



## **HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON  
TUESDAY, 23RD JULY 2019 AT 5.30 P.M.**

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PRESENT:

Councillor C. Forehead - Vice Chair - Presiding

Councillors:

R.W. Gough, L. Harding, A.G. Higgs, G. Kirby, Mrs G.D. Oliver, B. Owen, W. Williams

Cabinet Members:

S. Morgan (Economy, Infrastructure and Sustainability & Wellbeing of Future Generations Champion)

Together with:

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), T. Stephens (Planning Services Manager), A. Dallimore (Regeneration Services Manager), T. McMahon (Community Regeneration Manager), P. Smythe (Housing Technical Manager), F. Wilkins (Housing Services Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bevan, D. Cushing, C. Elsbury, Ms P. Leonard, Mrs D. Price, J. Ridgewell (Chair), Mrs M.E. Sargent and B. Zaplatynski, together with Cabinet Members Mrs L. Phipps (Homes and Places) and Mrs E. Stenner (Environment and Public Protection).

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

Councillor A. Higgs declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 8 (Housing Revenue Account – Outturn 2018/19). Details are minuted with the respective item.

### **3. MINUTES – 11TH JUNE 2019**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 11th June 2019 (minute nos. 1 - 8) 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. HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

Mark Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) presented the report, which outlined details of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the period July 2019 to July 2020, and included all reports that were identified at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11th June 2019.

Members considered the forward work programme and agreed that the report on The Grove Flats, Fochriw be deferred from 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2019 to a date to be confirmed, and that an update report on WHQS Progress be scheduled in its place.

Subject to the foregoing changes, it was unanimously agreed that the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme be published on the Council's website.

#### **6. 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.

#### **7. YEAR END PERFORMANCE 2018/19 REGENERATION AND PLANNING**

Consideration was given to the report, which provided members with a performance update for the Regeneration and Planning Service. The report reviewed the last twelve months of performance against a number of key indicators and highlighted the exceptions against each department, identified any areas for improvement, and set out key objectives/priorities for the next twelve months. The Scrutiny Committee were asked to consider the content of the report and where appropriate question and challenge the performance presented.

Members were advised that overall, 2018/19 offered a positive year in terms of service performance. However, a number of future challenges have been identified, and the biggest challenge across the service area remains how to balance the demands of increasing legislation and rising public expectations against reducing budgets. Whilst challenging, the service area is well placed to respond to them, but it must be recognised that reductions to some current service delivery standards and changes in how services will be delivered over the next few years will be inevitable.

Officers from the Regeneration and Planning Service highlighted key areas of note across each department as set out in the report and invited queries from the Scrutiny Committee.

Members referred to the funding awarded to the commercial/business sector and community/voluntary sector by way of the various grant schemes set out in Section 5.6 of the report and sought clarification on the awarding criteria and process. Officers summarised the

assessment process, and in response to a request from the Scrutiny Committee, confirmed that they would circulate a breakdown of the funding recipients for 2018/19 to Members following the meeting. It was also noted that arising from a general reduction in the level of grant funding available, the Council's existing grant programmes as set out in the report have now been amalgamated into a single Caerphilly Enterprise Fund, which will convene regularly to consider larger applications..

The Scrutiny Committee discussed occupancy rates across the Council's business property portfolio, and in response to a query on how business rates are being used to help encourage take up of vacant buildings by local enterprises, Officers confirmed that they would arrange to circulate this information to Members following the meeting. Reference was also made to a reduction in staffing levels and resources within the Business Support and Funding Team, and it was noted that a restructure of the Regeneration and Planning Service is currently underway, which will include the appointment of a new post that would include Town Centre Management duties under the new structure.

Having considered and discussed the report, the Scrutiny Committee noted its contents and the details of performance across the Regeneration and Planning Service for 2018/19.

## **8. WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 2 AND 3 - YEAR END PERFORMANCE REPORT 2018/2019**

Councillor Sean Morgan (Cabinet Member for Economy, Infrastructure and Sustainability & Wellbeing of Future Generations Champion) presented the report, which provided the Scrutiny Committee with an annual progress update against Well-being Objective 2 (Enabling employment) and Well-being Objective 3 (address the availability, condition and sustainability of homes throughout the county borough and to provide advice, assistance or support to help improve people's well-being).

The Scrutiny Committee were referred to the outcomes for Well-being Objectives 2 and 3 as set out in Sections 5.1 and 5.2 of the report, and were advised that following review, both are judged to be progressing well after the first year of the 5-year plan. The report identified areas that have performed well over the past year and also highlighted areas for improvement and the steps that are being implemented to take these actions forward. A progress update in respect of each Wellbeing Objective was appended to the report, together with details of case studies in relation to the Wellbeing Objective 3 for Housing. Members were asked to scrutinise the report and satisfy themselves that this progress is being made, prior to publication of the outcomes in the overall Council Annual Performance Report for the year 2018/19.

Discussion took place regarding the progress made against both Well Being Objectives, and in relation to Well-being Objective 2 (Enabling Employment), a Member asked what could be done to address the lack of transport that had been identified as a barrier to participation in the Communities for Work programme. Officers explained that there continue to be regional reductions in bus subsidies which has led to the removal of off-peak services across many wards in the county borough, and this is an area that the Council has very little control over. Reference was also made to progress across supported employment and a Member asked for the breakdown of job types created across the Communities for Work and Communities for Work Plus programme. Officers confirmed that they would arrange to circulate this information to the Committee following the meeting.

In regards to Wellbeing Objective 3 (Housing), a Member asked if the anticipated completion of the WHQS investment programme by the target date of December 2020 as cited in the report was accurate, given that sheltered housing works have not been programmed for completion by this date. Officers explained that as of March 2019, 85% of internal works and 71% of the external works for the Council housing stock had been completed, and that some sheltered houses have been taken out of the programme for health and safety reasons which

may require tenants to be decanted and will be treated as an acceptable fail in line with the WG guidance criteria. On this basis the properties will still be classed as compliant as an interim measure whilst the completion of the work will be planned for post 2020 and WG have been consulted on this and agree with the approach being taken. The Member also referred to the high level of customer satisfaction highlighted in the report across internal and external works and asked if percentages could be provided in this regard. Officers explained that satisfaction levels are currently 92% for internal works and 84% for external works, so equate to 86%-87% overall, and are comparable to other organisations. Officers also advised that satisfaction levels for work undertaken by the in-house workforce was higher than that for external contractors.

Reference was also made to the purchase of 5 long term empty properties to be fully refurbished and added to the Council's housing stock, and Officers explained that these had been acquired via a valuation and negotiation process and through the Affordable Housing Grant. It was noted that an update report on WHQS Progress would be brought to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration at the next meeting, which would deliver further detail on the programme of works and the progress made against this Housing objective.

Having considered and discussed the report, the Scrutiny Committee noted its contents and unanimously agreed with the progress that has been made in respect of Wellbeing Objectives 2 and 3 to date.

## **9. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT – OUTTURN 2018/19**

Councillor Alan Higgs declared a personal interest in this item as a Council tenant and remained in the meeting during consideration of the report.

The Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Economy, Infrastructure and Sustainability & Wellbeing of Future Generations Champion presented the report, which provided details of the outturn position for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA for the 2018/19) financial year, and had been previously considered by the Caerphilly Homes Task Group on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

Members were advised that the HRA budget for 2018/19 totalled £49.5m, which comprised £17.5m of salaries, £7.9m of capital financing charges, £8.7m of response repairs and £16.9m of revenue contributions to fund the WHQS programme. The underspend across these areas was £5.46m, which will be reallocated to the current budget to complete the WHQS works and reduce further borrowing requirements moving forward.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the details of the underspend across the Housing Revenue Account, and in response to a query on the level of in-house workforce spend at Section 5.6.5 of the report, Officers confirmed a minor correction in that the paragraph text should reflect an underspend (and not overspend) of £235k due to salary savings.

Having considered the report and taken into account the comments of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group, the Scrutiny Committee noted the details of the outturn position for the Housing Revenue Account for the 2018/19 financial year.

The meeting closed at 6.05 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 3rd September 2019, they were signed by the Chair.

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CHAIR