



HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON
TUESDAY, 3RD SEPTEMBER 2019 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Ridgewell - Chair

Councillors:

J. Bevan, C. Elsbury, R.W. Gough, L. Harding, G. Kirby, Ms P. Leonard, Mrs G.D. Oliver, Mrs D. Price, Mrs M.E. Sargent, W. Williams, B. Zaplatynski,

Cabinet Members:

Mrs L. Phipps (Homes and Places)

Together with:

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), P. Smythe (Housing Technical Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D. Cushing, Mrs C. Forehead (Vice-Chair), A.G. Higgs and B. Owen, together with Cabinet Members S. Morgan (Economy, Infrastructure and Sustainability & Wellbeing of Future Generations Champion) and Mrs E. Stenner (Environment and Public Protection).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 23RD JULY 2019

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 23rd July 2019 (minute nos. 1 - 9) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Arising from the minutes, a Member asked if it would be possible to have regular progress reports on Business Development Grants and employment programmes reported to the Committee on a twice-yearly basis. The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that he would relay the request to Officers and asked the Member to email the specifics to him so that arrangements could be made to add these reports to the Forward Work Programme.

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 September 2019 to July 2020, and included all reports that were identified at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 23rd July 2019.

Members were advised of several proposed changes to the forward work programme since the publication of the agenda papers. These included the rescheduling of the Heads of the Valley Masterplan report from 15th October 2019 to 28th January 2020 and the scheduling of 4 reports for 15th October 2019, namely;

- (1) Caerphilly Homes - #Building Together,
- (2) Complaints and Representations – Caerphilly Homes Task Group (CHTG)
- (3) HRA (Housing Revenue Account)/ General Fund 2019/20 Period 4 Monitoring Report
- (4) Budget Monitoring (Regeneration – Communities Directorate).

The Committee were also asked to consider the addition of a WHQS Progress Report to the meeting of 26th November 2019.

Members were in agreement with the proposed additions and changes but expressed concerns regarding the slippage of the Heads of the Valley Masterplan report to January 2020, given its previous rescheduling to October 2019. The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that he would seek clarification for the delay from the relevant Officers and would enquire if it would be possible to bring a progress report to the Committee before January 2020.

A Member also asked why three reports were listed on the FWP under date to be confirmed. Officers explained that these are listed to demonstrate that the item has been requested for inclusion. However the reports cannot yet be scheduled for specific dates, as each item is dependent on further information from external sources before the report can be prepared.

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

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following report.

6. WHQS PROGRESS REPORT – FINAL STAGES

The Cabinet Member for Homes and Places presented the report, which provided an overview of the performance of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) Team to date and the anticipated projected performance up to December 2020. It was noted that the report had previously been considered by the Caerphilly Homes Task Group on 27th June 2019 and subsequently presented as an information item to the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 23rd July 2019. During discussions on its Forward Work Programme at that meeting, the Committee agreed that the report should be formally considered by Members at its September meeting, prior to presentation of the report to Cabinet.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the details of the year end outturn for 2018/19 for WHQS works, together with the overview of the many achievements that have been made as part of the wider commitments and benefits delivered by the WHQS Programme. Projected performance of the internal and external works has demonstrated that full compliance is achievable prior to the December 2020 deadline, and 100% of surveys are now complete, which have provided more detail of the scope of anticipated works, and which will assist with contract forecasting and budget monitoring. The report also detailed further changes to the sheltered housing schemes where survey results have necessitated in two further schemes being omitted from the programme on health and safety grounds and transferred to the Post 2020 asset management programme.

Members were asked to note the significant progress made across the programme to date, with internal works achieving 85% compliance and external works achieving 71% compliance, with an overall compliance level of 57%. The Scrutiny Committee were also asked to recognise the significant efforts of WHQS staff in achieving this level of project performance.

During the course of discussion on the report, a Member queried the disparity between the compliance rate across internal and external works. Officers explained that this is due to the way the programme of works have been structured, with internal works starting prior to external works and therefore achieving higher compliance to date. Some delays were caused by the loss of an external contractor in December 2018 and the need to procure a replacement, but this will not affect the overall projected completion date which is still on track to be achieved prior to December 2020.

