



HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 29TH OCTOBER 2024 AT 5.30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor A. Whitcombe – Chair
Councillor S. Williams – Vice Chair

Councillors:

R. Chapman, C. Cuss, D.T. Davies (MBE), T. Heron, A. Hussey, A. McConnell, B. Owen, L. Phipps, H. Pritchard, J. A. Pritchard.

Cabinet Members:

Councillor: N. George (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Property and Highways).

Together with:

Officers M. S. Williams (Director for Economy and Environment), M. Lloyd (Head of Infrastructure), G. Richards (Highway Services Group Manager), C. Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manager), J. Roberts-Waite (Head of Strategy and Development), M. Jennings (Principal Housing Strategy Officer), L. Sykes (Deputy Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), A. Jones (Committee Services Officer), J. Thomas (Committee Services Officer).

RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live-streamed and recorded and would be made available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#) Members were advised that voting on decisions would be taken via Microsoft Forms.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C. Bishop, M. Chacon-Dawson, D. Cushing, D. Ingram Jones, M. James, and J. Rao.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 17TH SEPTEMBER 2024

It was moved and seconded that the minutes be approved as a correct record. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal vote (and in noting there were 10 for, 1 against and 1 abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee held on 17th September 2024 (minute nos. 1 – 7) be approved as a correct record.

4. CALL-IN PROCEDURE

There had been no matters referred to the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the call-in procedure.

5. HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Cath Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager)/ presented the report, which outlined details of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the period October 2024 to March 2025.

Members were asked to consider the FWP alongside the Cabinet work programme and suggest any changes prior to publication on the Council's website.

It was moved and seconded that the report recommendation be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal vote (and in noting there were 12 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the Forward Work Programme as appended to the meeting papers be published on the Council's website.

6. CABINET REPORTS

It was confirmed that there had been no requests for any of the Cabinet reports listed on the agenda to be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports which were taken in the following order.

7. ON STREET ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Property and Highways presented the report to provide Scrutiny Committee with proposals to address increasing requests from members of the public for electric vehicle charging on the Highway. Members were provided with an overview of the summary of the report.

A Member sought clarification as to why the Council had not taken up the offer for a free trial from a Company called Turbo Charge who would install a track across the pavement that was lockable and referred Members to the report at 5.5 where it stated that under s115B of the Highways Act 1980, the Council could install covered channels for the

charging cable, but this would be a considerable cost or permission could be granted for households to do so under s115E of the Act There would be no cost if the Council took up the free trial offered. Members were advised that these trials had taken place in Milton Keynes and West Berkshire successfully. Officers confirmed that they did not take up the offer following recommendations not to install charging points on residential streets, there were a number of concerns which were explained to Members which covered issues such as where there are terraced properties, the residents would desire to have designated parking outside their properties potentially causing neighbourhood disputes particularly where parking was at a premium, all the safety concerns of having cables over footpaths which would be accessible to the public and it was advised that the residents would need to have an indemnity Insurance policy in place.

Members were advised that there were concerns as to who would monitor the installation and testing of the cables and the frequency of the testing as additional Officers would be required. Research undertaken highlighted that there was no legislation that allowed the installation of cables in the carriageway that were not supplied by Utility Companies. Discussions took place about the 76 Charging points throughout the Borough and Members were advised that the Council was looking to roll out putting these in more accessible locations. The costs of using the charging points at 45 – 75pence compared to 7 to 10 pence from home was discussed and it was acknowledged that the cost was high as the Companies run as a business and this was raised in the report as a socio economic impact and would be taken into consideration on any policy decision and an integrated impact assessment developed.

The Member stated that they felt that Welsh Government were not doing enough to encourage on street charging.

Clarification was sought on whether any locations had been identified for the hubs for charging points. It was confirmed that Officers were currently looking at this and that these would not be large hubs for charging vehicles it would be more of looking to identify isolated pockets that could be developed to make them more accessible for everyone. Members were informed that the usage of the charging network throughout the borough was extremely low and advised that the commercial aspect of the existing EV chargers are operated through private companies who manage and maintain those chargers. They are looking for a return on them in the future but at present they are not getting that return yet. The aim was that they would eventually operate on a fully commercial basis but until take up starts to build the rollout of EV charging infrastructure would be constrained as the companies would look to minimise their financial risks.

A Member enquired as to whether there was a possibility that charging points could be placed in local supermarkets or other similar premises where they have sufficient space. Officers confirmed that they were working with the private sector companies to encourage investment and confirmed that some businesses and supermarkets had already put charging points in. However it is early days and as the need increases, they may expand to include additional charging points. As this would be facilitated by the private sector, the Council would not have the liability for these charges or operational costs

One Member confirmed that they were aware that a number of Local Authorities were taking up the free trial and one of them was Blaenau Gwent Council, where they would be having a channel across the pavement for the cables which would be covered and queried how would Officers deal with situations where cables are being trailed across the footway. Members were advised that it was illegal to trail cables across the footway and Officers would take enforcement action. Officers are in discussions with other Authorities that are trialling this and all feedback would be looked at and considered before making any decisions going forward.

The Chair thanked Officers for the report.

The Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee considered and commented on the contents of the report, including appendices.

