



HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY,
1ST FEBRUARY 2022 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor J. Ridgewell - Chair
Councillor M. Adams - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

C. Elsbury, L. Harding, G. Kirby, Ms P. Leonard, B. Owen, Mrs D. Price, W. Williams and B. Zaplatynski.

Cabinet Members:

Councillor S. Cook (Social Care and Housing) and Councillor E. Stenner (Performance, Economy and Enterprise).

Together with:

M. S. Williams (Corporate Director for Economy and Environment), N. Taylor-Williams (Head of Housing), F. Wilkins (Housing Services Manager), R. Kyte (Head of Regeneration and Planning), S. Isaacs (Rents Manager), L. Allen (Principal Group Accountant - Housing), D. Roberts (Interim Finance Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer) and J. Thomas (Committee Services Officer).

Also in Attendance:

Councillor J. Pritchard.

RECORDING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being recorded and would be made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items. [Click Here to View](#).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bevan, D. Cushing, R. W. Gough, A. G. Higgs, Mrs G. D. Oliver, Mrs M. E. Sargent and A. Whitcombe (Cabinet Member for Sustainability, Planning and Fleet).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor L. Harding declared a personal and prejudicial interest in relation to Agenda Item No. 7 – Housing Revenue Account Charges 2022/2023, as family members are Council tenants. Details are also minuted with the respective item.

Councillor S. Cook declared a personal and prejudicial interest in relation to Agenda Item No. 7 – Housing Revenue Account Charges 2022/2023, as a family member is a Council tenant. Details are also minuted with the respective item.

Councillor D. Price sought advice from the Scrutiny Officer in relation to Agenda Item No. 7 – Housing Revenue Account Charges 2022/2023, in that a colleague is a Council tenant, and was advised that there was no requirement to make a declaration of interest.

3. MINUTES – 30TH NOVEMBER 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 30th November 2021 (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

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report which outlined details of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the period February 2022 to March 2022 and included all reports that were identified at the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 30th November 2021. Members were asked to consider the Forward Work Programme, alongside the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, prior to publication on the Council's website.

The Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee was informed that the Welsh Government Lease Scheme Proposal report has been scheduled for the special meeting on 10th February 2022 and the Housing Revenue Business Plan report has been scheduled for 15th March 2022.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme be published on the Councils' 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. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT CHARGES - 2022/2023

Councillor L. Harding declared a personal and prejudicial interest, as family members are Council tenants, and left the meeting during consideration of this item.

Councillor S. Cook declared a personal and prejudicial interest as a family member is a Council tenant. It was noted that Councillor S. Cook was attending as a Cabinet member and therefore took no part in the debate of this item.

Consideration was given to the report which asked Members of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee to consider and take a view on the increased Council Housing rent charges proposed in the report, prior to consideration from Cabinet on the 9th February 2022. Members were advised that the charges predominantly focus on council house rents, but also include garages, and are intended to be effective for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2022/2023 financial year. The Head of Housing addressed the Scrutiny Committee to raise a number of points outlined in the report and it was highlighted that Caerphilly County Borough Council is ranked the 3rd lowest local authority in terms of weekly rent. Members also received a summary of the budget monitoring projections for 2021/22.

The Chair congratulated the Housing Department for the successful completion of the WHQS Programme.

A Member raised a question in relation to the impact of high levels of inflation on material costs. The Head of Housing advised on how cost efficiencies were explored, how managed procurement contracts with fixed prices provided some protection and also outlined some of the benchmarking work that took place with partners. The Member also asked about any cost benefits from future plans for the construction of Council housing. In response, the Head of Housing outlined economies of scale associated with modern construction methods and advised that cost efficiencies were constantly sought with partners.

In response to a Members query, the Head of Housing provided an update on the level of apprenticeships. Members also heard how new ways of training for Caerphilly Homes would be explored in the future.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that recommendation 3.2 option (iii) be recommended to Cabinet for consideration. By way of verbal confirmation (and in noting that there were 8 votes for, 1 vote against and 0 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

3.2 (iii) – The increase per property from April 2022 of 2% – (£93.62/52 week – additional £1.84/wk) which is additional income of £1m, allowing for a small margin to reflect the unprecedented increase in material costs, be approved.

It was also moved and seconded that recommendation 3.2 (vi) be recommended to Cabinet for consideration. By way of verbal confirmation this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

3.2 (vi) – The level or rent for garages from April 2022 be increased by 2% to £8.39 per week, be approved.

It was further moved and seconded that recommendation 3.2 (vii) be recommended to Cabinet for consideration. By way of verbal confirmation this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet:

3.2 (vii) – A review of the current rent policy to reflect affordability, be approved.

8. ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT 2021/22 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT (PERIOD 7)

Consideration was given to the report which informed members of projected revenue expenditure for the Economy and Environment Directorate for the 2021/22 financial year. Service Divisions include Regeneration and Planning Division, Infrastructure Services Division, Public Protection Division and Community & Leisure Services Division.

In response to a Members query, the Interim Finance Manager confirmed that there had been no material changes between Period 5 and Period 7 of the Economy and Environment Budget Monitoring reports.

Following consideration of the item, the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report and the detailed budget monitoring pages that followed in respect of the Regeneration and Planning Division.

9. DIRECTORATE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT SIX MONTH UPDATE 2021/22

Consideration was given to the report which presented the Scrutiny Committee with the 6-month Caerphilly Homes Performance Assessment which is part of the Council's Performance Management Framework. Members were informed that the Performance Assessment is the Directorate's self-assessment and forms part of the Council's overall self-assessment activity. The Housing Services Manager emphasised that the DPA provided information and analysis for the 6-month period, April 2021 – September 2021, and advised Members that things have progressed quite considerably since then. A number of issues in relation to escalating costs, including the shortage of materials and contractors, were highlighted.

Further information was sought on the support provided to residents to help them manage their accommodation, access benefits and manage their money. The Scrutiny Committee was informed that it was the 10-year anniversary of the creation of the Housing Support Team. The Rents Manager advised Members that the Housing Support Team ensure tenants receive the right support at the right time and summarised the support that has been provided to tenants. Members were informed that staff have assisted tenants to claim over £2.3m in additional benefits. It was highlighted that this support is not only offered to tenants experiencing financial hardship, but to tenants who are not claiming their full entitlement of benefits. The Rents Manager spoke very proudly about the Housing Support Team and highlighted the real difference the team has made to people's lives.

In response to a Members query, the Housing Services Manager informed the Scrutiny Committee that good success has been achieved in the private sector, with approximately 85 properties and 44 landlords currently being used to assist with homelessness via the Caerphilly Keys initiative. It was highlighted that the Council will continue to develop Caerphilly Keys to attract more landlords to sign up to the scheme and provide quality, affordable private rented accommodation for people not able to access social housing. In conclusion, the Head of Housing advised that a report on the Welsh Government Lease Scheme Proposal will be presented to the Scrutiny Committee at the special meeting to be held on 10th March 2022 for Members to debate.

Clarification was sought in relation to landlords who are not complying with the minimum energy efficiency standard regulations. The Housing Services Manager informed Members that the Council was successful in receiving grant funding to recruit staff to work with landlords to comply with the minimum energy efficiency regulation standards. Members were further informed that the Council is also looking at the possibility of enforcement options. In response to a Members query, the Head of Housing provided an update on the progress of the two Passivhaus new Caerphilly homes schemes, in Trecenydd and Trethomas, and it was noted that work is progressing well with both schemes expected to be completed by June 2021.

In response to a Members query regarding the provision of surgeries, the Scrutiny Committee was informed that prior to the latest Covid restrictions a number of surgeries were being held in the borough. The Rents Manger explained that the aim is to re-open the surgeries, by appointment only in the interim, and to roll out to other venues. It was highlighted that there is a very robust homeworking model in place at the moment whereby tenants and residents are supported.

Following consideration of the item, the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Caerphilly Homes Directorate Performance Assessment and discussed, challenged, and scrutinised the information contained within.

10. DIRECTORATE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT FOR ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT SERVICES - SIX MONTH UPDATE 2021/22

Consideration was given to the report which presented the Scrutiny Committee with the 6-month Economy and Environment Directorate Performance Assessment (DPA), which is part of the Council's Performance Management Framework. Members were informed that the Performance Assessment is the Directorate's self-assessment and forms part of the Council's overall self-assessment activity. It was noted that the DPA provided information and analysis for the 6-month period, April 2021 to September 2021.

Reference was made to the progress RAG status in relation to undertaking a formal review of the Community Centre managed network to support a more sustainable and efficient delivery model. It was noted that the completion date is April 2022, however the progress RAG status indicated that it has not yet started or too early to report any progress. The Corporate Director for Economy and Environment provided the Scrutiny Committee with more context in relation to Community Centres and outlined some of the reasons for the delay.

Following consideration of the item, the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Economy and Environment Directorate Performance Assessment and discussed, challenged, and scrutinised the information contained within, for the Planning and Regeneration service aspects only.

The meeting closed at 6.51 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 15th March 2022 they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR