

## HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> June, 2022.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The Meeting recording is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor A. M. Collins (Chair), Councillors J. Aviet, G.M. Ball, S. Campbell, G.D.D. Carroll, S.M. Hanks, W.A. Hennessy, B. Loveluck-Edwards, M.J.G. Morgan and S.D. Perkes.

Also present: C. Ireland (Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale Representative); Councillors R. Sivagnanam (Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Equalities and Regulatory Services), M.R. Wilkinson (Cabinet Member for Public Sector Housing and Tenant Engagement), E. Williams (Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health) and M.R. Wilson (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services).

### 60 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Chair read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing”.

### 61 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR –

RESOLVED – T H A T Councillor B. Loveluck-Edwards be appointed Vice-Chair for the Municipal year.

### 62 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillor I. Buckley, G. Doyle, V. John and H. Smith (Representatives from the Tenant Working Group / Panel).

### 63 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2022 be approved as a correct record.

### 64 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations were received.

## 65 INTRODUCTION TO THE HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –

To mark the first meeting of the Committee following the 2022 Local Government Election, this introduction to the Scrutiny Committee was provided by the Director of Environment and Housing which set out the following:

- The governance arrangements of the Committee and the Council's business planning process and what role the Committee played in this.
- The Council's key vision or 'mission statement' was 'Strong Communities with a Bright Future' which fundamentally helped to guide the Council's business and the services it provided to residents. To underpin that vision, the Council had set a series of outcomes which were crucial in terms of measuring and managing the Council's performance.
- The Corporate Plan Objectives most closely aligned to the remit of the Committee.
- How the work of the Committee was aligned to contributing towards the Wellbeing Goals for Wales which were part of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and how effective scrutiny was enhanced by the Act via the five ways of working,
- The 4 well-being objectives of the 2020–25 Vale of Glamorgan Corporate Plan included:
  - Work with and for our communities
  - Support learning, employment and sustainable economic growth
  - Support people at home and in the community
  - Respect, enhance and enjoy our environment
- The subsequent key themes of the 2022–23 Annual Delivery Plan tied in with these objectives and ran through them (i.e. Project Zero, Community Capacity, Hardship, Care and Support, Transformation, and Infrastructure). Annual performance was reported quarterly to each Scrutiny Committee for their consideration.
- In terms of performance, it had been a very challenging couple of years for the Council, but most or all services had continued through the pandemic, and they continued in most cases to perform well. The Committee would get an opportunity to scrutinise the performance of each of the services that reported to this Committee.
- Each Committee looked at the issues relating to the outcomes the Council wanted to achieve to deliver its vision. To make the connections, and take an integrated approach to the Council's work, a number of service areas were allocated within the specific remit of each Committee. The scope of this Committee and its role as a Council function came under the outcome 'An Inclusive and Safe Vale' and encompassed such diverse but related areas as Public Housing, Public Housing Maintenance, Public Protection including all Shared Regulatory Services functions, Community Safety, Private Sector Housing and Renewal Areas, Crime and Disorder Matters, etc.
- Within the Environment and Housing Directorate, each service area had its own individual plan as well such as Housing and Building Services and Shared Regulatory Services which fed into the overall Corporate Plan. This

was all highly structured and provided a 'golden thread' from what staff were doing at an operational level (i.e. picking up refuse) through to the corporate / strategic level (via the Corporate Plan), ensuring that everyone knew their role within the organisation.

- The Senior Team functions and personnel was outlined to the Committee, with the Head of Housing and Building Services and the Head of Shared Regulatory Services, who were in attendance, being introduced to the Committee as some of the key senior officers who would be attending the Committee on a regular basis. Also, more junior Council officers would attend in order to present key areas of their work to the Committee for scrutiny. Cabinet Member(s) would also attend and answer questions at Committee.
- If any questions arose from papers prior to the Committee meeting that were technical or very specific, Members were advised to let Democratic Services know in order to research the answer prior to the Committee meeting. Furthermore, for cross-cutting reports (such as performance), Members should let Democratic Services know of any specific questions (i.e. drilling into particular areas of interest) so that key Officers could be in attendance. If Officers did not know the answer at a meeting, they would commit to finding it and providing it by email shortly after the meeting and welcomed challenging questions from Committee Members.

Following the presentation, Committee and others raised the following questions and comments:

- Councillor Perkes asked about the budget for Environment and Housing Services and what the biggest 'draws' were on it. The Director of Environment and Housing explained the biggest draws were from Waste Management and Highway Maintenance (outside the remit of the Committee) due to them being the Council's biggest assets. Within the Committee's remit, there were also other challenges and draws ranging from homelessness, housing supply, the cost of living crisis through to supporting refugees from Ukraine, Afghanistan and Syria. The Head of Housing and Building Services outlined these issues further (such as providing wraparound support for Ukrainian refugees through to their hosting arrangements), as well as referring to the Council's ambitious programme of building more Council housing and its challenges (i.e. the lack of available, affordable land) but also referring to other successes such as the Vale of Glamorgan Council being one of the most successful Local Authorities in Wales in terms of generating affordable housing from private sector developments in the Vale. Members were also referred to the Council's Housing Business Plan, with the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer to share this with the Committee for their information.
- Councillor Loveluck-Edwards asked, in light of the challenges raised by the Head of Service above, if further updates regarding the Homelessness Prevention Strategy and Action Plan would be brought back to the Committee for discussion, overview and scrutiny. It was explained that this would be coming back to the Committee and that such strategic documents and action plans would go to either Scrutiny or Cabinet first and then on to each other with their comments and recommendations / decisions.

- On Councillor Aviet's query on what support was being given to Ukrainian refugees and their host families, and the challenges faced around this, it was explained that the Council had entered into a regional partnership with Cardiff Council in order to share resources and expertise. Due to the scale of this, there had been some delays in house visits and DBS checks, but these had now been 'ramped up' once the scale and need had been fully understood. The Council were looking to recruit additional staff in order to provide additional wraparound support, first stage intervention support, and advice around employment and welfare benefit advice for Ukrainian refugees and host families, in conjunction with Llamau who were currently employed as a support provider around initial first stage support. It was noted however, that the pool of recruitment for support staff was limited. So far there had only been a small number of instances where such hosting arrangements had broken down, due to factors such as the expectations that the hosts and the Ukrainian families had of each other and the costs / support involved.
- Councillor Carroll stressed the need for the Council to have 'joined-up' thinking between the various departments when helping refugees to settle within the Vale, etc. and asked what discussions took place between the various departments (such as Housing, Education and Social Services) to ensure that support for refugees ran as smoothly as possible. It was explained that although such discussions and support for refugees between the various Council departments had been 'clunky' to start due partially to a lack of guidance at the beginning, and not being aware of the numbers of Ukrainian refugees coming into the Vale via air, rail or from other parts of Wales, communications had improved on this over the last few months and the Council now had a fuller appreciation of the scale and challenges involved. The Housing Team had taken a lead in this area and the Head of Housing and Building Services lead an internal group within the Council, including Social Services, Health and SRS. Issues raised there were coordinated through Tom Dodsworth the Resettlement Coordinator. There had been challenges involving other partners too i.e. health screening and school admittance, but this was also being seen at the all-Wales level and the situation was now improving, due to in part to the constant work being undertaken by the relatively small numbers of operational and senior staff at the Vale of Glamorgan Council around this.
- The Cabinet Members for Neighbourhood and Building Services and Public Sector Housing and Tenant Engagement introduced themselves to the Committee and set out what their responsibilities were in terms of the remit of the Committee. They also spoke about the various challenges that their portfolio areas faced, such as recruitment and retention of Housing and Building Service staff, Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) part 2 and emphasised that due to the Council retaining its social housing stock it was vital to continue to ensure that tenants had decent homes to live in.
- Councillor Perkes asked about the UK Government's announcement around the encouragement of social landlords to sell their properties. It was explained that this announcement applied to England only and there was no right to buy in Wales and that housing legislation was devolved to Welsh Government (who had legislated to remove the right to buy several years ago). However, the Council was mindful that there were some people who did

aspire to buy and therefore utilised the Local Housing Market Assessment to measure what demand there was for the different tenures within the Vale and, based on this, to exercise influence via the Local Development Plan and the Council's own building program in order to meet those needs and others i.e. 'less than market' rate rents and other low cost ownership options, continuing to build more social housing and find accommodation for homeless persons, etc.

Committee, having considered the presentation and all the issues and implications contained therein, subsequently

**RECOMMENDED – T H A T** the presentation on the Introduction to the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee be noted.

#### Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the presentation and discussions at the meeting.

#### 66 SHARED REGULATORY SERVICES BUSINESS PLAN (DEH) –

The report, presented by the Head of Shared Regulatory Services (SRS), set out the process by which the draft SRS Business Plan for 2022/23 had been developed.

The draft Plan required ratification by the Joint Committee and formed a part of the SRS Annual reporting process set out in the SRS Joint Working Agreement.

The report offered the opportunity for pre-decision scrutiny of the Business Plan prior to submission to the SRS Joint committee.

The Head of Shared Regulatory Services also presented to the Committee the following:

- SRS had arisen out of discussions between Bridgend, Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Councils to ensure the resilience of the regulatory services across those three Council areas, to run their services more efficiently, to make cost savings, and for allowing areas of specialism.
- SRS also provided a single management structure, with governance through a Joint Working Agreement, Joint Committee and Scrutiny arrangements of the respective Councils.
- SRS encompassed various areas and services, including Environmental Health, Licensing, Trading Standards, Health and Safety and Illegal Money Lending within larger groupings such as Neighbourhood, Commercial and Enterprise and Specialist Services, supported by the Administration / Business Support Team that acted as an interface between those specialist teams and residents and businesses that SRS worked with.
- The SRS Business Plan delivered the statutory requirements placed upon each Council and supported the corporate priorities of each Council through its five strategic themes (Improving Health and Wellbeing, Protecting the

Environment, Supporting the Local Economy and Safeguarding the Vulnerable and Maximising the Use of Resources) in turn these themes would be cascaded down the organisation and turned into the actions and outcomes of the services that SRS delivered.

- The Business Plan set out the service achievements in 2021-22 under each of the strategic themes. i.e. responding to the COVID-19 pandemic (including Test Trace and Protect service, supporting high risk settings, ensuring business and returning traveller compliance) whilst trying to maintain the 'business as usual' work undertaken by SRS (including the food programme, housing, pollution, trading standards interventions and continued prevention, as well as prosecution of door step crime / scams, rogue traders and illegal dog breeding, as well as the seizure of illegal cigarettes and tobacco).
- In terms of looking ahead, the key challenges included the ongoing response to potential new variants of COVID-19, to recover lost ground with SRS' business as usual work, address the challenges around recruitment and retention of key or specialist staff and to develop a related strategy (including Welsh Government Regulatory Apprenticeships).
- Other emerging issues included the cost of living crisis, climate change (including the need to drive up energy efficiency in the private rented sector by working with landlords), new legislation around the Renting Homes (Wales) Act, Public Health (Wales) Act provisions relating to Special Procedures, and smoke-free requirements, supply chain difficulties (packaging and labelling, the impact of the war in Ukraine, etc.), as well as the ongoing need to safeguard older and vulnerable residents (i.e. installing call blockers in order to prevent nuisance calls).
- The Business Plan would be presented to the SRS Joint Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> June. Consultation with partner agencies was ongoing, so the Plan may be subject to a degree of change and any comments or thoughts from the Scrutiny Committee were welcomed on the 2022-23 Business Plan.

Following the Head of Service's presentation of the report, the Committee and others raised the following comments and questions:

- Councillor Hanks asked whether the Regulatory Apprenticeship Scheme had started yet and what numbers SRS were looking to recruit on to the scheme. It was explained that the scheme was a very recent development and so it required further work in order for it to be implemented, i.e. the need to involve Qualifications Wales and a steering group would have to decide the content of that qualification. SRS would also need to look at the figures to see exactly how many apprentices it would be able to take on because SRS would need to sustain them for a number of years. However, it was vital to make such opportunities 'visible' in order to get younger people into these specialist areas of work and to address the issue of an aging workforce.
- The Vice-Chair asked the following:
  - On the issues around recruitment and retention, the SRS Business Plan was silent on the role of Trade Unions in helping within this area. In response, the Head of SRS stated that the views of staff would be determined through a consultation exercise and creation of a dedicated workstream where 'nothing was off the table' in terms of identifying and

- resolving any barriers to recruitment and retention. She agreed the merits of Trade Union involvement in this work.
- SRS had undertaken child sex exploitation training with taxi drivers / firms and the Vice-Chair enquired if SRS would undertake other, similar training or awareness raising around areas such as disability. It was explained that disability awareness raising was being undertaken with taxi drivers, coupled with the use of 'mystery shopper' type checks to ensure that such awareness raising was working and that taxi drivers were dealing with such situations appropriately, with the results from these being very encouraging.
  - On the absence of empty homes data for the Vale of Glamorgan in the SRS Business Plan, it was explained that, unlike in Cardiff and Bridgend, SRS within the Vale of Glamorgan did not have responsibility over this area, which was dealt with elsewhere.
  - The Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Equalities and Regulatory Services wished to add that the SRS was a really good news story for the Vale of Glamorgan Council because it demonstrated how it could work in partnership with two other Local Authorities and share its expertise, take the lead in some areas and serve all members of the local community.

Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the draft Shared Regulatory Services Business Plan for 2022/23 be noted.

#### Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

#### 67 4<sup>TH</sup> QUARTER SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATION TRACKING 2021/22 AND PROPOSED ANNUAL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME SCHEDULE 2022/23 (CX) –

The report advised Members of progress in relation to the Scrutiny Committee's historical recommendations and the proposed Annual Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2022/23:

- 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter Recommendation Tracking January to March 2022 (Appendix A);
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Recommendation Tracking October to December 2021 (Appendix B);
- 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Recommendation Tracking April – June 2021 (Appendix C);
- 2019-20 Uncompleted Recommendation Tracking (Appendix D);
- Cabinet Annual Forward Work Programme 2022/23 (Appendix E);
- Proposed Annual Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2022/23 (Appendix F).

Concerning Appendix C, the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer explained that the recommendation for the Update on the DAARC Service (Domestic Abuse Assessment and Referral Co-ordinator) was ongoing due to the impact of Covid-19, whereby this work was delayed due to the overriding priority of keeping victims safe and the difficulties in meeting with victims. Officers had met with the Chief Executive of Atal y Fro (the domestic abuse provider of services in the Vale) to discuss the priority and it has been agreed that the scoping work will take place in the Autumn of 2022.

Regarding Appendix D, the Head of Housing and Building Services updated the Committee on the recommendations concerning the report identifying an appropriate housing solution for the Traveller community. He explained that these were still ongoing, and a new, draft, Gypsy / Traveller Assessment had been commissioned and shared with Welsh Government as well as going through officer consideration. Officers continued to seek alternative sites which would now be informed through the review of the Local Development Plan as well. A finalised version of the report / assessment would come back to the Committee to consider in due course.

Finally, the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer referred to some small amendments that needed to be made with reference to the Proposed Annual Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2022/23 (Appendix F), prior to it being uploaded to the Council's website and following approval by the Committee:

- The Presentation on Digital Inclusion be moved from June to July 2022 in the Work Programme Schedule.
- That the report for Closure of Accounts 2020/21 be renamed to Closure of Accounts 2021/22 on the Work Programme.

Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein, subsequently

#### RECOMMENDED –

(1) That the status of the actions listed in Appendices A to D to the report be agreed.

(2) That the Cabinet Annual Forward Work Programme for 2022/23 attached at Appendix E, in the context of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee Annual Forward Work Programme 2022/23 content, be noted.

(3) That the Committee's proposed Annual Forward Work Programme Schedule for 2022/23 attached at Appendix F be approved and uploaded to the Council's website, subject to the following amendments being made:

- The Presentation on Digital Inclusion be moved from June to July 2022 in the Work Programme Schedule.
- That the report for Closure of Accounts 2020/21 be renamed to Closure of Accounts 2021/22.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) To maintain effective tracking of the Committee's recommendations.
- (2) To align with section 7.6 of the Cabinet and Scrutiny Roles and Responsibilities Protocol.
- (3) For public information.