

REGENERATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

Members Present:

26 October 2018

Chairperson: Councillor L.Jones

Councillors: D.Cawsey, C.J.Jones, S.Purse, S.Rahaman,
R.L.Taylor, R.W.Wood, H.Jones and N.T.Hunt

Officers In Attendance J.Davies, N. Jones, R Davies, Chele.Howard,
C.Morris, Brien, N.Pearce, R.Turner and
S.Brennan

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors A.Wingrave and D.W.Davies

Observers Paul Pigott and E.Bradfield

1. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Committee noted the minutes.

2. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 18/19**

The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

3. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following Cabinet Board items:

Cabinet Board Proposals

3.1 **Tai Tarian – Local Letting Policies**

The Committee received information in relation to the Tai Tarian – Local Letting Policy as contained within the circulated report.

Members queried whether Tai Tarian had a statutory duty to prevent homelessness.

Members queried how many people were on the waiting for Tai Tarian properties. The Director of Housing and Corporate Services and Company Secretary for Tai Tarian stated that around 7,000 people were on the waiting list.

Members queried how many people were identified as homeless on the waiting list. Officers stated that there were around 450, but this did not necessarily mean that they were homeless as such, some people may be in temporary accommodation waiting for their own property. Officers added that a breakdown of statistics in relation to the waiting list could be provided. Members stated that the information would be useful.

Members referred to paragraph three on page 18 of the report, and questioned whether half of the properties were out of the reach of homeless people. The Director of Housing and Corporate Services and Company Secretary for Tai Tarian stated that this was only the case for new builds and for the first occupiers. The Director of Housing and Corporate Services and Company Secretary for Tai Tarian informed the Committee that 50% of nominations would come from the Authority's Housing Options Team (HOT). The Director of Housing and Corporate Services and Company Secretary for Tai Tarian added that 750 to 800 properties would be available to homeless persons across the county borough in addition to the new builds due to come on line. Members questioned whether under the Tai Tarian allocation, would those with homeless needs identified not be able to apply for a new build property. The Director of Housing and Corporate Services and Company Secretary for Tai Tarian reported that under the Tai Tarian allocation those identified with homeless needs would not be able to apply, but would be given priority for the other 750-800 properties available within the county borough.

Members queried whether those in urgent need were identified on the waiting list, and if so, did officers have an estimate of the figures. Officers stated that they did not have the information to hand, but believed it to be approximately two hundred people without permanent residence. The Director of Housing and Corporate Services and Company Secretary for Tai Tarian added that in some instances that those on the waiting lists

were not always bidding for properties as they were waiting for particular properties in specific areas.

Members questioned how many were bidding for properties and how many were not. Members stated that it was important for the Committee to see these figures. Members added that there were reasons why some clients were not bidding for properties, for example, if somebody from Bryn was being offered a property in Sandfields they would be reluctant to accept this offer.

Members questioned why were properties not being allocated on a need only basis. Members queried that on a specific development, if urgent and priority clients were not bidding for properties, could the offers be passed down to the next tier. The Director of Housing and Corporate Services and Company Secretary for Tai Tarian reported that under the Tai Tarian allocation only first tier clients would be eligible. The Director of Housing and Corporate Services and Company Secretary for Tai Tarian informed the Committee that it was important to have a mix within the community for each new development not just homeless residents, as it was important to build sustainable communities.

Members stated that they did not agree with the statement in the report that an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) was not required. Officers informed Members that homelessness was not considered to be a protected characteristic, and if homeless persons were being given priority over other groups with protected characteristics they could be at a disadvantage. Officers added that it was important to consider the housing needs of other categories and groups as well not just the homeless.

Members stated that the Authority had a statutory duty to prevent homelessness. The Director of Housing and Corporate Services and Company Secretary for Tai Tarian stated that the 50% allocation coming from the HOT as part of the shared lettings policy gave homeless persons priority, and if this was not adopted the criteria would place less emphasis on the needs of homeless people and put them at a disadvantage.

Members commented that there appeared to be a housing shortage and a significant issue with regard to the number of

people considered to be homeless. Members added that with a potential homeless crisis developing it was important for the Council to monitor the situation, and it was important that delegated authority was not given to the officers at this stage as recommended in the report.

Members stated that a lot of citizens came under the category of homelessness and that the shared lettings policy would discriminate against those people. Members commented that Tai Tarian does not have a statutory duty to prevent homelessness and the proposed policy mitigated against this. Members stated that advice would need to be sought from a legal officer to determine whether the Authority was breaching its statutory duty to homeless people by agreeing to the shared lettings policy. Members mentioned that an EIA should have been attached to the report as it discriminated a specific group of people. Members stated that a breakdown of the figures in relation to those on the waiting list for homes should be sought beforehand and that a “ball park” figure was not acceptable in light of such an important decision. Members added that it was important that the new Homeless Strategy be put in place before the lettings policy was agreed to ensure that they were not at odds with each other.

The Director of Housing and Corporate Services and Company Secretary for Tai Tarian stated that the issues surrounding Bush Row were different and unique to other developments, and that reports of “cuckooing” had been received in relation to this particular development. Members stated that they were comfortable with the proposal for Bush Row and understood the issues with this development.

The Director of Housing and Corporate Services and Company Secretary for Tai Tarian stated that Tai Tarian would be willing to work with the Authority to ensure that the lettings policy reflected the Authority’s statutory obligations to prevent homelessness. The Director of Housing and Corporate Services and Company Secretary for Tai Tarian added that Tai Tarian would be prepared to work with the Council to carry out further work on the criteria for housing need.

Following scrutiny, the Committee recommended to Cabinet Board that recommendation 21a and 22 be deferred until:

- an Equalities Impact Assessment had been carried out;
- legal advice had been sought on whether the Authority was breaching its statutory obligation to homeless citizens by agreeing to the shared lettings policy;
- the new Homeless Strategy had been agreed and was in place;
- that an analysis of the HOT waiting list had been undertaken.

Following scrutiny, the Committee were supportive of recommendation 21b on the basis that when the policy was due for review that it would be brought back to the Committee for scrutiny.

3.2 Local Development Plan (LDP) Annual Monitoring Report

The Committee received information in relation to the Local Development Plan (LDP) Annual Monitoring Report as contained within the circulated plan.

Members referred to bullet point three on page 31 where it was indicated that 15 polices were proving not to be as effective, and queried whether further research and investigation on these policies would be reported back in the next Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) next year, or would this be undertaken as part of the reviewing process for the LDP in 2020. Officers stated that the next AMR which was due in October 2019 would be reported to Members and follow the same format of the previous two AMRs and a 'Review Report' would follow soon after which would set out the areas of focus for the LDP review process.

Members queried whether there was anything that the Authority could do to encourage development in areas like the valleys, such as offer rate exemptions or put infrastructures in place for developers. Given that the LDP was a land use plan, officers explained that the LDP was limited with what it could do. Officers explained it was difficult to attract developers to the valley areas due to the smaller profit margins. Officers added that self-build options could be explored particularly as funding can be accessed from Welsh Government.

Following scrutiny, the Committee were supportive of the proposals to be considered at Cabinet Board.

3.3 Neath Food and Drink Festival

The Committee received information in relation to the Neath Food and Drink Festival as contained within the circulated report.

Members commented that there was a financial loss of £3,000 in the previous year and a £5,000 this year to the Council for running the event, and queried what would be done to mitigate against any further loss next year. Officers explained that the festival was focused on promoting Neath town centre and that the losses were considered to be minimal in light of the positive exposure that the town received and the benefits to the local economy and traders. Officers informed the Committee that the cost of the generators was the key reason that the event had gone over budget, and that this would be reviewed before the next event was arranged. Members commented that money generated in parking fees paid by visitors to the festival should be factored into the overall cost also.

Members queried whether a similar event could be organised in Port Talbot and Pontardawe. Officers confirmed that this was possible but it required support from local businesses as had been the case with Neath. Members questioned whether Neath Inspire had been involved with the arrangements for the festival. Officers confirmed that Neath Inspire had been involved.

Members congratulated the team for their work in organising a successful Food and Drink Festival for 2018 and welcomed the return of the event next year.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

4. ACCESS TO MEETINGS

RESOLVED: that pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

5. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following items:

Cabinet Board Proposals

5.1 Former Brynsiriol Senior Citizens Centre, Cymmer, Port Talbot

The Committee received information in relation to Former Brynsiriol Senior Citizens Centre, Cymmer, Port Talbot as contained within the circulated report.

Members welcomed the revised bid received by officers for the property.

Following scrutiny, the Committee were supportive of the proposals to be considered at Cabinet Board.

CHAIRPERSON