



## **POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH  
ON TUESDAY, 27TH FEBRUARY 2018 AT 5.30 P.M.**

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PRESENT:

Councillor J. Pritchard - Chair

Councillors:

M. Adams, L. Harding, G. Kirby, C.P. Mann, J. Taylor, L.G. Whittle

Cabinet Members:

C. Gordon (Corporate Services)

Together with:

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), C. Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs E.M. Aldworth, K. Dawson, K. Etheridge, Mrs C. Forehead, Miss E. Forehead, Mrs D. Price (Vice-Chair), J. Ridgewell, R. Saralis, Mrs M.E. Sargent, Mrs B. Jones (Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Governance) and Mrs L. Phipps (Cabinet Member for Homes and Places).

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

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

### **3. MINUTES – 16TH JANUARY 2018**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 16th January 2018 (minute nos. 1 - 12) 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 C. Gordon and Mrs L. Phipps, which provided an update on their respective portfolios, and had been circulated to Members in advance of the meeting.

The report from Councillor C. Gordon (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services) updated Members on new equal pay legislation within Human Resources, the preparations by IT Services for the implementation of the new Welsh Community Care Information System and General Data Protection Regulation, and improvements to systems within Customer Service Centres. The report from Councillor L. Phipps (Cabinet Member for Homes and Places) outlined works and upgrades taking place across the Property Services portfolio. Members were also informed of the latest developments across Caerphilly Homes, including an update on the lettings situation within Rowan Place, the Abolition of Right To Buy, and the conclusion of the Senghenydd Renewal Area. The Scrutiny Committee were also advised that the energy efficiency programme in Lansbury Park recently achieved the Regional Energy Efficiency Large Scale Project of the Year Award.

A Member complimented the Customer Service Team on their new system and the speed in which he had been offered an appointment. Officers responded to general queries regarding changes to the methods of rent payment. In response to queries regarding equal pay legislation, the Cabinet Member confirmed that he would consult with Officers following the meeting and respond to the Member in due course. Reference was made to the community improvements that had been brought about via the Senghenydd Renewal Area programme, and the Scrutiny Committee placed on record their thanks to the now retired Private Sector Housing Manager and his team for all their work that had been carried out in this regard.

The Cabinet Members were thanked for their reports.

#### **6. POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

Cath Forbes-Thompson (Interim Head of Democratic Services) 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 noted the report on British Telecom – Broadband Coverage and the Digital Profile scheduled for 10th April 2018 and it was agreed that representatives from Welsh Government and British Telecom be invited to speak at the meeting. It was also agreed that the report on Disabled Facility Grants – Performance be rescheduled for 10th July 2018 and a report on the Review of the Rechargeable Repairs and Appeals Panel be scheduled for 10th April 2018.

Officers highlighted the Property Review 2017 report due to be presented to Cabinet in the near future and it was agreed that as the maximum of four reports had been scheduled for each of the next two meetings, Officers would email Members following the meeting to seek confirmation on whether they wished to add this report as a discussion item in place of one of the existing items listed on the FWP,

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. RE-PROFILING OF WHQS PROGRAMME AND HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2018/2019**

Shaun Couzens (Chief Housing Officer) presented the report, which had been considered by the Caerphilly Homes Task Group on 15th February 2018. The report provided proposals for re-profiling the WHQS programme with the aim of ensuring full compliance by 2020 and sought the views of the Scrutiny Committee on these potential re-profiling options, prior to consideration by Cabinet.

The report outlined the continued good progress with the WHQS delivery programme during 2017/18. However, it has been necessary to review the programme (as set out in the report) to take account of changing circumstances to ensure full compliance by 2020. Following the Wales Audit Office Review conducted in April 2017, a commitment has been made to complete 40% of the external works and 75% of the internal works by March 2018. As of the end of December 2017, 33% of the external works have been completed and 70% of the internal works have been completed. A further commitment has been made to Welsh Government that 80% of external works and 90% internal works will be completed by March 2019. It was noted that Welsh Government has now confirmed that the deadline for achievement of WHQS is December 2020 which provides additional flexibility in this regard.

