

Extract of Corporate Scrutiny Committee Minutes relating to the HRA

Budget Scrutiny Panel – Phase 2 Meeting

Session Title: Scrutiny of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing Services

Session Number: Session 9 of 11

Date of Meeting: 17 January 2025

1. Attendance and Apologies

Panel Members:

Cllr Lyn Buckingham (Chair)

Cllr Paul Marks

Cllr Andy Mercer

Cllr Steven North

Cllr Russell Roberts

Executive Members:

Cllr Lloyd Bunday (Executive Member - Finance and Transformation)

Cllr Gill Mercer (Executive Member - Adults, Health and Wellbeing)

Cllr Mark Rowley (Executive Member - Housing and Communities)

Observers:

Cllr Graham Lawman

Officers:

Evonne Coleman-Thomas (Assistant Director - Strategic Housing, Development and Property Services)

Claire Edwards (Executive Director - Finance)

Samantha Fitzgerald (Assistant Director - Adult Services)

Maria Idoine (Strategic Finance Business Partner)

Matthew Jenkins (Assistant Director - Commissioning and Performance)

Dean Mitchell (Assistant Director - Finance and Accountancy)

Raj Sohal (Scrutiny Officer)

Chris Stephenson (Scrutiny Manager)

David Watts (Executive Director - Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing)

2. Purpose of Meeting

The session focused on reviewing the proposed 2025/26 budget for Adults, Health Partnerships, and Housing Services. The meeting examined financial pressures, key savings and strategic approaches to service delivery.

3. Key Lines of Enquiry

Query 11: Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Benchmarking, Performance and Standards

Members queried the Council's approach to managing the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), particularly whether benchmarking against neighbouring authorities or national standards was possible and how the Council was addressing regulatory requirements. They also sought clarification on efforts to

optimize HRA spending to ensure compliance with emerging regulatory standards.

Response: Officers explained that benchmarking HRA performance was inherently difficult due to significant variations in factors such as property profiles, local housing demand, and the age and condition of housing stock. These variations meant that comparing the Council's performance to others would provide limited actionable insights. Officers noted that no national benchmarking framework currently existed to support such comparisons.

Officers further noted that the Council had prioritised regulatory compliance as part of its housing strategy. The Housing Improvement Board was actively monitoring progress on meeting new regulatory standards, which included safety, quality and service expectations set by national regulators. Future updates on these efforts were planned to be reviewed by the Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee to provide members with further assurance.

Additionally, officers emphasised that managing HRA spending effectively was a core priority. Investments were being made to address historical underinvestment in areas such as property maintenance and housing standards, while simultaneously seeking efficiencies through procurement and contract management. The Council was also exploring opportunities to address housing demand through innovative approaches, such as developing partnerships and considering different housing models.