



HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY 15TH MARCH 2022 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors:

D. Cushing, R. W. Gough, L. Harding, G. Kirby, Ms P. Leonard and B. Owen.

Together with:

N. Taylor-Williams (Head of Housing), L. Allen (Principal Group Accountant - Housing), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer) and M. Harris (Committee Services Support Officer).

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, C. Elsbury, A. G. Higgs, Mrs G. D. Oliver, Mrs D. Price, Mrs M. E. Sargent, W. Williams and B. Zaplatynski.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 1ST FEBRUARY 2022

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on 1st February 2022 be approved as a correct record. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 6 votes for, 0 votes against and 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 1st February 2022 (minute nos. 1 - 10) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. MINUTES – 10TH FEBRUARY 2022

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the special meeting held on 10th February 2022 be approved as a correct record. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 6 votes for, 0 votes against and 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10th February 2022 (minute nos. 1 - 5) 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. 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 March 2022 and included all reports that were identified at the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 1st February 2022. Members were asked to consider the Forward Work Programme, alongside the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, prior to publication on the Council's website.

Members were asked to note that there were no reports scheduled on the Forward Work Programme for the meeting to be held on 26th April 2022, as the meeting falls within the pre-election period. The Head of Housing indicated that there may be some proposed amendments to the Forward Work Programme for the meeting to be held on the 21st June 2022 and it was noted that this would be undertaken through the Scrutiny process.

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.

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 BUDGET MONITORING – PERIOD 9

Consideration was given to the report which informed the Scrutiny Committee of the projected position for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2021/22 financial year, based on the income and expenditure movements of the first 9 months of the year.

The Principal Group Accountant for Housing provided the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the report. Members were informed that the HRA had a projected underspend of £9.7m for the end of the 2021/22 financial year. The surplus was split between general revenue underspends and capital related underspends and Members were asked to note the main variances detailed in the report. A summary was also provided on section 5.7 of the report which detailed the revenue contributions to capital outlay, in relation to the WHQS programme.

The Principal Group Accountant for Housing referred the Scrutiny Committee to section 5.4.1 of the report and a point of correction was made in relation to the Single Source Supplier arrangement, in that the year-end pain/gain is likely to be in the region of £100k cost to the HRA and not £30k.

A number of queries were raised in relation to the filling of vacant posts. The Principal Group Accountant for Housing confirmed that there were currently 53 vacant posts and it was considered that more than half of those posts were blue collar workers. It was explained that the number of vacant posts did contribute to the delay of the completion of the Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WQHS) programme, along with other issues. It was highlighted that the extended deadline to complete the WHQS programme by December 2021 had been achieved, however it has impacted on the commencement of the maintenance through the PAMS programme. It was noted that the underspend is a result of not being able to progress with the PAMS programme whilst the WHQS programme was being finalised.

Further discussion took place regarding the issues in filling vacant posts, particularly where more competitive rates are being offered in the private sector and with Registered Social Landlord providers. In conclusion, the Head of Housing informed the Scrutiny Committee that it is his core priority to address this issue during the coming months.

9. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2022/23

Members of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee were asked to consider and take a view on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2022/23 prior to its presentation to Cabinet on 23rd March 2022, and to also recommend that Cabinet submit this report to Council to request an extension to the borrowing cap. Members were informed that the HRA Business Plan is an annual requirement from Welsh Government as part of the annual submission of the Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) grant application. It was highlighted that the Business plan has not been presented for approval in recent years but there are now an increased number of objectives to be delivered within the Business Plan, on similar timeframes. The importance of Members being formally updated on the financial position of the HRA investment programme on an annual basis, to inform future decision making was emphasised.

The Head of Housing provided the Scrutiny Committee with more context to the report and informed Members that the Business Plan is a long-term 30-year plan for managing the

organisations assets and financing the necessary investments. Members were asked to note that the Business Plan is reliant on a number of key assumptions which are detailed in the report.

A question was raised in relation to inflation rate predictions and the consultation that had taken place. Officers outlined the consultation measures undertaken and advised that typically a forecast of 2% over a 5-year period would be assumed but because of economic volatility a higher rate over a shorter period was forecast in the plan.

In response to a query regarding the implications of the current conflict in Ukraine the Scrutiny Committee was advised that, during these unprecedented times, it is not possible to predict the full impact it is going to have on the supply chain. However, the Head of Housing further advised Members that the situation is being monitored and that he was confident the Business Plan was sustainable for now, however the strategies, focus and priorities in the coming years will be kept under constant review.

A Member raised a question in relation to Social Landlords meeting the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) on all tenanted stock. The Head of Housing advised the Scrutiny Committee that they have a strong relationship with the major Housing Association partners and that Affordable Housing Partnership meetings take place regularly. Members also heard how Welsh Government regulate the Housing Associations.

A number of queries were raised in relation to the competition for a skilled workforce. The Head of Housing outlined the need to ensure that there was a policy of ongoing learning and development across the sector. Members also heard about plans for a more robust apprenticeship approach for a wide range of functions within the Housing Sector.

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:

- (i) Acknowledged and considered the 2022/23 Housing Business Plan prior to it being presented to Cabinet for approval on the 23rd March 2022, and its submission to WG by the 31st March 2022, and annually on an ongoing basis.
- (ii) Recommended that Cabinet approve the submission of the report to Council to request an extension on the HRA borrowing cap to £90m to allow the new build programme to progress.

Councillor J. Ridgewell announced that this would be his last meeting as Chair of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee. He expressed his thanks to all for the help and support he has received during his time as Chair and also to the Housing Team for all their hard work.

The meeting closed at 6.15 pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 21st June 2022, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR