



## HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 10<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2024 AT 5.30 P.M.

#### PRESENT:

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

#### Councillors:

C. Bishop, M. Chacon-Dawson, D. Cushing, R. Chapman, P. Cook, C. Cuss, D. T. Davies, T. Heron, A. Hussey, D. Ingram-Jones, A. McConnell, B. Owen, L. Phipps, H. Pritchard, J. A Pritchard.

#### Cabinet Members:

S. Cook (Housing), P. Leonard (Planning and Public Protection), N. George (Corporate Services, Property and Highways), J. Pritchard Deputy Leader (Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change).

#### Together with:

Officers: M.S. Williams (Corporate Director for Economy and Environment), M. Lloyd (Head of Infrastructure), C. Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manager), D. Smith (Principal Engineer Traffic Management) B. Winstanley (Head of Land and Property Services), B Thomson-Payne (Property Review Officer), C. Edwards (Environmental Health Officer), N. Taylor-Williams (Head of Housing), L. Allen (Finance Manager - Housing), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer) and A. Jones (Committee Services Officer).

Also in attendance: Cllr C. Gordon (Presiding Member)

#### 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 Councillor M. James.

## 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor A McConnell declared a personal and prejudicial interest on Agenda Item No. 9 - Housing Revenue Account Charges 2024-2025 in that she is a contract holder of Caerphilly County Borough Council, as such she would leave the meeting when the item was considered and take no part in the debate or vote.

## 3. HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 29<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 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 13 For, 0 Against and 4 Abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee held on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2024 (minute nos. 1 – 6) 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

Mark Jacques (Scrutiny Officer) presented the report, which outlined details of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the period December 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 subject to the addition of a report on the length of time taken on voids, how we operate the maintenance of our buildings and our purchasing programme being added to the FWP as discussed under Agenda Item 9. By way of Microsoft Forms and verbal votes, 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 Agenda item 6 (1) Bryn Community Engagement Liaison Group – 14<sup>th</sup> November 2024 Cabinet report was called forward by Councillor J. A. Pritchard.

The Chair reminded the Committee that the decision by Cabinet had been made to dissolve the Bryn Community Engagement Liaison Group with immediate effect, and that this item was not up for debate.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection was invited to address the Committee to outline the reasons why Cabinet reached their decision to dissolve the group. The Committee were provided with a summarised chronological history of the Bryn

Liaison Group which was initially established in 2008 to address complaints of odours associated with an In Vessel composting of food waste. The In Vessel was replaced with an Anaerobic Digestion Plant, which reduced the odours. Various iterations of the Liaison Groups followed and in 2022 Cabinet agreed to establish a formal Bryn Liaison Group and the terms of reference of the group stated that the Liaison Group be evaluated after two years. The Decision to dissolve the Group was made by Cabinet on the 14<sup>th</sup> November.

Over the two years the Bryn Liaison group had met 6 times where service requests and complaints were raised. Since the last meeting of the Liaison Group in October 2024 there had been 13 service requests received from 5 people across Gelligaer and Penybryn. These service requests are deemed to be business as usual for each of the regulators and as there are mechanisms in place for residents to engage directly with the Bryn Group, it was considered that there was no longer a requirement to continue operating the Bryn Liaison Group.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and invited Councillor Pritchard to outline the reason the Cabinet report had been called forward.

Councillor Pritchard confirmed that the reason the report was called forward was due to the way the decision was made and commented that the process was not satisfactory as the Liaison Group was not properly consulted about the group being disbanded and she felt that the Liaison Group should have been consulted to a greater extent. Referring to the last meeting Committee heard that residents were surprised that the meetings may not continue as they found them useful. Councillor Pritchard commented that residents had concerns as sulphurous smells and dust was still an issue and she felt that the Liaison Group should continue to allow any questions on these issues to be put to Officers.

The Chair thanked Councillor Pritchard and confirmed that the Cabinet Member would take the comments back to Cabinet and that it would be noted in these minutes.

## **REPORTS OF OFFICERS**

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

### **7. COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER POLICY REFRESHED APPROACH**

The Head of Land and Property Services presented the report to the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee and sought the views of the Scrutiny Committee on the refreshed approach to Community Asset Transfer (CAT) actioned through the Mobilising Team Caerphilly Process, which aims to provide a clear, proactive approach with effective support mechanisms.

An overview of the Summary of the report was provided to the Committee. Members were advised that there was Welsh Government guidance which covered best practice and that these had been discussed through various committees within Welsh Government. This guidance was published by Ystadau Cymru an organization that the Head of Land and Property Services was part of and fed into. Members were informed that the policy was currently being updated by Welsh Government and a report was being compiled by Cardiff University, the outcome of that report would be available in early 2025.

Members were advised that a Community Asset Transfer Officer would be appointed, and the role of the Officer was outlined to Members. The role included providing assistance to applicants and to collaborate with internal departments and external agencies throughout the whole process.

The Committee were informed that there were four assets that had been selected and would be going through the Community Asset Transfer process and the officer advised that there could be some technical or complex legal issues that may extend timelines.

The Chair thanked the Officer and invited Members to ask questions.