A Member referred to the tenant satisfaction rate for external works and asked if timescales are set for contractors to carry out any subsequent remedial works. Officers explained that this depends on the level of work required and that a monetary retention is held against contractors to ensure any defects are fixed in a timely manner. In response to a Member's query, Officers also confirmed that the additional workload arising from one external contractor going into administration had mainly been absorbed in-house by the Council's workforce.

Members discussed the WHQS Environmental Programme and expressed interest in receiving updates on any projects identified for their wards. Officers confirmed that an extensive consultation and engagement process in this regard is ongoing across all 82 communities throughout the county borough and that Members will be updated in due course. A Member expressed thanks to the WHQS Team for the environmental improvements already carried out in her ward. In response to a query on future funding for the Environmental Programme, Officers confirmed that a consideration going forward would be the level of budget required to maintain the key aspects of these environmental improvements.

A Member highlighted some outstanding issues in a Council property following WHQS works and asked when the follow-up work would be completed. Officers explained that in this particular instance, re-tendering for the outstanding work is due to take place in January 2020. Members were advised that all works are inspected following completion and that the new style of tenant satisfaction survey involves detailed questions to identify any underlying issues. Assurances were given that the standard of works and tenant satisfaction levels are closely monitored by the WHQS Team, and that staff work proactively with contractors and other Council departments to ensure that any issues are addressed.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed tenant satisfaction levels, and in response to queries from Members, Officers confirmed that this data is acquired from both the old style of postal surveys and new style telephone surveys. It was explained that the analysis of the survey is now more detailed and performance is measured on a periodic basis. Members suggested however that the new style of survey could produce less accurate data, as some tenants

might be less inclined to highlight any WHQS issues over the telephone. Officers also confirmed that a postal survey is still sent to the tenant if they are unable to be reached or surveyed by telephone. Members were advised that in the event of outstanding works being identified through the survey, the Clerk of Works will arrange for the works to be programmed and will submit a report before the job is closed out.

Discussion took place regarding the longevity of products supplied under the WHQS scheme, Officers explained that if a fault develops within 12 months (which is the industry standard), the contractor will be asked to re-attend to rectify the problem. Outside of that period, the Repair Team will be called in to address the issue. However some products have a manufacturer's warranty period which can extend to 7 years and such information is recorded to ensure this is actioned if necessary.

Clarification was sought on the future of the apprenticeships created through the WHQS programme, upon conclusion of the programme in 2020. Officers explained that there will be a requirement to maintain the standard of works thereafter and deliver future planned maintenance programmes, as well as a need to provide continuity across the workforce, and as a result, there will be further work opportunities in this area moving forward.

A Member asked if it would be feasible to prepare a detailed report on customer satisfaction, which would list the individual detail for any problems and the details of the relevant contractor. Officers explained that as the WHQS is now in the final stages of the programme, it would not be conducive to produce this level of detail in regards to individual contractors. Officers explained that a further report on WHQS Progress is being prepared for consideration by the Committee on 26th November 2019 and offered to expand on the level of detail in relation to customer satisfaction.

Reference was made to the cycle of billing applied in respect of the works carried out to leasehold properties, and particular concerns were raised regarding the delay in recharging leaseholders for these costs. Officers outlined the billing process and explained that these recharges are dependent on the timeliness of contractor invoices. However, the work recharged to leaseholders only accounts for a very small proportion of the works completed in total under the WHQS programme.

In response to a query on the direction of the Post 2020 Asset Management Strategy referenced in the report, Officers explained that this will encompass new build opportunities, oversee the conclusion of the environmental improvements programme, and will set the scene for the next planned maintenance programme for external works to commence 2020/21 and internal works anticipated to begin in 2025.

In closing, Members were pleased to note the improvements made across the programme and congratulated the WHQS Team on their efforts.

Having considered and discussed the report ahead of its submission to Cabinet, and in taking into account the comments of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group, the Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report, including the position and approach being taken to deliver the WHQS programme.

The meeting closed at 6.35 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 15th October 2019, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR