



City and County of Swansea

Notice of Meeting

You are invited to attend a Special Meeting of the

Scrutiny Programme Committee

At: Council Chamber - Guildhall, Swansea

On: Thursday, 1 August 2019

Time: 4.30 pm

Chair: Councillor Mary Jones

Membership:

Councillors: C Anderson, M Durke, E W Fitzgerald, L S Gibbard, J A Hale, D W Helliwell, T J Hennegan, P K Jones, E T Kirchner, W G Lewis, G J Tanner and W G Thomas

Statutory Co-opted Members: D Anderson-Thomas, J Meredith and A Roberts

Councillor Co-opted Members: P M Black, C A Holley, P R Hood-Williams, L R Jones and J W Jones

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Agenda

Page No.

- 1 Apologies for Absence.**
- 2 Disclosures of Personal & Prejudicial Interest.**
www.swansea.gov.uk/disclosuresofinterests
- 3 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips.**
- 4 Public Question Time.**
Questions must relate to matters on the open part of the Agenda of the meeting and will be dealt with in a 10-minute period.
- 5 Housing Commissioning Review Progress**

Next Meeting: Monday, 12 August 2019 at 4.30 pm

Huw Evans

Huw Evans
Head of Democratic Services
Thursday, 25 July 2019

Contact: Democratic Services - Tel (01792) 636923

Agenda Item 5



Report of the Chair

Special Scrutiny Programme Committee – 1 August 2019

Housing Commissioning Review Progress

Purpose:	The Scrutiny Programme Committee is meeting to discuss emerging findings and proposals from the Council's Housing Commissioning Review.
Content:	A report from the Cabinet Member for Homes & Energy, Councillor Andrea Lewis, which provides a progress report on the Commissioning Review is appended. The Cabinet Member will attend the meeting along with the Head of Housing & Public Health, Mark Wade, and the Housing Landlord Services Manager, Jane Harries, for report presentation, questions and discussion.
Councillors are being asked to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss and give views on the Housing Commissioning Review.
Lead Councillor:	Councillor Mary Jones, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee
Lead Officer & Report Author:	Brij Madahar, Scrutiny Team Leader Tel: 01792 637257 E-mail: brij.madahar@swansea.gov.uk
Legal Officer:	Debbie Smith
Finance Officer:	Aimee Dyer

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Programme Committee has asked for early engagement in the Housing Commissioning Review, and discussion well ahead of any final cabinet report, that will enable scrutiny councillors to give their views for decision-makers to take into account.
- 1.2 A Cabinet decision on the Housing Commissioning Review is currently listed for cabinet meeting on 21 November 2019. The report to Cabinet is expected to inform of the findings of the Commissioning Review process in the Housing Service and seek approval for proposals, progress to implementation and to undertake formal tenant consultation.

- 1.3 In addition to any early discussion and engagement, it is expected that the Scrutiny Programme Committee will carry out pre-decision scrutiny of the Cabinet report at the appropriate time.
- 1.4 The Cabinet Member for Homes & Energy, Councillor Andrea Lewis, has provided to the Committee a report (appended) which details progress with the Housing Commissioning Review. The Cabinet Member will attend the meeting to present the report and respond to questions, along with the Head of Housing & Public Health, Mark Wade, and the Housing Landlord Services Manager, Jane Harries.
- 1.5 The Committee is invited to discuss and comment on the Housing Commissioning Review. Scrutiny views at this stage will help to inform and influence decision-makers and any proposals for the Housing Service that will be taken forward. Any views will be passed on to the Cabinet Member for Homes & Energy and relevant officers so that they can be considered, and inform the preparation of the cabinet report.

2. Legal Implications

- 2.1 There are no specific legal implications raised by this report.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 There are no specific financial implications raised by this report.

Background Papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Report of the Cabinet Member for Homes & Energy – Housing Commissioning Review Progress.



Report of the Cabinet Member for Homes and Energy

Scrutiny Programme Committee - 1st August 2019

Housing Commissioning Review Progress

Purpose:	To brief the Scrutiny Programme Committee on the Housing Commissioning Review
Content:	An update on the initial findings from the Housing Commissioning Review
Councillors are being asked to:	Consider the information provided and to forward views to the Cabinet Member
Lead Councillor:	Councillor Andrea Lewis, Cabinet Member for Homes and Energy
Lead Officer & Report Author:	Mark Wade Lynda Grove, Tel 01792 635041 Email: Lynda.grove@swansea.gov.uk
Finance Officer:	Aimee Dyer
Legal Officer:	Debbie Smith
Access to Services Officer:	Rhian Millar

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The aim of the Housing review is to look at how we can work differently to deliver efficient, modern services, which are sustainable, meet future needs and contribute to the Council's Transformation and Future Council development objective. This is timely, given that much of the structure of the service has been in place for a number of years and the way in which customers wish to communicate with organisations and businesses is changing whilst demands on services continue to increase.
- 1.2 The review also looks at agile/mobile working and how that could change the way we work by ensuring staff have the right tools to carry out their job more effectively, together with examining the long term sustainability of District Housing Offices.

2.0 Service Review Details

2.1 Service Review Scope

The Housing Service is based within the Place Directorate and provides a wide range of statutory and preventative functions across two divisions, i.e. Landlord Services and Strategic Housing.

2.2 Landlord Services provides a comprehensive housing management service to 13,525 Council properties. The service is delivered primarily through 9 District Housing Offices. It also provides housing advice, homeless prevention services and tenancy support via Housing Options in the city centre. Strategic Housing provides a range of strategic/service planning and direct operational functions.

2.3 The key areas covered by the review are the core business and frontline customer functions that manage homes and estates. These functions focus on delivery of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan, making sure properties are let, ensuring the rent is paid, preventing anti-social behaviour, sustaining tenancies, estate management activities, etc. The core property functions focus on the investment in and delivery of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) (excluding the repairs service as this has been subject to review by Building Services). Other core support functions, some of which generate income/and or receive funding such as furnished tenancies and sheltered services, have also been reviewed to ensure they are shaped to support the overall housing corporate priorities and are effective in the services they provide. Finally, some indirect support functions which assist frontline delivery such as policy development, training and tenant consultation and communication have also been reviewed. A full list of the functions are included at Appendix A.

2.4 Purpose

2.5 The overall purpose of the Housing Service is to manage and invest in Council housing stock, support individuals and sustain communities.

2.6 Service Priorities

2.7 Good quality housing plays a significant role in helping meet the Council's vision for Swansea. The review has captured the headline priorities that apply across all services that support the delivery of key Corporate priorities, in particular safeguarding people from harm, tackling poverty, transforming our economy and infrastructure and maintaining and enhancing Swansea's natural resources and biodiversity. In addition, the extensive range of housing services contribute to the wider national and local agenda of health, well-being, poverty, public service improvement and plays a direct and indirect preventative role.

2.8 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires public bodies to carry out their functions in a sustainable way which improves economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being. Safe and secure housing is fundamental to the wellbeing of individuals and the wider community and an essential element in achieving the well-being of future generations. Without a secure, affordable home it is difficult for people to progress in other areas of their lives including employment,

education, training, health and family life. The review has been undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

2.9 Poverty and low income prevents people from accessing the full range of housing choices and can make housing costs hard to sustain. The Housing Service is a key contributor to the Council’s anti-poverty agenda through a wide range of activities. These include the provision of Council housing as a safe, secure and affordable option for households, support with financial matters, homelessness prevention, working with the private rented sector to improve conditions and security for tenants, provision of tenancy support to enable people to live independently and through the development of additional affordable housing to meet needs.

2.10 Key service priorities are as follows;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulfil statutory duties. • Maximise income to the HRA and deliver a viable rolling 30 year business plan. • Meet statutory consultation requirements • Prevent homelessness. • Maximise peoples independence and the ability to live in their homes for longer. • Help tenants to sustain tenancies. • Tackle ASB and help tenants affected by anti-social behaviour and support community cohesion across estates and improve the wider environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve housing conditions in the private sector. • Deliver WHQS by December 2020 and maintain it thereafter. • Deliver the More Homes strategy to increase the supply of affordable housing/new build Council housing. • Co-ordinate delivery of the Social Housing Grant programme/increase the supply of affordable homes.
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2.11 Service characteristics

2.12 The service area is large with some distinct characteristics and challenges.

The distinct characteristics are as follows;

- The service is complex, high profile and one of the biggest social housing providers in Wales.
- It is funded differently to other Council services. The majority of housing services are funded by the HRA with resources mainly generated by rental income which can only be spent on Council housing.
- It has 362 full time equivalent members of staff.
- The HRA has a net annual turnover of £81m and includes a Capital programme spend in excess of £43m per year. The net cost of the Housing General Fund (HGF) service is £2.2m and it has a capital programme of £7m per year. (Appendix A highlights which services are funded from the HRA or HGF).
- The service co-ordinates a Social Housing Grant and Housing Finance Grant Programme working in partnership with Registered Social Landlords and developers to deliver more affordable housing (this totalled £13m in 18/19).
- There is a national ambition to provide/build more homes to which the Council has developed a More Homes strategy to respond to this challenge.
- Many of the services are frontline, provide support, are preventative in nature and have a direct impact on individuals and communities.

- Much of the service is provided at the homes of tenants and residents and this is enhanced by a local 24/7 Neighbourhood Support Unit.
- Getting things wrong could have an impact on the reputation of the Council. More importantly there could be serious consequences on individuals if services fail as our service users are often the most vulnerable in society.
- Investment in housing has a big economic impact locally. The service will have delivered £498m of improvements to deliver the WHQS by December 2020. This will result in direct benefits to individuals in relation to safety, security, reduced heating costs and in some circumstances have a positive impact on health. In addition improving existing Council housing and building new Council homes provides considerable benefits to the wider community in terms of employment, investment in the local economy and help to supply more affordable housing to meet the overwhelming need.
- It provides a significant response to tackling homelessness along with partners and agencies.
- Work in partnership with other service providers/agencies to support individuals /families who maybe in crisis.

2.13 Challenges

- 2.14 The service needs to look at how it can change the way it responds to increasing service demands and the significant challenges it is facing.
- 2.15 These challenges include Universal Credit which impacts on tenants and the amount of HRA income available to run services, building new Council houses, ongoing investment and regeneration of estates, reducing resources in the General Fund, increasing demands due to the ageing population, statutory homelessness duties, implementation of new legislative requirements such as Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 and customer expectations to name but a few.
- 2.16 Over the last few years, a number of services within Housing have been subject to review due to budget pressures, legislation changes and external review/funding. These include Adaptations and Renewals, Homelessness, Tenancy Support and the Sheltered Housing service. In addition, the work undertaken to invest and improve the housing stock up to the WHQS has recently been scrutinised by the Wales Audit Office (WAO) together with a national WAO study on Homelessness and Adaptations.

2.17 Customer Demand

- 2.18 Customer demand remains high across services, examples from 2018/19 include;
- 2511 homeless applications,
 - 2091 referrals to the Tenancy Support Unit,
 - A total of 1257 private sector and Council house adaptations
 - Removal of 1,116 tonnes of rubbish,
 - 1499 end of tenancies and 1423 properties were let,
 - Visits and support to 1068 sheltered tenants,
 - Management of 2465 furnished tenancy packs compared to 50 in 1996,
 - 4352 incidents reported to the Neighbourhood Support Unit
 - Around 1600 enquiries to District Housing offices in a one week period.

- 2.19 Whilst demand on services continues to be high, performance in a number of areas remains positive, e.g. in 17/18 national performance indicators for the delivery of Disabled Facilities grants and homelessness prevention were in the second quartile of local welsh authorities which is encouraging as the volume of cases/demand dealt with were among the highest. Performance in both these areas has continued to improve since 2017/18. (Local authority comparison of 18/19 indicators is published around Sept/Oct 2019).
- 2.20 Whilst demand remains high it is encouraging that customer satisfaction across services is positive. Examples of these include;
- Tenants Surveys carried out in 2017/18, indicated 80% of respondents were satisfied with the condition of their home, 82% satisfied with their neighbourhood, 88% satisfied with responses to enquiries, 80% satisfied with the housing service and 83% were satisfied they are kept informed.
 - Customer surveys in 2017/18 for the adaptations service indicate that 98% are satisfied with the delivery of housing adaptations/repairs to their properties and 100% of customers were satisfied regarding repair loans.
 - The Tenancy Support Unit undertook a small user questionnaire in 17/18. Results indicate that overall, service users feel better about managing new accommodation, relationships and money. They also said they feel better mentally and physically as a result of receiving support. Almost 100% said that support was available when they need it and it had helped them to achieve the things they wanted and that they could live more independently.
 - A new Homelessness Strategy for 2018-22 was launched. Its development involved detailed consultation with service users and partner organisations to ensure that they had the opportunity to influence the content of the strategy and action plan.

2.21 Stakeholder engagement

- 2.22 The review commenced in August 2018 and the following framework was put in place for the review process;
- A Review Programme Board and 11 Staff focus groups were established
 - SWOT sessions were undertaken with all staff and regular team briefings held
 - Head of Service video messages cascaded to staff
 - A number of customer surveys and tenant events took place
 - Local ward members were briefed
 - Meetings held with Union representatives
 - Internal stakeholder workshops were attended by a wide range of colleagues from other services across the Council such as Social Services, Employability, Welfare Rights, Planning, Parks, Union, Local Area Coordinators, etc.
 - Liaison with other external stakeholders took place via a number of mechanisms including questionnaires/ongoing partnership meetings etc to address service improvements. These included the Department of Work & Pensions, local housing associations, Tenancy Support Unit providers, The Wallich, Police, Community Safety, SWP Domestic Abuse Unit, Supporting People, Emerging Role of Sheltered Housing regional group and Western Bay Care and Repair.
 - Some service areas have recently been subject to extensive partner consultation such as homelessness when developing the homelessness strategy with other agencies such as CRISIS, Shelter, etc and others subject to scrutiny via WAO reviews, i.e. WHQS and adaptations.

- Feedback from the WAO reviews have been incorporated into the review process.

2.23 Housing Management cost comparison

2.24 Research has been undertaken to see how the other Welsh Local Authorities deliver services but comparison is difficult as many are split across different portfolios, structured differently, have different demand issues, don't operate a 24/7 landlord presence etc. However, the majority do deliver their housing activities in a similar way to Swansea through specialist teams for homelessness, rents, liaison work for WHQS, etc, neighbourhood teams and most have area/estate based offices.

2.25 Some cost data is available for the 11 stock holding local authorities for 18/19 HRA spend on management costs per property. These costs range from £622 to just over £1,800. Out of the 11 authorities, Swansea is in the mid-range with an average cost per property of £1,146. However a detailed breakdown of who provides what services for these costs is not available.

2.26 Appraisal of office assets and IT requirements

2.27 As part of the review, an analysis was undertaken to look at the channels available to customers to communicate and contact services as the way they are accessing organisations is changing. This included an analysis of the long term sustainability and investment required to maintain the District Housing offices and examining demand data. In addition, the Council is introducing new ways of working for staff including agile and mobile working. Consideration has been given to how the service can utilise these new working methods to improve the service to customers and at the same time reduce service overheads.

3. Service Improvements

3.1 The review has highlighted that significant IT investment is needed to provide greater service efficiencies both for customers and staff as a large number of processes and transactions are heavily paper based. The headline emerging issues fall into five main categories and include:

- Maximising income
- Improving customer access
- Improving operational systems and processes
- Service specific issues
- Asset issues

More details are provided in the following paragraphs.

3.2 Maximising income

3.3 The vast majority of funding for the HRA comes from the collection of rent. The introduction of Universal Credit has meant that the Rents Team is facing significant challenges to maximise income. As a result there is a need to increase resources and reconfigure this team in order to offer early support to tenants and minimise the overall impact of arrears on the HRA business plan and tenants themselves.

- 3.4 Staff focus groups have also identified a number of opportunities that should be explored further to increase income which include:
- Exploring the introduction of charges for some functions not currently charged for, e.g. lift maintenance/window cleaning/ NSU/lost alarm pendants (Sheltered) subject to tenant consultation.
 - Considering charging for missed furniture pack deliveries for the furnished tenancy scheme. This is due to a high number of aborted deliveries as the tenant does not turn up at the allocated slot. This has a big impact on the number of deliveries completed in a day and staff time.
 - Reviewing the annual leasehold management charge and options to charge solicitors for work relating to the resale of leasehold properties.
 - Reviewing the capacity of the Furniture Store to store furniture items we have a statutory duty to store rather than paying contractors for storage.
 - Analysing the opportunity to hire out communal halls in sheltered complexes to relevant services/agencies.
 - Undertaking a cost analysis of leasing a HIAB vehicle in order to lift heavier loads for estate clearance activities.
 - Exploring the options to bring back in house debt recovery for certain functions in liaison with Finance section.
 - Considering phasing out paying for TV licences for new Sheltered tenants and review the scheme for existing tenants.

- 3.5 In addition:
- A review is underway to explore opportunities to generate additional income from HRA garages, leases and car parks as part of the development of a HRA Asset Management Plan.
 - The service will continue to seek capital funding income streams including WG Arbed Ambyth and Enable programmes to support provision of energy efficiency schemes.

3.6 Improving Customer access

- The way customers access services is changing, with significantly more transactions being undertaken over the phone and online. There are a number of different telephony systems across satellite offices which are out dated and do not work efficiently to enable direct customer access to the relevant officer/team.
- Changes are required to online facilities for tenants to improve the way they can make online transactions such as rent payments, housing applications, grant applications, allow them to report repairs, fly tipping, incidents of anti-social behaviour online, etc. Any digital solution would need to work with mobile phones/tablets as these devices provide the only access to the internet for many of our customers.

3.7 Improving operational systems/processes

Agile/mobile working/WiFi and communication

- Historically, access to IT systems for staff has been provided via fixed desktop computers. In order to facilitate a more agile/mobile approach to working a number of improvements to hardware devices and network infrastructure need to be implemented. Desktop machines will be replaced with laptops as part of a corporate programme. The service will also explore the installation of staff WiFi

into DHO offices to allow the office accommodation to be used in a more 'agile' way. Further investigations are also taking place to look at mobile solutions which would allow officers to input information whilst on site and in customers' homes.

- A number of frontline staff, do not currently have basic IT access for communications and the purchase of smart phones is required.
- There is also the need to consider installing a customer IT facility in Housing Options to ease the Universal Credit claims process and contact partner agencies such as the DWP.

Back office systems

- Many processes, across all services are currently paper based and key records are held in paper files. This causes significant inefficiencies both for the physical storage of files and access to information. An electronic document management system is required to facilitate the introduction of more modern ways of working. A Corporate project is examining these issues for all services. Improvements to back office systems will simplify and reduce time spent on a number of transactional processes.
- The furniture store require a computerised inventory system to replace the current manual system of coding furniture.

Software solutions/new systems

- A number of services are currently reliant on unsupported bespoke databases, for example homelessness, leasehold service charges, asset management and WHQS. These systems were developed as short term solutions and pose significant risk around long term resilience. Exploration of new systems is needed.
- The Renewals service shares its main IT system (FLARE) with other Council services. A corporate project to replace this system is currently on going. An alternative IT system is also required to replace the Tenancy Support case management system.

The investment in IT will have a significant positive impact on the way services run, how customers can access them, cost reduction, officer time and inefficiencies in paper based and back office processes.

3.8 Service specific issues

3.9 Some services/functions are facing more significant challenges and need to consider how they can address the issues and/or overhaul systems with IT improvements, etc, including:

- **Housing application, assessment and waiting list** –There is a need to overhaul the housing application, assessment and waiting list process as well as improving the way the customer can access this service and information on properties and estates online. This will help manage customer expectation of realistic housing options/likely waiting times, minimise the time a property remains empty, reduce an officer's time spent making abortive offers due to no contacts and the customer not really wanting the area they originally chose.

- **Empty properties/Voids/lettings** – The void and lettings processes have previously been subject to a systems thinking review and continue to be scrutinised as they have a big impact on loss of income when a property is empty. Current void levels are around 199 which is a significant reduction from when they stood at over a 1000 in 2002. A number of service improvements are being considered to reduce the time taken to let a property. These include promoting alternatives to transfers via HomeSwapper to encourage tenants to swap their homes; extending early viewings to give the applicant the opportunity to view a property whilst it is undergoing repair; making changes to how waiting lists are updated with the aim of reducing abortive offers; and in liaison with Building Services reviewing the void process stages to minimise rent loss and turnaround times. It is also hoped that the turnover of around 1500 tenancies ending and being let each year will slow down as the current investment and significant kitchen and bathroom programme should help tenants be happier in their homes and want to settle in them longer.
- **Prospective tenants** - The service also needs to consider what mechanisms it could put in place to prepare new tenants for successfully managing a tenancy.
- **Anti-social behaviour (ASB)** - ASB related activities are currently delivered through 9 District Housing Offices, who are in turn supported by a small dedicated ASB Support Team of 3 officers. Any type of enforcement action linked to ASB, has to be proportionate and tailored to the individual as it is carried out within a restrictive legal framework based on evidence and proof. A larger ASB Support Team dealing with high level ASB, would lead to a more consistent, measured and timely approach to effectively deal with ASB. The service also needs to explore the procurement of a noise “app” which would help complainants to provide evidence of noise problems as a significant amount of ASB incidents are low level noise issues.
- **Supporting individuals/tenancy enforcement** - The District Housing Office service deals with an increasing proportion of customers who present with complex needs requiring high levels of support. These include safeguarding, drug/alcohol misuse, a range of mental health and well-being issues. Taking a holistic approach and working with a range of professional partner agencies to deliver the support needed to help sustain tenancies is pivotal to this. As an example, a Neighbourhood Officer dealing with a case of hoarding will work intensively with a range of partners such as Community Mental Health, Fire Service, Pollution Control, Local Area Co-ordinators and Social Services to help support a tenant. Frequently there will also be complaints of ASB.
- **Sheltered service** – Following a significant review in 2011, the service continues to face many challenges, including the future of Supporting People funding, an ageing population, increases in dementia/other related illnesses and new technology. As a result, the service is subject to continual review to consider how it can support people to remain in their homes for longer. The service also needs to review its cleaning and weekend service, 24hr response provision, its use of guest bedrooms and the level of future investment required for furnishings, lifts and ramps in some complexes. It will also explore the feasibility of introducing a handyperson service in sheltered complexes to assist tenants with minor jobs, e.g. changing light bulbs, putting up curtain rails, minor repairs of furniture etc, which could assist tenants to stay in their homes for longer.

- Further investment will also be required longer term with the likely introduction of new assistive technology in sheltered complexes, e.g. movement sensors. The service is also working with Social Services to explore how the extra care provision model could be incorporated into the existing sheltered housing provision.
- **Furnished tenancy scheme** – There is an opportunity to consider implementing a points based choice system to examine how the scheme could be made more financially viable to those people not in receipt of benefit. The scheme could also explore its expansion to other social landlords to increase income.
- **Neighbourhood Support Unit** – The unit was set up in 1997 with the main role to provide a 24/7 landlord presence on Council estates to support District Housing Offices, prevent ASB and provide security to empty Council properties. However, the existing empty property alarms are becoming obsolete and need replacing which will require significant investment. Research has shown that other organisations do not generally alarm empty properties so it is opportune to review this provision. The service has started to pilot not alarming voids in some areas to help inform the analysis. In addition, it needs to examine future income opportunities and analyse the feasibility of merging the NSU & City Centre CCTV control centres.
- **Estate management/gardening scheme** – When Housing first adopted the “Tend and Mend” service in 2015, the intention was to provide 3 cuts per year to gardens covered by the scheme. However, it has only been able to achieve one cut per year due to significant increases in demand and this is likely to continue due to an ageing population and the lack of verification required to demonstrate disability. Whilst currently the service is available to those aged 65 and over or disabled, consideration is being given to altering this criteria to those aged over 70 or with a qualifying disability. Alternatives to direct delivery of garden cutting are also being explored including a garden tool hire scheme and working with the Local Area Co-ordinators to identify any opportunities for community run initiatives. This should ensure the garden cutting scheme can continue to provide a valued service to those that need it whilst redirecting demand from those tenants who are able to carry out the work themselves or who may have family who can provide assistance. The service is also working with the estate management tenant panel to update its Estate Management strategy to ensure resources are targeted effectively and that the service continues to meet tenants priorities to keep estates safe and attractive.

3.10 Service issues from external review, funding outcomes

3.11 Two high profile services have recently been subject to scrutiny by the Wales Audit Office and one has recently undergone an in-depth exercise with partners as a result of new Welsh Government legislation to review outcomes for customers. These are:

- **Improvements to Housing stock/WHQS** – In 2018, the Wales Audit Office undertook a review to look at whether the Council has effective arrangements in place to meet the WHQS by 2020. Overall, the findings identified that tenants are satisfied with the improvement works and the Council has a sound

approach to meeting the WHQS by December 2020. The WAO made a number of recommendations for improvements in its final report which have been included in an action plan. This was considered by Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel in March 2019.

- **Adaptation services** - The WAO have undertaken a review of adaptation services across all local authorities in Wales in order to consider improvements for customers. The service's response to the findings and an action plan on the recommendations were considered by Adult Services Scrutiny Performance Panel in June 2019.
- **Homelessness** – This service has recently been subject to review as part of the work it has undertaken with a significant number of stakeholders to develop the Homelessness Strategy and action plan. The findings from the Scrutiny Homelessness Working Group held in June 2018 fed into the development of the strategy. Scrutiny Programme Committee considered the final draft of the strategy in October 2018 and in November 2018 prior to Cabinet approval. Delivery of the action plan in collaboration with partners will result in improved access to services for customers. The service also needs to consider minimal cost improvements to Housing Options reception area to improve the physical environment for customers.
- **Private Sector Renewal** – The review has identified a service that is currently being phased out due to the lack of capital funding. Whilst a number of additional funding bids have been made by the Council for the Sandfields Renewal Area these have been unsuccessful.

3.12 Asset issues

- 3.13 A number of sources of information have been used to assess the long term sustainability of District Housing Offices. These include building surveys, analysis of patterns of changes in customer access, preference towards more contact over the phone/online and falling numbers of face to face callers. In conjunction with looking at new ways of working for staff, this information suggests that the DHO footprint should be reduced from 9 to 6. The proposals being considered include closing Penlan, Eastside and West Cross offices. Feedback on these proposals are currently being sought from stakeholders as part of the review process, prior to any recommendations being reported to Cabinet later this year and formal consultation with tenants.
- 3.14 To effectively manage the reduction in DHOs Housing Services would continue to be provided from the nearest housing offices and Neighbourhood officers would make more home and estate visits. Housing advice/rent surgeries are proposed for local community buildings for tenants who may not want a home visit. Tenants would still be able to pay their rent in local post offices, shops displaying the payzone sign, online, over the phone and by direct debit, or by calling into other District Housing Offices or the Civic Centre. Recycling bags can be picked up from local libraries, some shops, post offices, a list of which can be found at <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/requestmorebags>. They can also be ordered online, by putting request tags out with recycling bags or contacting evh@swansea.gov.uk tel 635600.

- 3.15 There is also an exercise taking place to explore co-locating one District Housing office with the Library service as part of the Services in the Community project.

4. Customer/Stakeholder Feedback On Proposals

- 4.1 Four internal stakeholder workshops were recently held with colleagues from services across the Council and responses were very positive, with further ideas identified to improve how services continue to work together.
- 4.2 In June, all tenants and leaseholders were invited to provide responses on the proposals to reduce the number of District Housing offices via written feedback slips online or by attending events in the local District Housing Offices. The number of responses totalled just under 150. The feedback highlighted the value tenants place on the housing services provided in communities and the main concern raised was that any improvements to IT systems should not replace the face to face service being delivered but should enhance it as a mechanism for those who choose to contact the service in this way.

5. Summary and Conclusion

- The review of the Housing Service has illustrated the vast majority of functions delivered are statutory, frontline and/or provide a significant preventive and supporting role which have a direct impact on individuals and communities. Investment in housing also has a big economic impact locally with £498m being invested in meeting the WHQS by December 2020.
- The service needs to respond to and progress a number of high profile issues over the next few years. These include achievement of the WHQS and development of post 2020 improvement schemes, delivery of the More Homes strategy, implementation of the outcome of the Welsh Government Affordable Housing Supply & Rents Policy review, implementation of the requirements of the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016, contribution to the development of West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Health & Housing strategy and delivery of the Homelessness Strategy to name but a few.
- The extensive range of services provided by Housing make a significant contribution to Corporate priorities. They also contribute to the wider national and local agenda of health, well-being, public service improvement and play an important direct and indirect preventative role.
- There is a need to invest to save and provide greater service efficiencies via a significant number of IT improvements. This will improve customer access, streamline back office processes, give staff better tools to deliver services allowing more time spent to support customers etc.
- The findings suggest that the DHO footprint should be reduced from 9 to 6 which will help make local services more sustainable for the future.
- Most of the total HRA expenditure of Housing is realised via rental income and there may be some scope to increase this further.
- Services funded by the general fund/external funding are continually subject to review due to pressure on resources.
- Key risks of getting things wrong could have an impact on the Council financially and on its reputation but most importantly on the residents of Swansea.
- Demand and expectation from the public continues to increase whilst performance continues to be maintained/ improved and satisfaction levels are positive.

- The review has identified potential service improvements across many areas in Housing. Tenants will continue to be encouraged to become actively involved in the review and its proposals to ensure Housing services are efficient and responsive.

5.1 Next Stages

Report to Cabinet in November 2019 and seek approval to commence formal tenant consultation on the review findings.

6.0 Equality and Engagement Implications

6.1 The Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) and must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

6.2 The Equality Impact Assessment process ensures that we have paid due regard to the above.

6.3 Feedback on services has been sought from Tenants and leaseholders as part of the review process and the Council's Tenant Participation Strategy.

6.4 An EIA screening has been undertaken to consider any impacts at the earliest opportunity on the emerging findings of the review. However work on a full EIA has commenced and will continue to be developed during the review process and as part of the reporting process to Cabinet.

7. Legal implications

7.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report

Background papers: None

Appendices: Appendix A: List of services subject to review

Appendix A

HGF
HRA

Core Business and Customer Functions which maximise income/deliver HRA Business Plan	Rent Management and Leasehold Management Financial & Orchard Management	Lettings/ void property management	Tenancy/estate management for existing tenants (DHOs) Sustaining tenancies, tenancy agreements/property upkeep, gardens, tenancy enforcement, allocations, inspections, ASB, transfers, referrals, etc. Housing advice Applications and tenant transfers
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Core Property Functions - to maintain housing stock, support service provision	Improvements to housing stock/repairs policy/liaison role with tenants/technical strategy/assessment for work programme and management of disrepair process.	Sustainability of office assets/agile working
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Core support and other functions	Adaptations	Furnished Tenancies	Neighbourhood Support Service	Estate Caretaking Service	Sheltered Service	Tenancy Support	Homelessness Assistance
	Delivery of private sector grants, including renovation grants, mandatory DFGs and council house adaptations.	For new tenants to rent. Affordable assistance to help with the set up of their home	Providing void property security and to enhance estate/tenancy management services by providing a 24 hour landlord response.	All aspects of council housing estates including management of open spaces, safety issues, caretaking and routine inspections of estates	Provision of a warden service at 31 complexes across the city, including regular visits and support to tenants to enable them to lead an independent life.	Provision of free advice and support to all residents across all tenures. Support clients to sustain their tenancies, address anti-social behaviour issues and manage new tenancies. Provide help with applying for benefits, managing debt, coping with mental or physical illness, overcoming alcohol or drug abuse etc.	Homelessness prevention/ assessment services, manage Council temporary accommodation/ money advice services. Coordinate the nomination agreement with RSLs, coordinate and develop partnerships with voluntary sector organisations, utilise the Adapt register to source suitable properties to meet individuals specific needs, development/ delivery of the Homelessness Strategy.

Indirect Support Functions	Policy/Performance/Service Development/Training/Tenant participation/communications	Enabling role	More Homes Programme
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