A Member sought confirmation on whether or not there was a list of the buildings and Land that could be considered for asset transfer, and if so, could it be provided to Members. It was confirmed that there was no list at present however discussions were intended with internal service areas to establish if any assets were surplus and therefore able to go through the asset transfer process. Members were advised that if they wished to know what assets were surplus in their individual Wards to contact the Head of Land and Property Services and a response would be provided to them.

Confirmation was sought on whether there were plans to introduce compulsory community asset transfers as part of the programme and the Member also queried what would happen to properties offered to Communities and not taken up. It was confirmed that there would not be any compulsory asset transfers forcing groups to take on assets as the process is designed to be open and inclusive. With regards to assets with no interest through the CAT process the property team would deem it surplus to requirements and Members heard how further discussions would take place on developing and an option to dispose of the assets via a commercial disposal on the open market would be considered.

A Member queried whether there was sufficient capacity to provide support to all the groups or volunteers who take the facilities on, and if not, would additional support need to be put in place. It was confirmed that Officers would be working more closely with third sector groups such as GAVO and the new CAT Officers role would help with better communication and coordination going forward.

A Member enquired if additional money would be provided to GAVO for additional staff and observed that voluntary organisations might not be in a financial position to take on the responsibility for community centres for example. It was confirmed that there was a lot of work to do regarding the allocation of funds. Members were advised that funding was available for properly constituted groups who were able to apply for the funding. The Member stated that whilst grants were available, they were not very big, and he felt that groups could not rely on grants.

In relation to capacity for GAVO Members heard that they had confirmed in meetings that they were struggling. Officers outlined how the report and the new approach moving forward would look to train up or provide guidance for community groups who would be taking on assets. Following conversations with other Councils it was established that their success had come from holding regular sessions with community groups so that they developed the skills needed to run the assets. The updated guidance from the Welsh Government would also look at putting more support in place for community groups.

A Member referred to 5.16 in the report regarding the time to go through the process and also asked if the Officer would be in contact with the relevant groups to ensure they were on track throughout each of the stages. The Member also sought clarification on what the Business Diagnostic Assessment entailed. The Officer confirmed that advisory work is offered to groups aimed at keeping them on track throughout the process.

Members heard how the Business Diagnostic Assessment would be a two-stage process. The first stage looked at assessing whether the idea was a good one to take forward, with an early decision being provided once it was agreed that it was acceptable in terms of legal, Social and practical terms. The second stage would be the decision-making part of

the process, and any feedback, guidance or comments would be fed back to the groups to advise them on what would be required within the business plan.

Clarification was sought on the process of determining what would have a chance of success based on the expressions of interest, as at that point a Business Plan would not have been prepared. Members were advised that as part of each review Officers would look at similar cases to see how successful they had been, and there would be a working group made up of all relevant officers including the Legal, Finance, and Estates teams. The officer advised Members that more technical expertise would be included for advice and guidance throughout the process before the final bid was taken into the political arena for a decision.

Following consideration of the report.

RESOLVED that: - the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee

1. Commented on the proposed refreshed approach, structure, and decision routes.
2. Noted the outlined routes for the pilot schemes outlined in 5.17, 5.18, 5.19 and 5.20.

## **8. CIVIL PARKING ENFORCEMENT UPDATE AND IMPACT OF REDUCED TARIFFS IN PAY AND DISPLAY CAR PARKS**

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Property and Highways presented the report to the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee to provide an update on the Civil Parking Enforcement Service (CPE) and provided feedback on the impact of the reduced 1-hour parking tariffs introduced in January 2023.

The implementation of CPE had been broadly successful. During the 2023/24 financial year there were 764 requests for enforcement across the county borough. A total of 10,858 Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) were issued, 9861 (90%) of which have been paid with the remainder progressing through the appeals process.

As a result of the more pro-active enforcement of parking restrictions numerous requests have been received to consider changes to the Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs). Since the implementation of CPE in April 2019, 208 TRO changes have been introduced throughout the county borough.

There had been a significant reduction in the number of tickets sold in 2023/24 compared to pre-pandemic levels (2017/18 and 2018/19). Approximately 145,000 (20%) less tickets were sold in 2023/24 and the largest percentage reduction in ticket sales (30% less tickets sold) is for the 'up to 1 hour' tariff despite the reduction to 40p.

A Member referred to the reduction in the number of tickets sold, especially the 30% less on the hour parking at 40p and asked if it was possible to get some revenue back into the Council by increasing the charges. It was confirmed that there was scope to review the charges, and this could be considered as part of the (MTC) Mobilising Team Caerphilly proposals and the officer highlighted to Members that the carpark usage had also reduced and that would need to be considered too.

Clarification was sought from a Member on whether there were enough Enforcement Officers, and he commented that more were needed. Members were advised that prior to setting up the civil parking enforcement an independent consultant who had worked with hundreds of Local Authorities across the UK was contacted to help with developing a

business case for the service. The process undertaken determined that for Caerphilly County Borough Council 8 full time Officers would be required. Members were advised that the team had not been at full capacity due to a high turnover of staff, and they also heard that since July 2021 there had been 30 recruitment drives undertaken. Currently the team was operating with one member of staff down.

A Member suggested that the charges remain at the same banding given that the usage of the carparks had reduced, and to increase charges would drive more people away.

Clarification was sought on point 5.1.6 and the income not reaching the budget target and the Member queried who set the target and how would we meet the target in the future. Members were advised that the year starts with a net credit budget based on the previous years. It was more difficult to control budget target due to operational costs and penalty charges, which were set by the Welsh Government with no uplift in these charges. There was no specific mechanism for setting the budget target, but officers set a realistic target based on previous years and took into account the running of the department and ensuring it operated as efficiently as possible.

A Member commented that during 2023/24 the team were two Officers short and that the number of tickets issued was down by 20% and suggested that this was due to the lack of manpower and that as the numbers are down by one currently this would have the same impact for the next year. The Member had raised previously in another Committee his view that 8 Officers was not enough. He also observed that he had been advised that the application process was very difficult and should be simplified. Members were advised that there was a high turnaround of staff, and the recruitment of Officers was time consuming and difficult due to these challenges.

A Member queried why there was such a high turnaround of staff. Members were informed that it was a very challenging job, Civil Enforcement Officers worked in all weathers and are subjected to a lot of difficult situations with members of the public. The Consultant at the beginning of the business case had advised that there would be a high turnover of staff, and Members were advised that officers would continue with the process of advertising and recruiting when required.

A Member sought clarification on how it was decided where Enforcement Officers would be deployed. Members were advised that the main focus would be on the town centres throughout the county borough. The officer also advised that there was also a reactive element with the team acting on requests for enforcement, and the team would also focus on school areas. It was outlined that there were also evening patrols undertaken and overall, the approach adopted made the best use of officers' time.

One Member asked whether consideration had been given to a mobile camera vehicle being used, as this would help especially with staff shortages as the vehicle could cover twice as much distance as an officer on foot. It was confirmed that Officers had started the process of looking to acquire a camera vehicle and hoped that towards the early part of the next financial year this could be in place.

A Member queried whether the team was due to recruit shortly as there was nothing advertised at present to replace the missing staff Member. Members were advised that recruitment would be dealt with 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 15 For, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

**RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that: -**

Members of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee scrutinised the report and provided comments on how this can be improved and endorsed the continuation of the approach taken within the contents of the report.

The Chair requested that Cllr McConnell leave the meeting as she had declared a Personal and Prejudicial interest on the next agenda item. Cllr McConnell left the meeting and took no part in the debate.

## **9. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT CHARGES 2024-2025**

The Cabinet Member for Housing presented the report to the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee for Members to consider and take a view on the increased Council Housing rent charges proposed in this report, prior to consideration from Cabinet on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 2024. 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 2025/2026 financial year. This report will be presented to Cabinet Members on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2024 and will include any comments or recommendations from this Committee which will be verbally presented due to the short timeframe between the two meetings.

An overview of the summary of the report was provided to Members for consideration.

The Chair advised that following pre meeting a number of queries had been raised by Members and raised a motion that a report on the length of time taken on voids, how CCBC operate the maintenance of buildings and its purchasing programme be added to the FWP. It was moved and seconded that the report be added to the FWP. By way of verbal vote (and in noting there were 14 For, 0 Against and 0 Abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that: - A report on the length of time taken on voids, how we operate the maintenance of our buildings and our purchasing programme be added to the Forward Work Programme. For Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee

The Chair invited Members to ask any questions on the report on the Agenda.

A Member sought clarification on whether any of the revenue collected on rent would be used to build new homes or was it only used to maintain the current stock. It was confirmed that all the finances go into the HRA, and it would be used to maintain stock and to deliver new affordable housing.

A Member sought clarification on the rental charges and asked if they increased would CCBC be in a position to build more houses. Members were advised that the rent charges were governed by the Welsh Government through a five year rent settlement with a one year extension, and CCBC could increase rent to the permitted maximum within the structure. The report being discussed was looking to increase the rent to the maximum 2.7% which is CPI plus one.

It was suggested by a Member that surplus garage sites could provide accommodation for homeless people, and he asked whether this had been investigated as an option. Members were advised that this was being considered and it was on the work plan. Officers were in the process of looking at garage sites to potentially utilise to more modular forms of buildings. Members were given details on a pilot scheme with a modular provider on a non-garage site. Depending on the outcome this could provide a model to roll out on other smaller sites.

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 14 For, 0 Against and 0 Abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

**RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that: -**

1. The Housing and Environment Scrutiny Members considered and provided views on the following recommendations, which would be presented to Cabinet on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 2024.
2. The following increases for consideration from April 2025 based on the options explained in the report, which are: -
  - (i) Rent is increased per property to the maximum permitted as per the WG rent policy which is 2.7%. This would increase the current average gross rent by £2.87 per week from £106.44 to £109.31 per week over 52 weeks.
  - (ii) The level of rent for garages from April 2025 be increased by the same level at 2.7% from £9.44 per week to £9.69 per week, an increase of 25p per week.

The meeting closed at 18:52 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 11<sup>th</sup> February 2025, they were signed by the Chair.

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CHAIR