



MINUTES OF MEETING

SCRUTINY : REGENERATION **AND PUBLIC PROTECTION** **MEETING**

TUESDAY, 11TH OCTOBER, 2022

PRESENT: Councillors L Davies (Chair)
D Sammon (Vice-Chair)

Councillors C T Jones, J Thomas and A Williams-Price

Cooptees:
H Hopkins (Public Appointment)

Other Councillors in Attendance:
G Thomas (Cabinet Member) and M Symonds (Cabinet Member)

Officers:
A Owen (Deputy Chief Executive), Z Thomas (European & External Funding Support Officer), P Lewis (Trading Standards and Licensing Manager), S James (Environmental Health Manager), M Clee (District Environmental Health Officer) and N Howells (Performance and Scrutiny)

M Morgan (Democratic Services Officer), M Phillips (Democratic Services Officer) and E Galeozzie (Democratic Services Officer)

ITEM NO.	AGENDA MATTER	DECISION
272	Apologies for Absence	No apologies for absence were received.

273	Declarations of Interest (including whipping declarations)	No Declarations of Interest were made.
274	Forward Work Programme 2022/23	<p>The Chair referred the Committee to the 'Forward Work Programme 2022/23' report.</p> <p>A Member then referred to the attendance of South Wales Police at a future Meeting and would recommend that dangerous and irresponsible driving be raised at that Meeting together with a complimentary report from the Cabinet Member in relation to the view of the Council on this issue.</p> <p>Paul Lewis then advised of the Joint Enforcement Strategy and suggested that a Workshop be facilitated in relation to the progress of this Strategy together with the consideration of an Action Plan first followed by consideration at the Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>Resolved that:</p> <p>The items as set out in the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme as detailed at (Appendix 1) be agreed.</p>
275	Empty Buildings in the County Borough	<p>The Chair welcomed Councillor G Thomas, Councillor M Symonds Cabinet Members together with the Officers to the Meeting.</p> <p><i>Empty Buildings in the County Borough</i></p> <p><i>What are we doing about Empty Homes</i></p> <p>The Committee were provided with a copy of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council – Empty Property Strategy 2022 – 2026 – Focus on the Future – Unlocking the Potential – Working with Empty Home Owners and Partners to reduce the number of Empty Homes across the County Borough.</p> <p>Councillor M Symonds then referred the Committee to the Presentation and advised of the aim to unlock the housing potential of long term empty homes and the target to bring a further 200 empty homes back into use over the next five years.</p> <p>Sian James and Melissa Clee then gave details in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the issue • Some Social and Environmental Problems associated with Empty Homes • Performance Data – Financial Years 2012 – 2022 – Total Number of Long Term Empty Properties, The Number of Vacant Properties returned to use through Direct Action of the Local Authority, The percentage of Empty Properties returned to use through Direct Action of the Local Authority

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empty Property Strategy 2022 – 2026 – Approved by Full Council in February 2022 • How we bring Homes back into use – Engagement, Advice and Support, Financial Assistance, Enforcement (Last Option) <p>The following questions were then raised by the Committee on the Presentation and were responded to in detail by the Cabinet Members and the Officers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 568 Long Term Empty Homes – Several properties empty for a very long time – When is Enforcement Action carried out • Local Authorities in Wales having extra powers to deal with empty homes – Explanation requested at what stage use is made of this Legislation – Why has it not been used so far • Financial assistance – How are Grants / Loans offered to Owners – What is the maximum amount that can be applied for • What is the end date for the response from letters – Will this be brought back to the Scrutiny Committee • Is the aim of 6% enough • Is there a requirement for a full time officer to deal with this • (Alyn Owen then suggested that a copy of the most recent letter sent to home owners be shared with the Committee) • Request that the funding available for landlords be shared with the Committee • Have all home owners been advised of the scheme • Council Tax Policy change – What resources are allocated in relation to anti-fraud measures (Single Occupancy) • What pre-emptive actions are taken if any to prevent houses from becoming long term empty • Extensive data – Data on length of vacancy – Useful to have a Table of how many properties and the length of time empty • How many owners engage after the letter is sent • How many are not paying Council Tax • How much money is owed to the Council for repairs to properties • Of the 568, how many have been deemed unsafe • Further details requested on the process in relation to response from the letters and follow up actions • What is the Enforcement in relation to Rat infestation and Fly-Tipping • How often is there a re-charge for works undertaken by the Council in default • How many properties have been subject to Compulsory Purchase or Empty Dwelling Management Orders in the past five years • Liaison with Building Control in relation to unsafe properties • How many visits have been undertaken by Health Officers where Enforcement has had to be
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		<p>undertaken</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very long term empty properties – Are there fines for people who do not bring properties back into use • Useful to have a Table or Matrix on Empty Homes <p>Councillor D Sammon and Councillor M Symonds left the Meeting at 4.45 pm.</p> <p><i>Vacant Grade II Listed Properties / Key Sites within Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre</i></p> <p>Alyn Owen and Zoe Thomas then gave details in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities • Weaknesses • General Hospital • Theatre Royal • YMCA • St Tydfil's Hospital • Synagogue • Miners Hall <p>Questions were then raised by the Committee in relation to the Presentation and were responded to in detail by Councillor G Thomas and the Officers:</p> <p><i>General Hospital:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did it take a site Meeting to start things moving – Why not meet with the new owner immediately • Discussion with Registered Social Landlords – How does this happen if the Council are not the owners • If a property is up for auction does the Council ever consider purchase of that property and if not why not <p><i>Theatre Royal:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the intended use by the new Owners • Has the Options appraisal been put to the new owners – Are they happy with its content – Is there a suggested use for the building • Why have works come to a halt <p><i>YMCA:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the reason for the delay in the report to Council • Has the work paused <p><i>St Tydfil's Hospital:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When will this start <p><i>Synagogue:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the start and end date for this • How do the Officers intend to keep the Members updated – Progress reports on where we are – Understand the difficulties faced • (The Chair suggested that it may be better to have
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		<p>a small Workshop with the Owners)</p> <p>Miners Hall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it possible to see the Feasibility Study undertaken in 2015 to identify future potential uses • Clarification on the ownership • What course is open to the Officers if there is no response • What are the plans as far as the Council is concerned to get things moving • (Alyn Owen referred to the next phase of the Town Centre Master Plan and discussions as a Council) • Have there been remedial works to make safe • Public House next door <p>A Members stated that he would welcome a Workshop on these Buildings.</p> <p>The Chair then thanked Councillor G Thomas and the Officers for attending and the update to the Committee.</p>
276	Scrutiny Referrals	The Chair advised that there were no referrals.
277	Report Recommendations	The Chair and the Committee referred to the update on Empty Buildings in the County Borough and welcomed a Workshop on this together with regular updates.
278	Feedback on Scrutiny Activities	<p>Public Transport</p> <p>The Committee were advised that Stagecoach had been written to and that this matter could be considered at a future Committee or to have a Workshop on this.</p> <p>Housing and Homelessness</p> <p>Follow up on information requested from Welsh Government.</p>
279	Any Other Business deemed urgent by the Chair	The Chair advised that there was no business deemed urgent.