RESOLVED that: -

- 1 Scrutiny provided comments on the proposal that on street individual residential chargers are not supported but a more holistic hub type strategy is more appropriate. It is the intention for a Policy document to be developed to be presented to Scrutiny, prior to presenting to Cabinet for a decision. Such a policy will allow residents and Officers to have a point of reference going forward and a consistent approach.
- 2 That Scrutiny considered removing the risk of liability of having to increase resources and therefore increased budget allocation, by waiting for Market Forces to dictate the locations, costs, numbers, and standard of charge points delivered by the private sector, in parallel with the Council installing community charge hubs.

8. CAERPHILLY HOMES PROPERTY AND LAND ACQUISITIONS POLICY (2024)

The Head of Strategy and Development presented the report to advise Members of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee on the development of the new Property and Land Acquisitions Policy.

Members were advised the report sought comments from the Committee prior to the policy being presented to Cabinet on 13th November 2024. A summary of the report was provided to the Committee.

A Member commented that they were pleased to see the first compulsory purchase carried out and it was the right approach, clarification was sought on what action can be taken when the owner of a property was unknown or not registered. The Committee was advised that every effort was made to identify property owners, and the Council has an Empty Property Team and Strategy to assist but, in some cases, it was very difficult. The Chair suggested both He and the Member could draft a letter to Planning on this matter.

Members commented that they had seen a report that large properties are being renovated and converted into flats and the costs to do this are significantly lower than new builds. A Member asked what the approach was to purchasing former council houses that are on sale and then adding them to council stock for rent. The Committee was advised that this was why this Policy had been developed, the approach to buying back former council properties has been ad-hoc and this Policy provides a steer and strategic approach. Each property would be assessed, and consideration given to whether it meets the policy.

The Scrutiny Committee highlighted the Welsh Government Grant funding of £4m plus HRA additional funds. It was important to ensure value for money, but the purchase price would surely be what the local market dictates. The report stated that there were costs to commission external Organisations and Members asked who these are and why they were needed. Members were advised that before purchasing a property a full survey would be needed, and an understanding of what works were required to bring the property up to standards. The external Organisations could be the District Valuer or an Independent Surveyor. The intention was to buy an initial 10 properties through a cautious and strategic approach.

A Member commented that it was important to ensure the current Housing stock was rented out and not vacant unnecessarily before purchasing additional stock.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal vote (and in noting there were 12 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that Members of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee considered and commented on the contents of the report, including appendix, prior to it being considered by Cabinet on 13th November 2024

9. LOCAL HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT AND LOCAL HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT PROSPECTUS 2024

The Head of Strategy and Development presented the report to advise Members of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee on the development of a new Local Housing Market Assessment and Local Housing Market Assessment Prospectus.

Advising Members on the outcome of the stakeholder consultations carried out by the Council as part of the process to finalise both the Local Housing Market Assessment and Local Housing Market Assessment Prospectus.

Comments were sought from the Committee prior to the finalised Local Housing Market Assessment and Local Housing Market Assessment Prospectus being presented to Cabinet on 13th November 2024. An overview of the report was summarised for the Committee.

The Scrutiny Committee highlighted the strategic priority to increase the Housing provision for people with physical disabilities. Members therefore asked what would happen to properties that have been adapted when they become vacant, would the adaptations be removed or is the property offered to someone with similar needs. The Committee was advised that the aim was to maximise the use of an adapted property and identify any potential tenants that are on the common housing register. However, if there was no-one suitable the adaptations may be removed and the property offered generally.

A Member sought clarification on how Housing Needs are defined and queried whether someone who was currently living in a private rented property but wished to move into a council property due to lower costs be considered to have a Housing need. The Committee was advised that when an application for Housing was made an assessment is carried out and the applicant is put into bands 1, 2 or 3, depending on their level of housing need. 40% of applications on the Common Housing Register having an identified housing need – bands 1 and 3. The determination of housing need was set out in the Common Allocation Policy which was available online. This Policy was currently being updated and would be presented to Scrutiny in the New Year.

Following consideration of the report it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal vote (and in noting there were 12 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that Members of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee considered and commented on the contents of the report, including appendices, prior to it being considered by Cabinet on the 13th November 2024.

10. ENVIRONMENT 2024/25 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT (PERIOD 5)

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Property and Highways presented the report to inform Members of the projected revenue expenditure for the Economy and Environment Directorate for the 2024/25 financial year as of the 31st of August 2024. Service Divisions include Infrastructure Services Division, Land and Property Services Division, Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services Division. A Summary of the report was provided to the Committee.

A Member sought clarification on page 80 point 5.2.18 and asked what progress had been made in relation to public conveniences (PC's). It was confirmed that there were standing costs which remain such as non-domestic rates, and that until the buildings are taken over by any interested party or demolished then the costs would remain with the Council. Members were informed that the PC building in the park in Risca had recently been advertised as part of a Community Asset transfer package of a number of premises that had been advertised and the council would continue to do this.

The Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee considered and commented on the contents of the report, including appendices.

RESOLVED that the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee Members noted the contents of the report and the detailed budget monitoring pages that followed in respect of the Infrastructure Services Division, Land and Property Services Division, Public Protection, Community and Leisure services division which all fall within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee

The meeting closed at 18:27 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 10th December 2024, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR