

COMMUNITIES, HOMES & REGENERATION

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13TH DECEMBER, 2023

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2024-27 CARMARTHENSHIRE'S HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

Purpose:

At the start of each year, we develop a business plan which explains our vision and the three-year housing investment programmes to maintain our stock and deliver more affordable homes.

It is important that the plan is clear and that all readers, including our tenants, understand its contents.

The income that we receive from tenants' rents and other funding sources enables us to build an investment programme exceeding **£277m** (Capital - £113m and Revenue - £164m) to run our services over the next three years. The plan reflects on previous years achievements and confirms the financial investment plans (based on current assumptions) for delivering more affordable homes, improving and maintaining our existing stock as well as developing new standards to meet our net zero carbon principles.

To maintain this level of investment through careful financial planning we have managed to keep the projected rent increase to 6.5%, which is below the September inflation rate of 6.7% and the maximum rental increase specified by the Housing Minister for 2024/25. In this plan most tenants will receive a 6.39% average rent increase which is significantly below the level set by WG and current inflation values.

We have also incorporated £330k of revenue efficiencies into our financial planning assumptions over the next three years.

To help maintain our housing stock investment programme, each year we apply for Welsh Government's Major Repair Allowance (MRA) grant. We access this funding by having a detailed business plan and compliance policy. The MRA application for 2024/25 will equate to **£6.2m**.

THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE IS ASKED:

General

1. To confirm the vision for our housing investment programmes over the next three years;
2. To agree that the 2024/25 Business Plan can be submitted to Welsh Government;

Specific

3. To note our new estate and tenancy management offer that will ensure our housing officers are more visible and accessible, balancing the support required by tenants and the need to take enforcement action when required;
4. To agree the implementation of a new pilot "handyperson" scheme on priority estates;
5. To note our commitment to keeping the number of void properties as low as possible;
6. To confirm our commitment to reduce the number of back-logged day to day repairs by rebalancing the split between internal and external contractors, and developing a new small works framework;

7. To confirm our priority to purchase additional land and develop large sites exclusively for Council housing and to note the contribution this plan makes to increasing the supply of affordable homes;
8. To note our commitment to make all our homes more energy efficient for tenants, achieving a minimum Band C energy performance rating (EPC C), installing rooftop solar panels as part of our re-roofing programme and developing a business case for the wider installation of solar panels to tenants' homes and supporting the Council's net zero carbon principles;
9. To confirm our commitment to continue to increase the supply of specialist housing in the county; and
10. To note the importance of the investment included in this plan and its role in stimulating the local economy and creating local jobs and training opportunities.

Reasons:

- To continue our housing investment vision, supporting tenants through the cost-of-living crisis, investing in existing homes and increasing the supply of affordable homes to meet the unprecedented levels of housing need and homelessness in the county;
- To implement the new estate and tenancy management offer that will deliver a balanced approach of supporting tenants and taking enforcement action when required;
- To continue to support tenants by investing in their homes, maintaining the standard, and making our homes more energy efficient (achieving a minimum Band C energy performance rating EPC), helping to promote affordable warmth and mitigating the effects of fuel poverty. An overall investment of £121m is planned for the existing housing stock over the next three years, including over £20m on energy efficiency and decarbonisation measures;
- To reduce the number of backlogged repairs and keep the number of void Council homes as low as possible;
- To continue to increase the supply of affordable and specialist homes in the county, with over £52m being invested into increasing the supply of homes through this plan;
- To link our housing investment programme with wider regeneration initiatives with a real focus on developments in the Tyisha ward, Pentre Awel, town centres and rural towns and villages.
- To make members aware that the delivery of the Business Plan is dependent on an overall average rent increase of 6.5% with a maximum progression of £1 for those tenancies below target rent.
- To access MRA grant from WG (£6.2m) for 2024/25 to help maintain our existing homes.

CABINET MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDER:-

Cllr. Linda Evans (Deputy Leader and Homes Portfolio Holder)
Cllr Alun Lenny (Resources Portfolio Holder)

Directorate Communities Name of Head of Service: Jonathan Morgan Report Author: Rachel Davies Nathan Hartley	Designations: Head of Housing and Public Protection Investment and Development Service Manager Innovation Partnership Officer	E Mail Addresses & Tel Nos: JMorgan@cararthenshire.gov.uk 01267 228960 RaMDavies@cararthenshire.gov.uk 07884 235714 NJHartley@cararthenshire.gov.uk 07827 808865
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2024-27 CARMARTHENSHIRE HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

1. Purpose of the Business Plan

At the start of each year, we develop a business plan which explains our vision and the three-year housing investment programmes to maintain our stock and deliver more affordable homes.

It is important that the plan is clear and that all readers, including our tenants, understand its contents.

The income that we receive from tenants' rents and other funding sources enables us to build an investment programme exceeding **£277m** (Capital - £113m and Revenue - £164m) to run our services over the next three years. The plan reflects on previous years achievements and confirms the financial investment plans (based on current assumptions) for delivering more affordable homes, improving and maintaining our existing stock as well as developing new standards to meet our net zero carbon principles.

To maintain this level of investment through careful financial planning we have managed to keep the projected rent increase to 6.5%, which is below the September inflation rate of 6.7% and the maximum rental increase specified by the Housing Minister for 2024/25. In this plan most tenants will receive a 6.39% average rent increase which is significantly below level set by WG and current inflation values.

We have also incorporated £330k of revenue efficiencies into our financial planning assumptions over the next three years.

To help maintain our housing stock investment programme, each year we apply for Welsh Government's Major Repair Allowance (MRA) grant. We access this funding by having a detailed business plan and compliance policy. The MRA application for 2024/25 will equate to **£6.2m**.

2. Our priorities and direction of travel

The plan is set within the context of continuing cost of living issues that will require further support for our tenants, high inflation, increased costs associated with investment in homes (both construction and repair and maintenance). In addition, there is an unprecedented housing need and homelessness demand due to making sure "no one is left out", a changing private rented market that is affecting supply and that we take our proportionate share to meet our responsibilities around resettlement schemes.

This year's plan has been developed around five key themes and the following actions are the

priorities which will define our direction of travel over the next three years.

We will:

3. Introduce a new estate and tenancy management “offer” that will ensure housing officers are more visible and accessible on our estates. This “offer” will balance support for our tenants with enforcement activity where it is appropriate to do so. This will also be aligned to the implementation of a new pilot “handyperson” scheme on priority estates in Carmarthen, Ammanford, Llanelli and rural areas;
4. Continue to keep the number of void properties at a low level and reduce the current backlog of day to day repairs. We plan to increase our in-house provision around day to day repairs and re-balance the current split between internal and external contractors;
5. Continue to invest in making sure homes are cheaper to run for our tenants and in addition to installing solar panels as we replace roofs, we will develop a business case for the introduction of a wider programme of rooftop solar panels on estates;
6. Due to the significant demand for new build homes, we will proactively acquire more land. This will include larger sites where there will be exclusive use for Council housing. This will put further pace and scale into our development programme;
7. Further invest in specialist type housing (e.g. learning disability, older people and young person supported housing) to ensure needs are met in the most appropriate way. This will include smaller, more dispersed accommodation in different wards. This investment will also ensure a move away from expensive and inappropriate out of county placements for certain client groups; and
8. Procure a new minor works framework for day-to-day repairs and wider improvement projects to ensure a quicker response and to support smaller local contractors across the County.

9. Business Plan Themes

The five key themes that will drive our business forward over the next three years, include:

10. Theme 1 – Our Estate and Tenancy Management Offer;
11. Theme 2 – Investing in Homes;
12. Theme 3 – Promoting Affordable Warmth and Decarbonising our Housing Stock;
13. Theme 4 – Delivering More Homes; and
14. Theme 5 – Local Economy, Community Benefits and Procurement.

15. Recommendations

General

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6. To confirm our commitment to reduce the number of back-logged day to day repairs by rebalancing the split between internal and external contractors, and developing a new small works framework;
7. To confirm our priority to purchase additional land and develop large sites exclusively for

Council housing and to note the contribution this plan makes to increasing the supply of affordable homes;

8. To note our commitment to make all our homes more energy efficient for tenants, achieving a minimum Band C energy performance rating (EPC C), installing rooftop solar panels as part of our re-roofing programme and developing a business case for the wider installation of solar panels to tenants homes and supporting the Council's net zero carbon principles;
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10. To note the importance of the investment included in this plan and its role in stimulating the local economy and creating local jobs and training opportunities.

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?

YES – HRA Business Plan 2024/2027

IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report:

Signed: Jonathan Morgan Head of Housing & Public Protection

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities	Legal	Finance	ICT	Risk Management Issues	Staffing Implications	Physical Assets
YES	YES	YES	NONE	YES	NONE	YES

1. Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities

The HRA Business Plan will act as the framework for policy development across Housing and Public Protection and will contribute to wider agendas and programmes.

2. Legal

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 sets out our statutory duty to maintain the Welsh Housing Quality Standard in our existing stock.

3. Finance

Maintaining and investing in our housing stock will continue to present significant financial challenges and risks to the County Council.

A capital investment of £231m has been undertaken to deliver the WHQS by 2015. This included £117m of unsupported borrowing. Since achieving the WHQS, a further £115m will have been spent on maintaining the standard and £80m on providing additional affordable homes in the HRA by the end of 2023/24.

Through careful management, the financial model remains viable to not only maintain the housing stock and evolve the current standard but also delivers more affordable homes. A summary of investment over the next three years is included in the plan.

An overall rent increase of 6.5% with a maximum £1 progression for those below target rent for 2024/25 is also assumed in the plan.

4. Risk Management

The housing investment programme is identified as a moderate risk in the Council's Risk Management Plan. A risk management plan has been developed to mitigate and review all risks associated with the programme.

Failure to deliver a viable Business Plan to Welsh Government by the end of March 2024 will mean the MRA of £6.2m for 2024/25 being withdrawn.

5. Physical Assets

The housing investment programme will involve the management, maintenance and improvement of the Council's housing stock. This will be carried out within the context of our asset management principles which are defined within the plan. Any decision to acquire, convert or dispose of homes, land and/or garage areas will be considered in line with these principles.

This plan will also result in an increase in the number of homes in the Council's housing stock through the Council new build and purchasing private sector homes programmes.

**CABINET MEMBER PORTFOLIO
HOLDER(S) AWARE/CONSULTED**

Yes

**Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information
List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**

THESE ARE DETAILED BELOW

Title of Document	File Ref No.	Locations that the papers are available for public inspection
HRA Business Plan 2024/2027	Housing General Files	Council website- Democratic Services