
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 24/11/16

PRESENT: Caerwyn Roberts (Chair)
Dilwyn Morgan (Vice-chair)

COUNCILLORS: Annwen Daniels, Eric M Jones, Louise Hughes, Edgar Wyn Owen, Tudor Owen, Angela Russell, Glyn Thomas and Gruffydd Williams.

OFFICERS: Arwel Ellis Jones (Corporate Support Senior Manager) and Lowri Haf Evans (Member Support Officer)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

- a) Councillor Ioan Thomas (Cabinet Member), Arwel Wyn Owen (Senior Housing Manager), Eiliw Llŷr (Housing Strategic Manager), Ffrancon Williams (Chief Executive - Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd) and Enid Roberts (Assistant Director of Customers and Communities - Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Craig ab Iago, Stephen Churchman, Annwen Hughes, Linda Morgan, Nigel Pickavance and Mike Stevens

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

The following member declared a personal interest for the reasons noted:

- Councillor Angela Russell, in item 7 on the agenda, due to her daughter being a tenant and a former Chair of the Board of Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd.

The Member was of the opinion that it was a prejudicial interest, and she withdrew from the Chamber during the discussion on the application noted.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 22 September 2016, were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

5. HOUSING STRATEGY DIRECTIVE AND THE ROLE OF THE ASSOCIATIONS

A report was submitted to encourage a discussion on the priorities of the

Gwynedd Housing Partnership Strategy 2013-2017. The role of the housing associations to achieve these priorities, along with the way these matters would be met, was noted by reviewing the Strategy for the 2017 - 2021 period.

The Housing Strategic Manager highlighted that Housing Associations provide more than housing and that the report referred to what had been completed, as well as the main achievements over the strategy's period. Additional benefits were apparent, such as work opportunities and opportunities for people to move forward in the housing market. Nevertheless, their main emphasis was to build new developments that would be funded by grants from the Welsh Government. It was highlighted that Welsh Government had set a supply target of 20,000 units by the end of the next Government, which placed emphasis and urgency on Councils and Housing Associations to respond. It was the Council that decided on the strategic priorities of these development by collaborating with, and directing, the Housing Associations to locations where other areas were targeted that had been divided as required. The process would identify prospective tenants through the Allocations Policy and the Housing Options Team. Reference was made to the role of the Energy Wardens that were crucial in terms of introducing and promoting schemes. It was noted that several Partners of the Partnership contributed toward this role - an example of energy schemes were 'Nyth' and 'Cartrefi Clyd'.

Along with new developments, it was explained that the Partnership focused on homelessness matters and the Housing Act by collaborating with Housing Associations and Supporting People Team to provide services to the most vulnerable people of our society. By reviewing the strategy, it was noted that, as suppliers and promoters, the partners would have to be central to ensure that the relationship continued.

During the ensuing discussion the following observations were highlighted:

- Some areas continued to see need
- What was the vision of the Housing Associations?
- More must be done to keep people local - need confidence in the allocations procedure
- Why build new? Needed to look at the housing for sale and empty housing situation
- Empty bedroom tax being an additional cost to the tenant.
- Building from new could create a ghetto outside of communities where people were seen moving from village centres to live on the outskirts.
- A need for schemes that would include more bungalows
- It was necessary to look long term and in detail in terms of housing suitability - a long term vision was necessary

It was recognised that the situation was challenging with substantial difficulties and problems to do what was possible with the available resources. It was highlighted that the Strategy was robust - the challenge was the capacity to implement and fund the schemes.

In response to the concern in regards to the allocations system, it was acknowledged that the emphasis in the past had been on allocations within a tight timetable, but by now that there was recognition to look at attaining the correct tenant for the correct location. The suggestion was accepted to contact the Local Member in areas with weak lists or situations where, possibly, a warning would be received beforehand about an empty house. It was noted that

a review into the Housing Options Team (that was established in 2012) was being completed.

Cartrefi Clyd - in response to an observation, it was highlighted that the requirements of the scheme limited the number of housing. It was reported that every scheme was different with different criteria and a tight schedule to submit an application. Concern was expressed about lack of resources within the unit and that the collaboration and support of the Housing Associations had been advantageous to seek information. It was reiterated that the national guidelines were an obstacle and it was suggested to contact the Assembly to report that the system did not lead to effective planning.

In response to an observation, and a desire to build more bungalows for older people, it was highlighted that the Older People Accommodation Strategy looked at the situation that was common across the County. It was noted that the constructing industry and developers appeared stubborn due to bungalows not being cost effective. It was noted that four areas had been identified within the Older People Accommodation Strategy and work was needed to seek solutions and hold discussions about the aspirations of families.

It was reported that Extra Care Housing had released 16 units for families in Bangor following work to facilitate and help individuals to move. Following the completion of Hafod y Gest in Porthmadog, the next options would need to be looked at, considering different models for smaller communities that offered the same opportunities for older people.

RESOLVED to accept the report and welcome the opportunity to hold an initial discussion about the direction of the Strategy and offer the observations below:

- **Affordability - emphasise that a response is needed to the housing affordability crisis - for the Partnership to look at different methods and ways of making a difference and respond to the challenge by ensuring affordable housing for local people**
- **Seek housing stock suitable to ensure balance in terms of the provision**
- **Identify opportunities, at least in areas where there are weak lists, to contact the Local Member to discuss the situation along with tailoring marketing methods**
- **Consider the possibilities to buy houses for sale or empty houses as well as new-builds in order to avoid the possibility of creating unviable communities. A suggestion to discuss the change in emphasis and adapt the subsidy arrangement in the long term with Welsh Government.**
- **As the Full Council will consider implementing Second House / Empty House Premium, it is possible to attract income to be earmarked for social, affordable housing - the Partnership would need to hold a discussion for the Council's decision on how to implement this.**

6. CARTREFI CYMUNEDOL GWYNEDD ANNUAL REPORT (2015-2016)

The Annual Report of Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd (CCG) for 2015-2016 was submitted. Reference was made to the Transfer Agreement, and it was noted that it was required for them to note how they had realised the promises made to tenants in the Offer Document and implemented the obligations under the Transfer Agreement. It was highlighted that the results of the report were encouraging and had a valuable effect on the economy.

During the discussion the following observations were noted:

- CCG were congratulated on receiving a Wales National Procurement award and on their positive social benefit report.
- New developments were approved, but it was necessary to secure more units for older people as well as one-bedroom units.
- Need to solve the land Maintenance responsibilities of locations in multiple ownership, giving consideration to the lack of flexibility in paying arrangements
- The decline in the standards of kitchens, for example, was likely to come together and therefore it was foreseen that a further investment would be needed.
- A request to strengthen the local members' links - a valuable resource to bridge links

In response to a question regarding an external company forming the report, it was noted that the tender process had been followed that was open to everyone and that it was a company from Belfast that had succeeded. It was highlighted that Menter Môn and a company from Colwyn Bay had contributed local input to the reports.

In response to a question regarding customer care, it was noted that the customer care statistics were lower than expected and that the repair service was part of this. As a result, it was noted that the situation was being reviewed and that work was being done to transform in order to improve customer care efficiency. It was reported that a pilot had been undertaken and that things appeared to be improved.

In response to a question regarding receiving the report, the Housing Strategic Manager reported that meetings were being held every six months with CCG to review the values and the promises. It was received that a number of promises had been given, but by now it was felt that CCG had achieved those promises and therefore accepted that these had been completed. This was confirmed by the Cabinet Member.

The Chief Executive of CCG highlighted that the company was, by now, moving to a period of development and wanted to achieve more within communities. A request was made for them to be treated as an equal partner - like the other housing services.

Everyone was thanked for their contribution and representatives of Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd were thanked for attending the meeting.

Resolved

- **To accept the professional advice that CCG has fulfilled the promises in the Offer Document subject to the points below:**
- **To welcome the fact that a close relationship should be kept with CCG even after completing the promises of the Agreement**
- **To congratulate the success of the procurement process with the investment received locally**
- **That there was a need to solve land maintenance responsibilities in multiple ownership Housing Estates**
- **That customer satisfaction needs to be examined following a lower performance than expected with a suggestion to extend the pilot**

scheme if it proves successful

- **That there is a need to ensure that the work programme includes an investment to ensure that the standard of the stock is consistent across the County**

7. EFFECT OF WELFARE CHANGES ON HOUSING

Two documents were submitted to the Members - one sharing the brief of the recent workshop arranged by Housing Associations and Gwynedd Council to discuss the obligations of the Local Housing Allowance as well as an initial draft of an action plan.

The Strategic Manager highlighted that the work programme was a live document mainly because the further changes in the benefits arrangements were on the horizon. It was emphasised that there was a need to be aware of these changes and the county's residents.

During the ensuing discussion the following observations were highlighted:

- Low cap in Gwynedd and therefore, attention needed to be brought to this nationally. Awareness needed to be raised on the difficulty of seeking properties to rent
- The situation was disheartening, difficult and tiresome for vulnerable families
- Suggestion to contact the Members of Parliament and the Assembly Member
- Methodology needed to be considered - needed to review Gwynedd's cap
- The scheme needed to be tied in with the other Strategies of the County e.g. the economy - there was a need to attempt to assist to get more people into work - tie in with senior strategies to seek a solution

In response to a question regarding work being done to identify families that would feel the effect of changes in benefits (Housing Benefits and Work Benefits - amendments 7.11.16), it was noted that 53 families had been identified by Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd (CCG) that were in a vulnerable situation. It was noted that CCG had collaborated with the Rent Team and were preparing beforehand to seek a solution. In the context of Universal Credit, it was highlighted that 60 individuals had been identified and that CCG had been working closely with Cynefin to seek a solution. It was highlighted that there was a need for the work of identifying vulnerable tenants to continue.

Resolved

- Welcome the submission of the action plan.
- To draw attention nationally to the cap being so low in Gwynedd - need to canvas to adapt the methodology and press on changing it. It was suggested to invite the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children to discuss the situation in Gwynedd
- That there is a need to continue to collaborate with tenants and to warn them about the effect of the changes

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.25 pm

CHAIRMAN