A separate programme of works was established for the sheltered housing schemes with agreement that both internal and external works would be undertaken by the in-house workforce. This work is on programme for completion by 2020 and is therefore not required to be re-profiled at this time. The HRA Capital Programme budget has been revised based on accurate recent actual costs projected forward to the end of the programme. This data now replaces the previous Savill's estimates and demonstrates that the housing business plan and the WHQS Programme remains financially viable.

Members were asked to consider two potential reprofiling options as outlined in the report for internal works to the remaining properties in the Lower Rhymney Valley, in order to ensure full compliance by 2020: (1) package the work allocated to the external contractor for 2018/19 to create a number of smaller contracts which could be tendered for using the Dynamic Purchasing System, or (2) roll forward the properties that were planned to be undertaken by the external contractor during 2018/19 to 2019/20, whereby the in-house workforce would have capacity to undertake the work. It was noted that the Caerphilly Homes Task Group supported the second option as contained in Section 4.17 of the report.

During the course of the ensuing debate, discussion took place regarding contractor performance and Officers outlined the measures in place to address any issues surrounding standards of work or underperformance. It was also noted that contingency arrangements have been put in place to increase momentum and to provide a safeguard for any unforeseen changes to ensure the continued delivery of the programme, including the recent implementation of the new procurement Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). In response to a Member's query, Officers expressed confidence that the WHQS programme of works can be completed by March 2020 in view of the recent accelerated completion rates across a number of properties.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the use of the in-house workforce with regards to internal works and Officers responded to queries regarding staff resources, recruitment processes, and the apprenticeship and training opportunities available. It was agreed that Officers would arrange to circulate information to Members following the meeting regarding the number of apprenticeships created by the Authority in relation to the WHQS programme. A Member queried the Council's remit in respect of monitoring sub-contractor payments and were advised that contractors may sub-contract to one level and are responsible for all payments to sub-contractors across this level.

Members also requested that they be kept informed in advance wherever possible of any changes to the internal and external programmes of works.

Following consideration of the report and in noting its contents, and in taking into account the recommendation from the Caerphilly Homes Task Group, it was moved and seconded that the second option within the report (to roll forward the internal works for remaining properties in the Lower Rhymney Valley to 2019/20) be endorsed and that the following recommendation be referred to Cabinet for approval. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that for the reasons contained therein, the option contained in Section 4.17 of the report be approved, in that internal works for remaining properties in the Lower Rhymney Valley be rolled forward to 2019/20 so that the works can be conducted by the in-house workforce.

## **9. OUTCOMES OF THE WHQS CROSS PARTY WORKING GROUP**

Consideration was given to the report, which provided feedback on the outcomes and conclusions made by the WHQS Cross Party Working Group, which had been established following presentation of the recommendations resulting from the Wales Audit Office (WAO) review of the Council's delivery of the WHQS programme. The report also detailed the progress made against these recommendations.

It was noted that three meetings of the Working Group were held to focus on each of the WAO recommendations and following comments received at the meetings, the Action Plan produced by the Council was amended to include the latest progress made against each recommendation. The report and its appendices summarised the conclusions arising from each meeting of the Working Group and contained the revised Action Plan and the briefing notes from the meetings. Overall, the Working Group were satisfied that considerable progress had been made since the WAO review, which now put the Council in a better position to deliver the programme by 2020, although accepted that this was still a significant challenge and requires ongoing scrutiny.

The Scrutiny Committee placed on record their thanks to those Councillors and tenant representatives who had participated in the Working Group and to the relevant Officers for facilitating these meetings. It was queried whether an update report on progress made against the WAO recommendations could be brought back to the Scrutiny Committee later in the year. Officers confirmed that an update on the Action Plan could be incorporated into the Wellbeing Objective WO5 – Investment in Council Homes performance report scheduled for consideration by the Committee in Summer 2018.

Following consideration of the report, the Scrutiny Committee noted the outcomes and conclusions made by the WHQS Cross Party Working Group in respect of progress made since the WAO review.

Arising from consideration of this item, discussion took place regarding meeting attendance and it was agreed that the Chair would write to all members of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee to emphasise the importance of attending these committee meetings wherever possible.

The meeting closed at 6.19 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 10th April 2018, they were signed by the Chair.

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CHAIR