



HOUSING TASK GROUP (WELSH QUALITY HOUSING STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
(SIRHOWY ROOM) ON WEDNESDAY 12TH SEPTEMBER 2012 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor R.T. Davies - Chairman

Councillors:

Ms. L. Ackerman, R.T. Davies, K. James, G. Jones, C.P. Mann and K.V. Reynolds.

Together with:

Tenant Representatives: C. Davies, B. Hoskins Mrs S. Jones, Ms. A. Lewis, L. Lewis and Mrs A. McConnell.

Officers: N. Barnett (Deputy Chief Executive), P. Davy (Head of Programmes, Housing), S. Couzens (Head of Housing Services), R. Matthews (Communications & Engagement Manager, Housing), Graham North (Public Sector Housing Manager), M. Betts (Community Participation Officer), J. Roberts-Waite (HR Advisor Housing), E. Sullivan (Committee Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mrs D. Price.

2. TO ELECT A CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR OF THE HOUSING TASK GROUP

Nominations were received and by a show of hands Councillor R.T. Davies was appointed as Chair of the Housing Task Group and Ms A. Lewis was appointed as Vice-Chair of the Housing Task Group.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the beginning or during the course of the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The report detailed the terms of reference for the Housing Task Group enabling Members to fully understand the remit of the group and its key role in the decision making process.

The groups primary focus would be the WHQS programme but it would also be developed into the consultative group on all works, leading a transformational programme for the Council's housing estates and with it wider regeneration benefits.

Members were advised that unfortunately a vacancy still existed in the Eastern Valleys. The recruitment initiative would recommence in that area shortly and it was hoped that the last remaining vacancy would be filled at its conclusion.

Members' attention was drawn to the terms of reference as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report, which defined the purpose and powers of the group and how it fits in with the Council's constitution. The role of the Cabinet Sub-Committee as the formal decision making body was recognised and the support mechanisms for the group confirmed.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and Members questions were welcomed.

Members queried if co-option would work given the difficulties in recruiting to the vacant post. Officers felt it important, during this initial stage, to open up the opportunity to all residents to express an interest, however should the recruitment process be unsuccessful consideration would be given to the co-option route.

Quorum rules for the Task Group and Cabinet Sub-Committee were queried. Officers confirmed that further advice would be taken from the Council's Monitoring Officer.

A Member proposed that the name of the Task Group be amended so that it better reflected the ideals of the group going forward.

It was proposed and seconded and agreed by a show of hands that the Housing Task Group be renamed the Caerphilly Homes Task Group.

The Task Group accepted the Terms of Reference as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.

5. THE WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD (WHQS)

The report outlined the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, the Council's commitments and the programme structure.

The Welsh Housing Quality Standard is intended to ensure that all local authority and housing association homes are improved and maintained to achieve specific standards. Made up of seven component parts, each element of the standard is categorised as either Primary or Secondary and assessed against a checklist of 41 questions. Elements are assessed as pass, fail, or not applicable, with an additional assessment concept of an 'acceptable fail'. Officer's clarified the criteria for the awarding of an acceptable fail and it was noted that resident choice would be the main consideration in these situations and instances would be closely monitored.

Members were directed to the programme structure as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report. It was noted that the six main work-streams were assigned a designated officer with Phil Davy responsible for overall programme delivery and Shaun Couzens responsible for the day-to-day, strategic and operational management. A Project Board chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive would oversee the programme as a whole.

The work-stream reflected the key issues raised by tenants during the consultation process and tenants continue to be actively involved in project going forward. The WHQS investment would not only result in a substantial physical improvement to the Council's estates but would also provide a catalyst for changing people's lives and life chances. This would bring about fundamental change in the relationship between the Council and its tenants. The wider objectives of the investment programme in terms of regeneration were emphasised and Members agreed that this would be a strategic responsibility for the Task Group.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and Members questions were welcomed.

Clarification was sought in terms of the wider regeneration benefits and initiatives the programme would bring. Members were advised that a formal work stream would be developed for Transforming Lives and Communities. As this evolved further reports would be brought back to the Task Group.

Members agreed that this was the first step on an exciting journey that would not only physically rejuvenate individual homes but also would transform housing estates and regenerate the whole of the Borough.

Having fully considered its content the Task Group noted the report.

6. DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR WHQS PROJECT BOARD

The report set out the communication strategy that would raise the profile of the Council's responsibilities in achieving WHQS through external and internal communication activities.

The key stakeholders and communication activities were detailed and the importance of engaging tenants, staff and partners was emphasised. The fundamentals of the communication plan and its key messages were explained. The importance of building a positive reputation through open and honest feedback was noted and Members were advised that a vital element of the strategy was to show tenants that as a Council 'we are doing different things and we are doing things differently'. Working with tenants and staff to find a positive way of working, recognising good work and celebrating successes to change public perceptions.

Members noted that focus groups would be integral to the development of the strategy and more detailed reports would be brought back to the Task Group as progress was made.

An example of one of the techniques employed the 'pledge card' was distributed to Members. The small card encapsulated the Council's guarantee to deliver the best quality home improvements as promised in the Offer Document.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her informative presentation and report and Members questions were welcomed.

Members recognised the importance of Council staff embracing the values and ethos of this new way of working, but felt that this belief would be missing from contractors who would be equally key to the success of the programme going forward.

