

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the hybrid meeting held on 16 January, 2024 (P.M.)

PRESENT: Councillor Douglas Fowlie (Chair)
Councillor Dyfed Wyn Jones (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Geraint Bebb, Aled M. Jones, R. Llewelyn Jones, Llio A. Owen, Keith Roberts, Ieuan Williams, Sonia Williams.

Co-opted Member: Wenda Owen (The Church in Wales)

Portfolio Members

Councillors Llinos Medi (Leader and Portfolio Member for Economic Development), Carwyn Jones (Portfolio Member for Corporate Business and Customer Experience), Gary Pritchard (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Member for Children, Youth and Housing Services), Nicola Roberts (Portfolio Member for Planning, Public Protection and Climate Change), Alun Roberts (Portfolio Member for Adults' Services and Community Safety), Dafydd Roberts (Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language), Robin Williams (Deputy Leader and Portfolio Member for Finance).

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer
Head of Housing Services
Head of Democracy (DS)
Housing Technical Services Manager (DR)
Community Housing Service Manager (LIW)
Scrutiny Manager (AGD)
Committee Officer (ATH)
Webcasting Officer (FT)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Jackie Lewis.

ALSO PRESENT: Elin Allsopp (Scrutiny Officer)

1 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee held on 21 November, 2023 were presented and were confirmed as correct.

3 TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-29

The report of the Head of Housing incorporating the Tenant Participation Strategic Plan for 2024 -29 was presented for the Committee's consideration and scrutiny. The Plan was developed to ensure that Housing Services works in partnership with tenants to develop and deliver first rate housing services for the people of Anglesey and is the successor to the 2018-2023 Local Tenants Participation Strategy. The Housing Wales Act (2014) requires all Social Landlords in Wales to have a tenant participation strategy with the long-term goal of achieving continuous improvement in landlords' performance in supporting and enabling tenants to participate so they can influence decisions and contribute towards improving service delivery.

The report was presented by Councillor Gary Pritchard, Portfolio Member for Children, Youth and Housing Services who emphasised the importance of involving tenants in the way decisions about their homes are made and of obtaining their views and ideas about how the Council's housing services, homes and estates can be further improved and the challenges of WHQS Phase II met. The Tenant Participation Strategic Plan sets out how the Council will continue to develop tenant participation and increase participation levels during the life of the Plan.

The Community Housing Services Manager outlined the legislative background and principles behind the Plan and she provided an overview of the Plan including the priority areas as agreed with current participating tenants. Those related to ensuring effective engagement and information sharing, empowering tenants to influence and shape services, continually improving services to meet customer needs, and ensuring tenants have the skills and confidence to become involved in tenant participation opportunities. In delivering the Plan, Housing Services will develop a range of participation and engagement methods that will allow people to participate flexibly and as little or as often as they wish; continue to develop appropriate and innovative means of communicating with tenants and keeping them informed of progress; support tenants to build their skills and knowledge so they have the capacity and confidence to participate, and take a proactive approach to developing services utilising good practice from others. The Housing Service's approach will be regularly reviewed over the course of the five-year plan and a twelve-month Action Plan will be co-developed and monitored quarterly by the Tenant Participation monitoring group.

The Head of Housing Services said that the Strategic Plan builds on the achievements already made in tenant participation. The views of Housing Services users are important as levels of tenant satisfaction are reflected in the STAR survey conducted annually and benchmarked against other authorities in Wales.

In scrutinising the Tenant Participation Strategic Plan the Committee discussed a range of issues including the robustness of the process for putting the Plan in place and the challenges involved in ensuring that there are no barriers to participation arising from age or location and that everyone has the opportunity to contribute recognising also that some people may be more reticent than others in putting their views across. The approach to complaints was raised including how those and the Service's interventions in response fit in with the Plan. The appropriateness of Elected members advocating on behalf of tenants was also discussed as was the availability of resources to be able to realise the Plan and the risks to that endeavour.

In responding to those matters the Portfolio Member and Housing Services Officers confirmed the following –

- That the process of developing the Plan has been conducted over many months with the input of the existing Tenant Participation group and was comprehensive and varied in terms of the methods of engagement used. Tenant involvement has been encouraged throughout the process. The Service has also been closely involved with TPAS Cymru

which is an organisation that helps promote good practice in tenant participation to ensure that the Plan meets with statutory requirements.

