some community areas that will be pulled forward, although others will slip back. Some of the changes are also to avoid gaps arising on the larger estates and enable continuity of phasing of works.

Officers explained that it would not be possible to catch up on the external works programme within 2015/16, with most of the current financial year planned programme expected to run into 2016/17. A number of sequence changes to external works take account of the change in approach in the Lower Rhymney Valley and will minimise (as far as practical) conflicts between internal and external works, with overlaps being managed as they arise. The HRA Capital Programme budget allocates the necessary resources based on the Savills cost plan to deliver the programme during 2016/17. Experience has shown that significant variances will arise once the properties are surveyed and contract packages are specified. A large contingency has therefore been included within the budget proposal. Appended to the report were details of community sequence changes in respect of internal and external works to Council homes, a re-profiled investment strategy and the HRA Capital Programme for 2016/17.

Discussion took place regarding the community sequence changes and Members referred to some communities where external works have been significantly postponed as a result of the re-profiling. Officers explained that a sensible approach needed to be undertaken in respect of these works and that by staggering these over a number of years, this would spread the investment needed, reduce pressure on available resources and ensure there is a manageable amount of work taking place at any one time.

In response to a Member's query, Officers confirmed that details of the re-profiling arrangements would be communicated to tenants via the Council's website, tenant

newsletters and Tenant Liaison Officers. Concerns were expressed regarding the significant re-profiling of external works in some communities (in that this delay could have an impact on tenants) and Officers explained that such delays were mainly restricted to external works only as they have a lesser impact to tenants than internal works. Discussion took place regarding tenant expectations in respect of the programme of works and Officers explained that although the initial programme of works had been published through to 2020, it had been made clear that this could be subject to change. Members were also advised that there had been little feedback received from tenants regarding changes to the programme of works to date.

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

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:-

- (i) the re-profiling of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard Programme and the Capital Programme for 2016/17 that flows from the re-profiling be adopted;
- (ii) a further report be presented when sufficient information is available to update the Savills cost plan based on an analysis of actual costs being incurred for internal and external works.

13. WHQS COMPLIANCE POLICY

Phil Davy (Head of Programmes) presented the report, which had been previously considered by the Caerphilly Homes Task Group on 10th December 2015. The report sought the views of Members on the draft WHQS (Welsh Housing Quality Standard) Compliance Policy, which is a Welsh Government requirement, prior to its presentation to Cabinet.

Members were advised that social housing landlords are required to put in place a Compliance Policy by 1st April 2016. The Compliance Policy is intended to provide the Welsh Government tenants and the Council with assurance that WHQS will be achieved and maintained and must set out the arrangements for independent verification. A copy of the draft policy was appended to the report.

It was noted that the Caerphilly Homes Task Group had expressed a need for the Environmental Programme to be more fully incorporated into the Policy, and as it is an integral part of the programme, at that meeting it was agreed that an additional paragraph be included in the Policy as follows:-

“There will be a separate environmental programme which will address Part 6 of the WHQS. The process will involve engagement and consultation with residents to identify community aspirations and to determine priorities for environmental improvements. An engagement plan has been agreed that will run from January 2016. Project implementation is likely to commence during 2016 and will be phased through to the end of the programme in 2020. Improvements may include landmarks/gateways, street furniture, traffic calming, street lighting, rationalising pedestrian routes, landscaping, safe play areas, car parking, defensible space and demarcation of boundaries”.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation from the Caerphilly Homes Task Group be referred to Cabinet for approval. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that subject to the inclusion of reference to the

Environmental Programme, the WHQS Compliance Policy be adopted.

14. DRAFT CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY 2016-2020

David Titley (Corporate Customer Services Manager), together with Liz Lucas (Head of Procurement) presented the report which provided details of the draft Customer Service Strategy 2016-2020. The report sought the views of Members on the draft Strategy prior to its presentation to Cabinet.

Members were advised that the Council's Customer Service Strategy has been in place since 2006 and has been partially updated on a number of occasions. However, the financial environment in which the Council operates has changed significantly in the last few years, as have the expectations of customers who are increasingly expecting services to be available on-line, and so there is a clear need to put a new Strategy in place.

Officers outlined the main strategic outcomes of the Strategy which are: to improve the consistency of customer service across the organisation; to meet customer expectations that services will be available online which will also reduce the cost of customer contact; and to develop in-person customer service so that it is more focused on delivering complex services or dealing with more vulnerable or disadvantaged customers. A copy of the draft Strategy was appended to the report.

Officers explained that once formally agreed, the Customer Service Strategy will be supported by a Delivery Plan that will be monitored by the Corporate IT Strategy Group (CITSG), of which the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services are members.

A copy of an email detailing the Trade Unions response to the proposed Strategy was tabled at the meeting. Members noted the key comments contained therein, including a need to involve and consult with all service areas and wider stakeholders identified within the Strategy to deliver the programme, and the need for a measured, pragmatic and holistic approach in delivery to ensure that department reconfigurations are not focused within one specific service area.

During the course of the ensuing debate, concerns were expressed regarding the personnel implications in respect of the proposals, particularly in relation to possible redundancies and a change in staffing hours. Further information was also sought on the financial savings that could be achieved as a result of the proposed Strategy. Officers explained that it was difficult to project savings at the present time but that the Strategy will support the aims of the Medium Term Financial Plan. However, there was an expectation that the need for customer-facing services could reduce in future years, leading to Customer Service opening hours being reduced in accordance with these principles. Members were advised that further reports on this matter would be brought to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee accordingly.

Members expressed the importance of maintaining customer-facing services together with a need to retain a customer service presence in local communities and Officers explained that the Strategy was not proposing to remove face to face services. Discussion also took place regarding departmental response times arising from initial customer services calls, together with customer engagement processes and the methodology used in monitoring customer feedback/satisfaction.

Queries were raised regarding the strategic direction and focus of the document, with Members expressing a need for customer-facing services to be maintained, including the retention of a customer service presence in local communities, and for it to be considered how the Strategy is fed back to customers. Officers confirmed that they would take into account the comments received at the meeting, and the Scrutiny Committee requested that their views

on this matter be reported to Cabinet.

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 subject to the incorporation of the views received at the meeting, the Customer Service Strategy as set out in the Appendix to the report be adopted.

15. REQUESTS FOR REPORTS TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA

Councillor C.J. Cuss requested a further report in respect of Leaseholder Charges within the county borough. He explained that he would liaise with Councillor D. Rees on the specifics of the request and then forward details of the required information to Officers accordingly.

16. INFORMATION ITEMS

The Committee noted the following items for information, full details of which were included within the Officers reports. There were no items brought forward for review.

- (1) Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring Report 2015/16 (Period 7);
- (2) Corporate Services and Miscellaneous 2015/16 Budget Monitoring Report (Period 7);
- (3) 2015/16 Capital Expenditure Monitoring Report (Period 7);
- (4) Whole-Authority Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2015/16;
- (5) Corporate Health and Safety Committee Minutes - 29th June 2015
- (6) Caerphilly Homes Task Group Minutes - 29th October 2015
- (7) Pensions/Compensation Committee Minutes - 9th December 2015;

The meeting closed at 8.10 pm

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 1st March 2016, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR