



## Report of the Cabinet Member for Homes and Energy

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 9th September 2019

### Key Headlines: Cabinet Member for Homes and Energy

**Purpose:** This report outlines notable activities and achievements in terms of ensuring the delivery of key priorities within the Homes and Energy portfolio. It describes key activities within the portfolio and how they are implemented in line with the Well-being of Future Generations Act. The report also identifies objectives, key challenges and decisions which are anticipated for Cabinet over the next 12 months.

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#### **For Information**

### **1.0 The Portfolio for Energy and Homes**

1.1 Key responsibilities within the portfolio include;

- Building Services
- Cooperative Housing
- Council House Management
- Council House Repairs
- District Heating Schemes
- Energy Policy including Generation & Supply
- Green Energy Infrastructure
- Green Fleet Transport & Green Vehicle Adoption
- Homelessness & Supporting People
- Homes as Power Stations (City Deal)
- Housing Adaptions & Renewal Schemes

- Housing Policy, Affordable Housing & Housing Options
- Landlord Licensing
- Lead Elements of Sustainable Swansea
- More Homes Delivery
- Poverty Reduction
- Sheltered Housing
- Tenancy Enforcement
- Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS)

1.2 This report highlights the progress made in relation to key priorities within the portfolio including energy, new council housing, the management of existing housing stock, wider housing policy and homelessness/supporting people and other notable achievements. The report also considers the impact of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 and Swansea's PSB on the delivery of key activities within this portfolio.

## **2.0 Energy**

2.1 Swansea Council declared a Climate Emergency on 29 June 2019, this recognised the importance of energy related and other actions taken to date in reducing carbon emissions, enhancing biodiversity, and securing a prosperous, low-carbon economy for our region. It also acknowledged the importance of working with expert partners to identify how we can build on these actions moving forward.

2.2 Implementation of key elements of the Energy Strategy are ongoing, this includes exploring the potential for a solar farm, a refit programme of energy efficiency measures and the centralisation of Council's utility budgets. It is anticipated that a business case for a solar farm will be presented by year end.

2.3 Green Energy Infrastructure work has included supporting work towards a world leading Tidal Lagoon and community energy schemes such as SCEES. SCEES is a scheme facilitated by the Council but set up as a separate entity, where revenue generated by the scheme is put back into community based projects. The Council has also procured a contract to utilise Energy Company Obligation (ECO and Eco-flex) as well as other subsidies to fund energy efficiency measures for both public and private sector housing as well as kick start new schemes.

## **3.0 Green Fleet Transport & Green Vehicle Adoption**

3.1 Swansea Council has Wales's largest public sector electric vehicle fleet. This achievement has been recognised with the 'Green Fleet Public Sector Fleet of the Year' Award. This year saw the adoption of the Council's Green Fleet Policy with annual targets and a link to the Business Travel Review. This policy specifically links to the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

- 3.2 The Council collaborates with regional partners via Swansea Bay Ultra Low Emissions Vehicle Group, in addition to engagement exploring hydrogen vehicles has taken place with Riversimple and Swansea University. The Council has also supported an annual Clean Air Roadshow and engaged local businesses and partners by hosting the first Green Fleet Wales event in Swansea this year. To achieve an integrated approach, the Council works with others nationally to urge Welsh Government to develop an electric car charging infrastructure.
- 3.3 Scheduled vehicle renewals for 2019/20 include 30 cars and vans to be replaced by full or hybrid electric vehicles in line with our Green Fleet Policy. Focus on Corporate Fleet charge-point infrastructure funding remains a priority.
- 3.4 Swansea Council has recently been successful with an award of £89,000 WG funding from the Local Transport Fund for the provision of publically accessible, electric vehicle charge points in a number of Council-owned parking interchanges across Swansea. It is anticipated that each site will have a dual headed 7kW 'fast' charger installed.

#### **4.0 More Homes and Homes as Power Stations**

- 4.1 The Colliers Way phase 1 scheme has been highly commended at Municipal Journal awards and was a finalist at the 'Constructing Excellence Wales' awards. The Housing Revenue Account Development Plan was approved by Cabinet in February 2019. The bid for Innovative Housing Programme 2 (IHP) 2 funding was successful and will result in 16 new build homes at Parc yr Helyg and 18 at Colliers Way phase 2 being developed as through the City Deal Homes as Power Stations (HAPS) strand. A bid has been submitted to Welsh Government for IHP 3 funding for 25 new homes at Hillview and Beaconsview, Clase.
- 4.2 Recent progress includes an Integrated Care Fund (ICF) bid submitted for 2 adapted homes in West Cross, ongoing acquisitions (3 acquired, 10 properties in negotiation) and a retrofit 'HAPS' pilot of 6 bungalows in Craig Cefn Parc in partnership with the Welsh School of Architecture (WSA) to transform them into highly energy efficient modern homes creating sustainable energy savings for tenants. In addition, the Affordable Housing Grant has been fully committed for 2018/19 & 19/20, totalling £2.8m.
- 4.3 A Prior Information Notice (PIN) has been issued, to look at options for a Joint Venture/development partner/s to deliver new mixed tenure housing on Housing Revenue Account (HRA) land, which has attracted 36 responses. The next steps will involve a report being submitted to Cabinet in the Autumn.

- 4.4 A brief has been prepared which identifies the Council's requirements to appoint external consultants to assist the Council in the development of a masterplan for the refurbishment, redesign or redevelopment of the Tudno Place and Heol Emrys Estate which will be a co-production site working closely with local residents and Ward members.

## **5.0 Council House Management**

- 5.1 A recent Wales Audit Office (WAO) report looked at the Council's arrangements to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) and how it engages with tenants. Overall the findings of the audit were really positive and the WAO confirmed that the Council has a sound approach to meeting the WHQS by December 2020. They also highlighted that most tenants were satisfied with the quality of improvement works and with the housing service they receive. The WAO published a report on the findings and an action plan has been put in place to address the recommendations they raised. One area the WAO wanted to see improvements on was how progress on WHQS is reported to stakeholders. This is being addressed via reports to Cabinet/Council, with regular updates to tenant groups and improved information on the website.

- 5.2 The Wales Audit Office report also highlighted that working towards WHQS has impacted on re-let times and recommended that work continues to reduce this. Housing and Building Services are jointly working on this by reviewing void processes and meeting more regularly in relation to voids undergoing major improvements.

- 5.3 At the end of 2018/19 the total number of void properties was 196. During the first quarter of 2019/20 they have remained low with the number of end of tenancies generally slowing down.

- 5.4 Preparatory work for the implementation of the Renting Homes Act has commenced.

## **6.0 Tenancy Enforcement**

- 6.1 The key areas of tenancy enforcement relate to breaches of tenancy conditions. The most prevalent breaches are:
- Anti-social behaviour - addressed by working in close collaboration with front line partners including the Police, the Tenancy Support Unit, drugs agencies/Community Mental Health Teams and Youth Offending Teams
  - Rent arrears & recovery - working with partners such as the Department of Work and Pensions and Poverty and Prevention (Employability/Welfare Rights/Supporting People) to tackle poverty and help sustain tenancies.

- 6.2 Preventative and remedial activities include;
- discussions of anti-social behaviour at the Estate Management Tenants Consultative Panel
  - the provision of information for tenants in relation to welfare reform, (specifically Universal Credit), via the tenants magazine 'Open House'
  - Support for the victims of: Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

- 6.3 The challenges in the year ahead will be:
- The implementation of the Renting Homes Act, which will change tenancies to occupation contracts that will be standardised across the whole of the rented sector in Wales. A commencement date has yet to be announced and formal consultation is not yet completed. However initial preparations around the new occupation contracts are underway
  - Delivering a Rents Strategy - tenant consultation will be included in its preparation
  - Finalising a bespoke Housing service procedure in regard to VAWDASV (Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence) and to cascade its principles across all teams
  - Updating the current anti-social behaviour guidelines for Housing staff.

- 6.4 Supporting tenants to live in a cohesive way with their neighbours is central to the way anti-social behaviour (on Council estates) is dealt with. This includes working in partnership with other agencies.

In relation to rent arrears, the service is focussed on protecting the social and economic interest of tenants, offering support and advice in relation to managing rent account debt, including money and debt advice and taking proportionate enforcement action depending on individual circumstances.

## **7.0 Welsh Quality Housing Standard (WHQS)**

- 7.1 The delivery of this year's £43m capital programme has continued during the financial year 2018/19. This has increased the number of houses meeting full WHQS criteria by 2,000 properties this year.

- 7.2 Plans are in place to continue progress towards achieving the WHQS during 2019/20. This includes plans to:

- Increase the number of new kitchens and bathrooms installed and accelerate the external facilities programme.
- Increase the number of compliant properties by a further 3,000 properties.
- Implement recommendations made in the WAO Report to improve services to tenants and reporting compliance progress to Council

- Complete and introduce a new Interim Council Housing Repair Policy.
- Start research and development to scope the implication of introducing a Decarbonisation Policy and Strategy to inform future work programmes between 2021 to 2030. In addition, research will be undertaken to explore the possibility of introducing housing led regeneration projects in certain areas.

## **8.0 Housing Adaptions & Renewals**

- 8.1 A robust performance management system is in place to ensure waiting times for adaptations are monitored and kept to a minimum. Waiting times are measured from initial customer contact to completion of works
- 8.2 The result of a review of the DFG process was completed and a number of changes aimed at reducing waiting times was implemented. This included, for example, a telephone based initial enquiry and screening process. This has helped ensure DFGs are offered within statutory timescales.
- 8.3 Waiting times were reduced in 2018/19 for Disabled Facilities Grants to 235 days, compared to 340 days in 2015-16. In total, 367 Disabled Facilities Grants, 543 Council House Adaptations and 734 Minor Adaptation Grants were delivered. Future plans aim to further reduce waiting times and introduce best practice from the Welsh Audit Office Review.
- 8.4 The provision of loan assistance is made available to bring empty properties back into use. By the end of 2018/19, **60** empty properties had received Welsh Government funded Landlord loans, creating 104 units of accommodation. We aim to continue the provision of loan assistance to help owners bring empty properties back into use, using recycled funds from repayment of previous landlord loan funds.
- 8.5 A successful Arbed am Byth energy efficiency improvement scheme bid was made for the Sandfields area. The scheme was delivered by Welsh Government project managers and completed in June 2019. Future meetings are arranged with Arbed am Byth project managers to identify further suitable areas to submit bids for energy efficiency funding within the 3 year programme.
- 8.6 Completion of the remaining External Wall Insulation and External Repairs scheme for the Sandfields Renewal Area.

## **9.0 Sheltered Housing**

- 9.1 Activity has included continued improvements to complexes, in particular updating fire safety measures such as the installation of sprinkler systems and a system which enables tenants to check the functionality of their smoke/fire alarms.
- 9.2 Quarterly meetings are held with sheltered tenants to discuss the service and consult on issues. The service continues to review the staffing structure as and when vacancies arise. A non-residential warden post was introduced in response to Supporting People requirements to move towards tenure neutrality. This has proved successful with older residents in the wider community benefiting from short term housing related support.
- 9.3 This year has seen the extension of the weekend/bank holiday visiting service provision, until December 2019. The main purpose of this service is prevention and early intervention. It is delivered by an external agency, offering reassurance and support to vulnerable sheltered housing tenants at weekends and bank holidays. Post December 2019 the service will be re-tendered for a further 12 months with an option to extend for a further 24 months.
- 9.4 A recent energy efficiency pilot in respect of boilers at Hafan Glyd will be evaluated and extended across other schemes if appropriate.

Other future challenges include a review of the payment of TV licences in light of BBC's announcement regarding the over 75's and concessionary licences.

Hard wired alarm systems will need to be upgraded in coming years as we move towards digitalisation of this technology.

## **10.0 Affordable Housing**

- 10.1 Following adoption of the Local Development Plan (LDP) in February 2019, the Council has an up to date, evidenced based policy position (Policy H 3), which requires all residential development proposals for 5 or more dwellings (or 2 or more dwellings in the case of Gower/Gower Fringe Areas) to provide affordable housing on the site at the following percentages:

<b>Strategic Housing Policy Zone</b>	<b>Target Percentage</b>
West	35%
Central	20%
Greater North West	15%
East	10%
North	10%
Gower and Gower Fringe	50%

- 10.2 In certain developments, where there are fewer constraints or requirements, a higher percentage than that stated in the policy may be sought in exceptional circumstances. Conversely, where the Council is satisfied that financial viability at the target percentages cannot be achieved and/or Section 106 agreement costs are particularly high, the affordable housing percentage agreed for a proposal may be lower than the target percentages stated in the policy. In such circumstances the Council will work collaboratively with developers to agree an appropriate proportion of on-site affordable housing provision for individual schemes.
- 10.3 In addition, the LDP includes a policy (Policy H 5) that allocates suitable sites on the edge of rural and semi-rural locations in the Gower, Gower Fringe and West of Swansea to deliver affordable homes for local people. The policy requires these sites to deliver a minimum of 51% affordable homes for local people with the range and type of homes tailored to meet the evidence of local need. This policy is an innovative, evidenced based and pragmatic response to an historic problem of under provision using previous policy approaches. The progress of development proposals through planning application stage on these allocated sites (despite early suggestions from objectors that such an approach would be unviable) demonstrates the effectiveness of the policy. It is a transferable approach to other Authorities that may have similar issues with providing affordable housing in rural areas, and this has been recognised by Welsh Government. The Minister for Housing and Local Government has issued (July 2019) a letter to all Councils in Wales requiring them to implement similar affordable housing led sites through their LDPs.



- 10.4 The LDP has been subject to extensive public engagement over many years of formulation, and subject to a process of independent scrutiny through an Examination in Public.
- 10.5 Moving forward there will be close monitoring of the LDP's Affordable Housing policies (H3 and H5) to record the delivery of sites. There will also be close working with relevant developers and site promoters to ensure appropriate proposals are brought forward at the planning application stage to assist in the delivery of these sites. This will require negotiation and ongoing analysis of matters such as development viability and assessment of individual site constraints/opportunities.
- 10.6 The Council fully spent its Social Housing Grant (SHG) allocation of £10.5m and its Housing Finance Grant (HFG) allocation of £2.5m in 2018/19. In addition, the Council was offered the opportunity by Welsh Government to apply for additional funds on top of the above allocated sums, which led to an additional spend of £1m SHG within 2018/19.
- 10.7 The Affordable Housing Grant (AHG) was fully committed for 2018/19 & 2019/20, for a total of £2.8m. 243 affordable housing units were delivered in 2018/19.
- 10.8 Moving forward we aim to monitor delivery of the 2019/20 £5.6m Social Housing Grant Programme and the £1.2m Housing Finance Grant II Scheme to ensure schemes are put in place which encourage sustainable social and economic growth within communities. We will continue to maximise the delivery of affordable homes to ensure access to housing for all, in attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.

## **11.0 Rent Smart Wales**

- 11.1 Work on mandatory registration for landlords of private rented accommodation and licensing of self-managing landlords and letting and managing agents is led by the single licensing authority for Wales, Rent Smart Wales (RSW) with enforcement powers for some aspects of the legislation shared with local authorities. The aim has been to increase the knowledge and professionalism of landlords and agents and to have a better understanding of the size of the private rented sector and type of properties. There has been a lot of publicity since the introduction of the new legislation at the end of 2015 and generally, landlords have been compliant. Swansea Council has prosecuted four landlords for failing to comply with the requirements.
- 11.2 The Council has a good working relationship with colleagues at RSW and will be participating in agent audits in the coming months as part of a proactive programme of work across the country. We are also using specifically targeted Welsh Government grant funding in the current financial year to inspect registered properties that we have not been aware of previously and will then use other enforcement powers to improve conditions where appropriate.

## **12.0 Cooperative Housing**

- 12.1 The Council has adopted a Co-operative Housing Policy that sets out a framework for the support of established and grass roots Co-operative groups.
- 12.2 A potential site has been identified and the Council along with the Wales Co-operative Centre, will continue to work and support existing groups.

## **13.0 Homelessness and Supporting People**

- 13.1 A Homelessness Strategy and action plan was agreed in December 2018. The Strategy will be delivered over a 4 year period and was developed through public engagement with service users, consultation with homelessness & supported housing forums and input from the Scrutiny Working Group.
- 13.2 The Homelessness Delivery Group was formed in January 2019 to oversee the action plan, this group is responsible for providing quarterly reports to the Cabinet Member & Head of Service.
- 13.3 Whilst in the early stages of the Strategy, a number of actions have already been completed. In addition, the Housing First Project will start in Autumn 2019. This project will run for a 3 year period and will look to accommodate and support the most entrenched rough sleepers in the City.
- 13.4 Performance targets were also met in relation to prevention of homelessness and time spent for families in in Bed & Breakfast.
- 13.5 The Tenancy Support Unit have continued to provide rapid response and support on demand services and have been able to reduce waiting lists to ensure that the appropriate support is in place much more quickly which in turns helps to prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies.

## **14.0 Swansea Public Services Board**

- 14.1 The Homelessness Strategy's aims and objectives are very much aligned with the outcomes sought by the PSB. For example, the actions within the Strategy will ensure that people live in good quality, safe homes.
- 14.2 Housing is also a theme underpinning the Local Well-being Plan's four Local Well-being objectives. For example, the Estate Management Strategy aims to provide children with access to safe play space in their local area, ensure households feel safe in their local area, looks to enhance green infrastructure, reduce waste, recycle more and work to reduce anti-social behaviour to build stronger communities.

- 14.3 The More Homes Strategy supports the PSB local well-being plan across all four objectives. The strategy sets out the vision to provide good quality, modern, adaptable, low carbon, energy efficient affordable housing in areas of housing need, and working with communities to ensure that developments provide good places to live. We can create safe environments for children to live and play, to provide green infrastructure and build safe and strong communities where residents feel pride and belonging.
- 14.4 The Council's approach to the management of Council house tenancies is to aim to build sustainable communities that are cohesive and strong. The provision of high quality housing will give children and their families the best start in life.
- 14.5 Welsh Government's Housing Adaptations steering group's future objectives include working with Public Services Boards to improve local area partnership by public services delivering housing adaptations.
- 14.6 Energy reduction actions feed directly in to the Working with Nature Objective and its climate change/decarbonisation elements.

## **15.0 Sustainable Swansea**

- 15.1 A Housing Commissioning review has been undertaken 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. The findings have 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 major economic impact locally with £498m being invested in meeting the WHQS by December 2020.
- 15.2 The review findings have recently been considered by Scrutiny Programme Committee on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2019. The next stage is to report the findings to Cabinet in November 2019 followed by a formal tenant consultation period.

## **16.0 Financial Implications**

- 16.1 There are no specific financial Implications arising from this report.

## **17.0 Legal Implications**

- 17.1 There are no legal implications at this time.

## **18.0 Equalities Implications**

- 18.1 There are no equalities implications.

## **Suggested Topics for Scrutiny**

- The Housing Commissioning review.
- When a formal implementation date for the Renting Homes Act is announced, scrutiny around the terms of the new occupation contract may be appropriate.