- That the main risks and challenges are in ensuring that everybody whatever their background or experience, have the opportunity to participate and that there is fair representation especially as regards hard to reach groups including those who might be digitally excluded. The Service is committed to recruiting new members through a variety of means and to upskilling and improving the confidence levels of tenants to ensure they can participate effectively. Tenant engagement is taking place all the time and is a continuous process whereby views are exchanged, information shared and issues raised and resolved. It is accepted that good tenant participation is a two-way conversation and many tenants know who their Housing Services staff are and are comfortable in having that conversation with them.

The Chief Executive advised that evidencing how the Service has listened to tenants' views and how those views have influenced decisions is equally important. Whilst the Tenant Participation Strategic Plan is a reflection of how the Housing Service is leading on this matter, consideration needs to be given to how to obtain input into the Council's wider decision-making processes and whether the mechanisms used by the Housing Service can be applied by other services within the Council.

- That Elected Members may advocate on behalf of tenants by letter if authorised to do so by the tenant otherwise any verbal representations by a Member have to be made in the presence of the tenant.
- That Housing Services activity is financed through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) which is funded from rental income. The HRA is ring-fenced and cannot be used for any other purpose and being well-resourced is able to support the delivery of the Tenant Participation Plan.
- That a central record of issues/complaints is kept and analysed, and the Service is aware of the challenges and is able to identify any pattern of issues within groups or communities. The last annual STAR survey as well as reflecting areas of achievements also highlighted areas where improvements needed to be made which the Service has addressed e.g. simplifying communication about rent arrears so that tenants understand and are clear about the situation. The Service recognises that it is important to listen to what tenants have to say and to that end has introduced a survey/questionnaire to which tenants can contribute on an ongoing basis either online or by other means.
- That the Tenant Participation Strategic Plan will be monitored via the Tenant Participation monitoring group, the Housing Service Senior Management Team and by Scrutiny via the quarterly Corporate Scorecard report.

Having scrutinised the documentation presented and having considered the points raised during the discussion along with the Portfolio Member and Officers' responses, it was resolved to recommend the Tenant Participation Strategic Plan 2024-29 to the Executive for its approval.

4 HOUSING SERVICES ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-29

The report of the Head of Housing Services incorporating the Asset Management Strategic Plan for 2022-29 was presented for the Committee's consideration and scrutiny. The Plan sets out how the Council will manage, maintain, and invest in its housing stock over the Plan period.

The report and Strategic Plan were presented by Councillor Gary Pritchard, Portfolio Member for Children, Youth and Housing Services who referred to the Plan's purpose as ensuring that the Council makes informed decisions about the investment in individual properties based on an understanding of their performance on a social, economic and

environmental basis and that the Council's housing stock provides safe and suitable homes for its tenants, complies with Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS) 2023 and wherever possible, meets decarbonisation targets.

The Housing Technical Services Manager summarised the priority areas of the Asset Management Strategic Plan which includes meeting new challenges in relation to decarbonisation and energy efficiency improvements contained in WHQS 2023. The Service completed a housing stock condition survey in 2022/23 which provides the basis for future planning including meeting the investment requirements of the service's 30-year business plan and achieving WHQS 2023. Among the areas of investment will be the replacement of key components such as boilers and kitchens in accordance with the expected life cycles as well as the installation of renewable energy measures such as Solar PV and Battery Storage.

The main points of discussion arising from the Committee's scrutiny of the Asset Management Strategic Plan were as follows –

- The effectiveness of asset management software applications and systems and the impact which technical issues could have on the realisation of the Strategic Plan.
- The financial implications of the Plan as well as the certainty of funding sources to enable its implementation.
- The monitoring, governance, and evaluation arrangements to ensure the plan is realised.
- The ways in which the plan aligns with and contributes to achieving the objectives of the Council Plan 2023-28
- The risks to the achievement of the Plan and how it is proposed those risks are mitigated.

The Portfolio Member and Officers responded as follows –

- Provided assurances regarding the information held by the Service and the effectiveness of the systems used to manage it. Stock condition data is key in ensuring that future costs are robust and provide a sound base for planning. The recently independently completed stock condition survey provides new baseline data which is supplemented by historical information about the housing estate.
- Confirmed the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) as the principal source of funding where the income from tenants' weekly rents on homes and garages is ring-fenced for expenditure and investment in the Council's housing stock. As such the HRA provides a robust financial foundation for the next 5 years and the life of the Plan. Where there is an element of uncertainty is in relation to the overall cost of meeting the requirements of WHQS including completing Targeted Energy Pathways for each Council owned property, once those costs are known they can be factored into the HRA Business Plan. The Welsh Government also provides a major repairs allowance to help councils with their housing stock. There are competing priorities that will have to be addressed in meeting the challenges set by WHQS 2023 including achieving a balance between developing new properties and investing in current homes.
- Confirmed the governance and evaluation arrangements for the Plan including the reporting mechanisms to enable progress to be monitored effectively via Asset Project review meetings, the Housing Senior Leadership Team, Corporate Senior Leadership Team and the Executive. A Tenant Monitoring group has already been established for WHQS 2023.
- Clarified how the Strategic Plan contributes to the achievement of the Council's corporate priorities through the development of a Welsh speaking Housing services workforce and deployment of local contractors, making best use of the housing stock through timely investment thereby contributing also to the local economy and by supporting education

through the service's links with Coleg Menai and apprenticeship schemes. The journey towards net zero which includes the decarbonisation of the Council's housing stock and the technologies associated with it are also expected to create opportunities in terms of skills, training, and employment.

- Confirmed that the main risks relate to knowing the total cost of delivering WHQS 2023 as well as factors in the labour market and the availability of contractors especially as other social landlords will be competing for the same resources and expertise at the same time to undertake the same work. A further challenge relates to the rent setting regime and the rent increases approved by Welsh Government which in turn affects the amount of revenue/income into the HRA and subsequently the level of investment which the Housing Service is able to make in its housing stock. The Service is fortunate in being among the first to complete a stock condition survey which is key to generating planned maintenance and improvement programmes and enables the Council to get ahead with regard to piloting the Targeted Energy pathways and maintain an advantage as regards securing the resources to carry out the work. The Council has over a number of years been proactive in installing solar energy measures with up to 20% of its housing stock having had those measures already installed and 28% of its stock has reached SAP75 EPC C.

Noting the availability of contractors as a challenge and potential risk to the delivery of the Plan, the Committee proposed, and it was agreed that the feasibility of establishing an in-house team or teams to deliver planned work programmes such as kitchen replacement and renewable energy measures over the course of the next five years be examined.

Having scrutinised the Asset Management Strategic Plan 2024-29 and noted the response of the Portfolio Member and Officers to the issues raised, the Corporate Scrutiny Committee resolved –

- **To recommend the Asset Management Strategic Plan 2024-29 to the Executive for its approval**
- **In light of the shortage of contractors, to ask the Housing Service to explore the feasibility of establishing an in-house team(s) to undertake planned work programmes such as kitchen replacement and renewable energy measures and/or other improvement work as required.**

5 LOCAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: HOUSING SERVICES

The report of the Scrutiny Manager outlining progress to date with regard to the actions agreed by the Committee at its November 2023 meeting in relation to Housing Services Performance Indicators 28 and 29 was presented for the Committee's consideration.

Councillor Gary Prichard and the Head of Housing Services reported on progress in respect of the Housing Service review of Performance Indicator 28 (the average number of calendar days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant).

With regard to the Scrutiny review of Performance Indicator 29 (the time taken to let lettable units of accommodation excluding DTLs) the Committee was presented with proposed terms of reference, scope and governance arrangements for the Scrutiny Task and Finish group which it was agreed be established at the last meeting to undertake the review and was invited to nominate members to represent the Committee on the group.

The following points were made during the subsequent discussion –

- That the Task and Finish group should comprise of six members of the Committee
- That it is a matter for the Task and Finish group to invite the Portfolio Member for Housing to its discussions as it deems appropriate.
- In relation to the Terms of Reference, -

- To replace the reference to “Head of Service” in the second bullet point under section 2 (Role, Purpose, and Scope) with “Task and Finish group”
- To replace the first line under Desired Outcomes with “To implement the actions”

It was resolved –

- **To note progress to date with the Housing Services review of Performance Indicator 28 (Disabled Facilities Grants)**
- **To note the intention to submit the review findings and recommendations for consideration by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee in March, 2024.**
- **To approve the terms of reference and scope for the Scrutiny review of Performance Indicator 29 (letting of units of accommodation) as presented with the two amendments as outlined.**
- **To approve the governance arrangements in support of the scrutiny process and timeline for reporting on the review findings and recommendations to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.**
- **To nominate Councillors Geraint Bebb, Dyfed Wyn Jones, Keith Roberts, Ieuan Williams, Sonia Williams and Arfon Wyn to serve on the Task and Finish group.**

7 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The report of the Scrutiny Manager incorporating the Committee’s Forward Work Programme to April, 2024 was presented for consideration.

It was resolved –

- **To agree the current version of the Forward Work Programme for 2023/24.**
- **To note the progress thus far in implementing the Forward Work Programme.**

**Councillor Douglas Fowlie
Chair**