Officers confirmed that during the procurement process a charter for the workforce would be developed and, working with tenants an agreed standard and quality of how we work with one another would be established.

Clarification was sought with regard to the use of social media. Members were reassured that all communication techniques would be employed. The importance of community leadership and the role of local councillors to the success of the programme was emphasised.

Members stressed the importance of quality work and a positive attitude from staff when working on people's homes, and felt that if this was right then the trust and change in perceptions would follow. It was agreed that the value of positive word-of-mouth recommendations could not be underestimated.

Concerns were expressed in relation to under achieving contractors and what action would be taken in this regard. Members were reassured that contractors would be held to the same standards as Council staff and non-delivery would be acted on and contractors would be held accountable.

Having fully considered its content the Task Group noted the report.

7. CALENDAR OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Members noted the calendar of future meeting dates and were advised that all meetings would be held at Penallta House, Ystrad Mynach at 5:00pm.

Members were made aware that there might be the need for additional meetings at first in order to bring the Task Group up to date with developments. Members requested that any additional meetings scheduled also start at 5:00pm.

8. THE WHQS INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The report and presentation outlined the development of the investment strategy and the proposals for achieving the Welsh Quality Housing Standards by 2019/2020.

The keystone data of the investment strategy was detailed and Members noted that the retention business plan had been based on the Savill's stock condition survey undertaken in 2008. Since that time around £30m had been spent on improvement works and this factor had been taken into account when establishing the starting point for 2012. The stock analysis showed that just over 4,000 homes required renewal of all four internal components, 9,500 required a new kitchen and around 8,500 homes required a new bathroom. The Council would need to budget around £200m from 2012 to 2019/20 and in excess of £800m over the life of the 30-year business plan.

The financial model was detailed and the options for work were confirmed. Officers advised that tenants had been involved in the process through their Repairs and Improvement Group. They explored the different elements of work that needed to be undertaken and the different combinations of renewals required at different properties. The key conclusions drawn were that all internal work should be done together as this would result in only one period of disruption inside the tenant's home and that there should be concurrent work within the three housing areas, so that all areas benefited from improvements at some time.

The ten propositions that evolved out of these discussions were then used to form the framework for a workable plan on the ground and the contract structure was established.

The contract structure was outlined and Members were advised around 50% of the internal work would be allocated to the DLO, with local sub-contractors supporting them, and 50% to contractors. There would be estate-based contracts for external works and a sequential approach would be taken to the internal and external works to ensure that they did not overlap. In this way when internal works were carried out in one area, external works would be carried out in another, sharing the benefits throughout the County Borough.

The Procurement Plan was detailed and proposed that a single source supply partner be procured. This approach was felt to be essential for the effective co-ordination of supply arrangements. A single source supplier would enable a long-term relationship to be developed, helping to sustain local jobs and deliver wider community benefits. It would also ensure the standardisation of products and administratively would require only one monthly invoice. There would also be particular benefits for the DLO by having one supplier, as delivery arrangements direct to site would be part of the negotiations. Officer's also confirmed that tenants would take a full part in the procurement process, for which training would be provided.

Work contracts would be tendered on the basis of labour and materials, however the Council's supply partner would be the nominated supplier for major components. Officers acknowledged that all contract arrangements carry risks and contract terms and conditions would need to be carefully drafted to ensure that the programme was affordable, manageable and would deliver WHQS by 2019/20.

The internal and external components required, annual spend analysis and projections of how the programme would develop year-on-year were outlined. Members noted the procurement and tender process timeline and how the work would be spread amongst the different communities.

The small lots exemption criteria was explained and Members were advised that this allowed the awarding of smaller contracts on a more limited tender basis. The use of the small lots exemption would allow smaller local businesses the opportunity to tender for WHQS work.

The need to realign staff resources in order to meet the demands of the programme was discussed. The creation of a WHQS Delivery Team was noted to be key to taking the programme forward and suitable accommodation would be essential in order to physically integrate staff currently located within different buildings.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and full discussion ensued.

Members expressed concern with regard to the risks involved in having just a single source supplier. Officers reassured Members that although there were inherent risks in all contract arrangements; over the long term a single source provider would secure additional community benefits and ensure the standardisation of major components.

Members were pleased to note the opportunities the small lots exemption criteria would give to smaller local companies.

Clarification was sought as to the location of the new Delivery Team offices. Officers confirmed this as Cherry Tree House, Oakdale. The Council owned office building would provide modern accommodation suited to the needs of the Team.

Members acknowledged the hard work of tenants and tenant groups involved in the programme to date. Officers confirmed that a newsletter would be issued in the near future to bring tenants up to date with recent developments.

Members acknowledged the work of Officers in the production of the report and expressed their confidence in the delivery of the programme outlined.

The Task Group having considered its content, fully endorsed the report and recommended that the Cabinet Sub-Committee approve the recommendations: -

1. The investment strategy as outlined in the report be approved.
2. The Council's proposal to procure a single source supply partner and works contract structure be noted.

3. Works contract be tendered on the basis of labour and materials, but the Council's supply partner will be the nominated supplier for major components.
4. The small lots exemption be applied to the external works contracts and the Project Board be authorised to determine the most appropriate way in which the exemption is applied having regard to the procurement and contract management resource implications.
5. A further report be presented on the WHQS Delivery Team structure.

The meeting closed at 19:27 pm.

CHAIRMAN