

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting held on 7 March, 2022,

PRESENT: Councillor Aled Morris Jones (Chair)
Councillor Dylan Rees (Vice-Chair)

Councillors John Griffith, Richard Griffiths, Bryan Owen, Gary Pritchard, Alun Roberts

Portfolio Members

Councillors Llinos Medi Huws (Leader and Portfolio Member for Social Services), Richard Dew (Portfolio Member for Planning and Public Protection), Carwyn Jones (Portfolio Member for Major Projects and Economic Development), R. Meirion Jones (Portfolio Member for Education, Libraries, Culture and Youth), Alun Mummery (Portfolio Member for Housing and Supporting Communities), R.G. Parry, OBE, FRAGS (Portfolio Member Highways, Waste and Property), Dafydd Rhys Thomas (Portfolio Member for Corporate Business)

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer
Acting Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer
Director of Social Services
Head of Adults' Services
Head of Highways, Waste and Property
Head of Housing Services
Head of Regulation and Economic Development
Head of Profession (HR) and Transformation
Chief Waste Management Officer (ME)
Housing Services Manager (Strategy, Commissioning and Policy)
Programme, Business Planning and Performance Manager (GM)
Scrutiny Manager (AGD)
Committee Officer (ATH)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Richard Owain Jones and J. Arwel Roberts;
Councillors Ieuan Williams (Portfolio Member for Transformation and the Welsh Language), Robin Williams (Portfolio Member for Finance)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Dafydd Roberts, Mr Arwel Jones (Principal Development Officer – Supporting People)

The Chair welcomed everyone present to the final Corporate Scrutiny Committee meeting of the current Administration and he thanked those members of the Committee as well as Portfolio Members who would be retiring at the next election in May, 2022, for their contributions and service, and he wished them all well for the future. The Chair also referred to the retirement of Mrs Annwen Morgan, the Chief Executive and thanked her also for her service to the Authority and wished her a long and happy retirement.

The Chair spoke with sadness about the ongoing conflict in the Ukraine and the suffering it was causing, with the situation worsening in recent days. A moment's silence was held in recognition of the gravity of the situation and the plight of the people of Ukraine.

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 MONITORING PERFORMANCE: CORPORATE SCORECARD Q3 2021/22

The report of the Head of Profession (HR) and Transformation incorporating the Corporate Scorecard for Quarter 3 of the 2021/22 financial year was presented for the Committee's consideration and comment.

Councillor Dafydd Rhys Thomas, Portfolio Member for Corporate Business presented the Corporate Scorecard for Quarter 3 which would be the last of the current Administration. The Portfolio Member reported that it was gratifying to be able to report of positive performance for this the final scorecard with 85% of Corporate Health Performance Indicators (PIs) performing well against targets (Green or Yellow RAG) and 82% of the Performance Management PIs performing above target or within 5% tolerance of their targets. Some of the performance highlights include the following –

- Indicator 10 – Percentage of NERS clients whose health has improved on completion of the exercise programme which has a performance of 92% against a target of 80%. The scheme was suspended last year because of the pandemic with this being the first time clients have completed the programme since the restart.
- Indicator 11 – The number of empty properties brought back into use which now stands at 73 properties against an annual target of 50.
- The Adults' Services indicators 16 to 19 are all Green against target and have all improved during the quarter.
- The Homelessness indicators 26 and 27 for the Housing Service have also performed well with both Green against target and improving during the quarter.
- Two waste management indicators – 31 and 33 have also performed well with 96% of streets surveyed in the quarter clean of waste and fly tipping incidents cleared within 0.3 days.

Where pockets of below target performance have been identified in Children's and Planning Services, mitigating circumstances apply and remedial actions are being taken. While the performance for Indicator 32 – the percentage of waste reused, recycled or composted has improved on the 60.8% reported at the end of Quarter 2, at 61.2% against a target of 70% it remains Red and is disappointing given the Authority's previous positive performance in this area.

The Programme, Business Planning and Performance Manager said that prior to the pandemic, the Isle of Anglesey County Council was recognised as one of the best performing local authorities in Wales; to be in a position to report that over 80% of the targets set have been met in what has been a challenging period is extremely positive.

The Committee welcomed the report as reflecting well on performance overall but challenged the following areas –

- The decline in performance with regard to the percentage of waste, reused, recycled or composted; although the Committee accepted there were valid reasons for the underperformance, it wanted to know whether there was evidence to link an increase in black bin household waste to an increase in the number of visitors to the Island and similarly whether there was evidence of people disposing of green waste in black bins.

Councillor Bob Parry, OBE, FRAgS, Portfolio Member for Highways, Waste and Property said that the fall in performance could be due to a number of reasons including the increase in homeworking generating extra household waste and the paper/ cardboard recycling box being too small to cope with the waste with the result that any overfill finds its way into the black bin. These are issues that are being examined by the steering group which was established during Quarter 1 which includes representatives from WRAP Cymru, the WLGA and an elected member from the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

The Chief Waste Management Officer advised that a high percentage of the visitors to the Island are from England, and many of these visitors come from areas where the recycling rates are lower and consequently the practice of recycling may not be so ingrained. Being on holiday may also lead to different behaviours with visitors taking a more relaxed attitude to recycling/waste disposal. The upshot is that black bin waste tonnage has increased significantly despite the fact that household recycling rates on the Island have remained consistent. The main issue is identifying what is driving the increase in black bin waste. While the report puts forward reasonable explanations for this increase, the steering group with WRAP Cymru will visit the Island to undertake a practical assessment during Quarter 1 2022/23 which it is hoped will pinpoint the reason behind the rise in black bin waste. Recycling rates have dropped nationally hence the establishment of the steering group to assess the situation nationwide. However, despite the decline in performance, Anglesey is still among the best performing authorities in terms of the waste it reuses, recycles or composts. The steering group will also investigate the reasons for the decrease in the green waste tonnage collected even though the number of subscriptions to the green waste collection service is high with the deduction being that some green waste is being disposed of in the black bins.

- In a follow up question the Committee wanted to know whether there was any evidence of green waste being fly tipped in the countryside. The Chief Waste Management Officer confirmed that although fly tipping occurs on a daily basis, there has been no noticeable increase in green waste fly tipping. The Chief Waste Management Officer further clarified that the Authority currently does not take enforcement action for non-compliance – recycling remains a choice on the Island; some Councils in Wales are considering enforcement as a route forward and it may be one of the options to come out of the work of the steering group.
- With regard to fly tipping response times the Chief Waste Management Office confirmed that the Service and its contractors are proactive in seeking out and clearing instances of fly tipping even before they are reported.
- The Committee queried the extent to which the Covid pandemic has impacted on performance while making reference to Indicator 23 – the average length of time for all children who were on the Child Protection Register during the year who were de-registered during the year where the performance had declined to 321 days against a target of 270 days. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Covid pandemic has had a widespread effect and that issues that were hidden during the pandemic are now emerging and are presenting in school children, staff and the general public. The next few years are likely to be challenging in terms of dealing with the after effects of Covid 19.

Having considered the Quarter 3 2021/22 scorecard report and the clarifications provided by Officers at the meeting, the Committee resolved to accept the report, to note the areas which the Senior Leadership Team is managing to secure

improvements into the future and to recommend the mitigation measures as outlined to the Executive.

3 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUSINESS PLAN 2022/23

The report of the Head of Housing Services incorporating the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2022-2052 was presented for the Committee's consideration and comment.

Councillor Alun Mummery, Portfolio Member for Housing and Supporting Communities presented the report and Plan the aim of which is to plan ahead to ensure that a financially viable plan is in place for the Council's housing stock.

The Head of Housing Services reported that the Plan is in the format the Council has used previously for its submission to Welsh Government which has been recognised for its level of detail. The Plan remains in draft form and further amendments and editing will be carried out prior to its final submission for approval by the Executive. The report and Business Plan have been prepared in conjunction with Officers from the Finance Service and the Plan forms the primary tool for financial planning of the delivery and management of the Council's housing stock. Specifically, the Business Plan shows how the Council brings all its stock to Welsh Housing Quality Standards; how the Council intends to maintain and exceed WHQS and work towards the decarbonisation of its housing stock and the investment needed to increase the housing stock and the provision of affordable housing. The HRA Business Plan also contributes to all the fundamental themes within the Council's Corporate Plan. The intention for the future is to refine the Business Plan into a shorter more forward looking document and to produce an annual report on performance and achievements.

In the ensuing discussion, the Committee raised the following points –

- Noting that the profile of the Council's tenants was weighted towards those aged 56 or over with only 10% aged 22 to 35, the Committee wanted to know how in light of the Council's emphasis on access to affordable housing, this demographic might be changed. The Head of Housing Services advised that the tenant profile is based on the total number of tenants who occupy the Council's approximately 3,900 council homes. On average, the Council lets around 260 council houses per annum or 8% of its stock and although the Council's tenancies include a number of older households with longstanding tenancies, the emphasis with regard to new lettings is towards the younger demographic.
- Whether the Council has the capacity and specialist skills to achieve its objective of decarbonising its housing stock by 2030. The Head of Housing Services acknowledged that delivering the decarbonisation agenda will be challenging as other councils and social housing providers will be seeking to deliver the same change and will be competing for the same skills and resources. Additionally, guidance with regard to what is expected of local authorities has not yet been issued. However, the Council will also look to build its own skills and workforce to help it achieve net zero across its housing stock by 2030.
- Whether the Business Plan in its projections for housing provision, takes into account the social and demographic changes that have and are likely to occur in future e.g. the increase in single households. The Head of Housing Services confirmed that the Council is developing an increasing number of one and two bedroom units while recognising that there is also a shortage of larger 4/5 bedroom units. The Council seeks to make the best use of stock and to use its stock effectively to ensure that the range of housing need is met; this includes a downsizing incentive scheme to support tenants occupying larger properties into moving to smaller properties based on their current and future needs.

- Noting that one of the Council's objectives is tackling poverty including fuel poverty, the Committee highlighted that tenants occupying council properties served by more expensive and often less efficient heating systems are at a financial disadvantage to those tenants in properties where the heating system is more efficient even though they may be paying the same level of rent based on the property's size. The Committee queried whether it is now appropriate to be considering varying rents to reflect the heating system installed in a property. The Head of Housing Services in acknowledging the point confirmed that rent setting is determined by the Rent Policy and that rent levels are primarily based on the size of a property. A number of factors are taken into account in determining rent levels although at present a property's heating system is not one of those factors. He confirmed that there are currently no plans to review the policy.
- In response to a query about acceptable fails the Head of Housing Services clarified that acceptable fails apply to cases where a tenant refuses improvement works to their home and safety is not a concern. The Council will undertake the necessary works in accordance with WHQS expectations when the tenancy ends and the property becomes void.
- The Head of Housing Services confirmed that historically the HRA Business Plan content has been met with positive feedback from Welsh Government. The Council although smaller in size compared to the other authorities in Wales that have retained their housing stock, is seen as being in the vanguard in terms of new council housing development and was also an early achiever of the Wales Housing Quality Standards.

Having considered the documentation and the clarifications provided at the meeting, the Committee resolved to recommend the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2022-52 to the Executive for approval and adoption.

4 HOUSING SUPPORT GRANT PROGRAMME STRATEGY 2022-26

The report of the Head of Housing Service incorporating the Housing Support Grant Programme Strategy 2022-26 was presented for the Committee's consideration.

The Head of Housing Services reported that the Housing Support Grant is a Welsh Government funded programme led and managed by local authorities in partnership with Health and Probation. It provides housing support services for people from a range of client groups. The programme aims to provide housing support for people to be able to maximise, maintain and sustain their independence through the provision of a range of innovative housing support services and projects that help prevent homelessness. It incorporates the previous Welsh Government funded programmes of Supporting People, Homelessness Prevention and Rent Smart Wales. As part of the Housing Support Grant Guidance, Welsh Government requires all local authorities to produce a 4 yearly detailed Needs Assessment which underpins the Housing Support Grant Strategy and 3 Yearly Cyclical Housing Support Delivery Plan which has to be reviewed annually. The Delivery Plan outlines how the Council proposes to spend its revenue allocation of £3.571m for 2022-23 allocated between Housing Support (previously Supporting People - £3.417m); Homelessness Prevention (£140k), Rent Smart Wales - £6,209k) leaving £8,148k uncommitted. The Strategy was subject to public consultation between 5 January and 1 February, 2022 and 88% of those who responded agreed that it captured the most important issues and priorities.

The Housing Services Manager (Strategy, Commissioning and Policy) confirmed that the Strategy is based on providing universal and targeted services to help people in housing crisis, prevent homelessness and support housing independence. The Covid 19 pandemic has seen an increasing number of people seek support and it is anticipated that this increase will continue into next year and that demand in the years after and beyond will settle at a

higher level than previously. The Strategy is the product of considerable research and consultation and brings forward plans to provide housing support.

In considering the report the Committee referred to the following –

- The absence of any reference to the Council's response to and provision for refugees. The Housing Services Manager (Strategy, Commissioning and Policy) clarified that the Service's Housing Strategy recognises the Council's role as a participant in refugee resettlement schemes which come under the jurisdiction of the Home Office. The duties in relation to homelessness and the pathway to accessing support are different in the context of refugees. The Service has plans at the ready under the Housing Strategy should it be called upon to accommodate refugees.
- Concern regarding homelessness, the people who present as homelessness and whether they are local or incomers and the availability of provision and funding in connection with tackling the immediate problems of homelessness such as emergency accommodation. The Housing Services Manager (Strategy, Commissioning and Policy) advised that the pandemic period has been challenging and has led to an increase in the number of people seeking support. Not all of those accessing the Service are in need of accommodation and the Service's approach through early interventions is to try to prevent housing crisis. The Strategy in part seeks to move away from a dependency on emergency accommodation provision to a rapid rehousing approach. The Service has also taken advantage of the Welsh Government's Covid Hardship Fund which has covered much of its emergency costs. Welsh Government has recognised that demand is also likely to remain high in the transitional period and has provided additional resources to that end. In addition, funding through the Housing Support Grant is higher than in previous years in recognition that tackling and preventing homelessness needs to be underpinned by sufficient resources.

Having considered the documentation and information provided verbally at the meeting the Committee resolved to recommend to the Executive -

- **That it approve the Housing Support Grant Programme Strategy 2022-26 and Delivery Plan.**
- **That it should agree to the proposed Spend Plan in accordance with Welsh Government HSG Guidance and requirement included in Annexe B in the Delivery Plan.**
- **That it approve the Rapid Rehousing Transition Work Plan April 2022 to March 2027.**

Councillor Aled M. Jones
Chair