



## **CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH  
(SIRHOWY ROOM)  
ON THURSDAY 5TH SEPTEMBER 2013 AT 5:00PM**

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PRESENT:

Ms. A. Lewis - Chairman

Councillors:

Ms. L. Ackerman, C. Davies, R.T. Davies, Ms. G. Henderson, K. James, G. Jones, Mrs S. Jones, Ms. A. Lewis, Mrs A. McConnell, C.P. Mann, J. Moore, Mrs D. Price and K.V. Reynolds.

Officers: P. Davy (Head of Programme), S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), V. Parsons (Supported Housing Manager), K. Watkins (Communication and Tenant Relations Officer), L. Lucas (Head of Procurement), P. Smythe (Building Maintenance Manager), G. Taylor (Tenant Engagement Officer), G. North (Public Sector Housing Manager) and E. Sullivan (Democratic Services Officer).

### **1. TO APPOINT A CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP**

In accordance with the terms of reference for the Caerphilly Homes Task Group, that the role of Chair and Vice Chair alternate annually between Councillors and Tenants, Ms A. Lewis was proposed and seconded as Chair for the forthcoming year and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

Councillor Mrs D. Price was proposed and seconded as Vice Chair for the forthcoming year and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

Councillor R.T. Davies as the outgoing Chair thanked Members for all their support and hard work over the past year.

Members commended Councillor Davies for his efforts during the first key year of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group.

Ms Lewis thanked Members for their confidence and support and welcomed new tenant representative Ms Geraldine Henderson to her first Task Group Meeting and introduced Miss Kelsey Watkins the new Communication and Tenant Relations Officer.

**2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Ms L. Ackerman, B. Hoskins, C.P. Mann and Mrs D. Price

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Ms. A. Lewis, C. Davies, Ms G. Henderson, Mrs S. Jones, Mrs A. McConnell and J. Moore as Council Tenants declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in all agenda items.

**4. MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 3rd July 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 28th August 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**5. TO RECEIVE ANY REQUESTS FOR AN ITEM TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA**

No requests were received.

**6. EMPTY PROPERTY MANAGEMENT**

The report provided an overview of void property performance management and the empty property management process.

The general performance analysis for 2012/2013 was detailed and Members were advised that the data had to be compared with that of the previous year and a trend table provided in Appendix 2 of the report. Officers confirmed that progress would continue to be reviewed and any increase in voids closely monitored in order to mitigate any impact going forward.

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

Clarification was sought with regard to providing a more in-depth analysis around the different reasons for refusals. Officers confirmed that the present system did not allow this kind of detail at the moment, however inputting codes were being changed in order to give a more accurate picture going forward and a further report would be presented to a future meeting.

Members asked if the impact of Welfare Reform had been reflected in an increase in refusals due to property size and if so were they being noted. Officers confirmed that this was being recorded and an increase in empty 3-bedroom properties in one specific area had been noted, however, whether this was as a result of Welfare Reform or another reason required further investigation. Members were advised that transfer requests were recorded and this would assist in identifying the impact of the changes.

The Task Group having fully considered its content noted the report.

**7. PUBLIC HOUSING RESPONSE REPAIRS SERVICE UPDATE**

The report updated Members on the performance of the Housing Response Repair Service following the introduction of the new IT system for repairs.

Members were advised of the changes and improvements made to the repairs service and noted the flexibility and control that the new technology offered tenants and operatives. The appointments process had been centralised with tenants offered an appointment on all repair requests. Jobs were now issued electronically, one at a time, with the focus on quality and customer service. Pre-inspections were no longer necessary as all operatives' were empowered to determine the extent of works required and vehicles were fitted with racking systems that allowed them to carry sufficient material stock to complete the majority of repairs on the first visit.. This had allowed Surveyors to concentrate on post-inspections and it was noted that over 40% of the completed repairs had been inspected to ensure customer satisfaction. This practice was further complemented by telephone customer satisfaction surveys being completed, some within minutes of the finished repair.

Repair target times were outlined and areas for improvement were highlighted, Officers commended the Repairs Team for their commitment and acknowledged and thanked the Repairs Improvement Group for all their hard work.

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

Clarification was sought in relation to emergency repairs and Officers confirmed that the emergency service had a 2-hour response target.

Clarification was sought in relation to the floating appointment system and Officer explained the process for larger repair works.

Members were pleased to note the high levels of customer satisfaction quoted in the surveys and congratulated staff on the excellent progress made.

The Task Group having fully considered its content noted the report.

## **8. PROCUREMENT UPDATE**

The report provided an update on the procurement processes for the delivery of the WHQS programme and the four key contracts relating to Building Materials, DLO Sub Contractor Framework, Internal Labour and Materials and External Labour and Materials.

Officers thanked the tenants involved in the procurement process for all their hard work and confirmed that the core contract awarded to Robert Price Ltd was now live and operating well. Members were advised that they were pleased with the progression of the contracts and the resulting benefits for the community were becoming apparent.

In relation to the DLO Sub Contractor framework, 274 expressions of interest had been received and 74 bidders were invited to tender of which 53 formal tenders were received and evaluated. Following the evaluation process a total of 30 contractors were awarded onto the framework across 10 lots. Of those 30 contractors, 29 had a base within Wales, with 12 classed as Caerphilly Contractors (operating a base within the Caerphilly County Borough).

The internal labour and materials procurement process was currently underway and Officers confirmed that 7 contractors had been shortlisted to tender, with 4 out of that 7 based in Wales. In terms of the external labour and material contract, 12 contractors had been shortlisted to tender and tender documentation would be issued to them on the 30th August 2013.

The progress made on the small lots packages of work was noted, the detailed procurement strategy for this was currently being developed and would look to award as much work as possible to Caerphilly based companies.

Members noted the amount of challenge that had taken place with regard to WHQS procurement process, primarily from unsuccessful companies or organisations. The Officer confirmed that these were being addressed as appropriate and all challenges had been defended to date.

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

Clarification was sought in relation to the merits of awarding a ten-year contract to a single supplier and Officers confirmed the benefits in terms of continuity of supply, monitoring performance, quality and for the local community benefits.

Members commended the Procurement Department for engaging with so many local suppliers and were very encouraged by the way the process was progressing.

Clarification was sought in relation to the provision of external legal advice and the associated costs. Officers confirmed that due to the complexity of the contracts awarded, specialist legal advice was required and that level of expertise was not available in house.

The Task Group having fully considered its content noted the report.

## **9. SHELTERED HOUSING REVIEW - FINAL UPDATE**

The report provided a final update on the Sheltered Housing review following the second round of tenant consultation meetings.

Officers thanked the Task Group Members for their support and special thanks were referred to the Older Persons Group for their contributions during the consultation process.

The different options presented were detailed and Members were advised that tenants favoured the 'Cluster' service delivery model. The banded service model was explained and the charges for the bronze, silver and gold service detailed. Officers confirmed that the current costs did not represent a balanced budget and further modelling would be required if this was to be achieved. The revised staffing structure of the service was noted and the appointment of an Older Persons Service Manager was well received during the consultation process.

Officers advised that one of the concerns raised was in relation to concessionary television licenses and were pleased to confirm that tenants would have reserved rights as long as they remained in their present scheme. Building cleaning arrangements were also looked at and would be reviewed in order to provide a professional cleaning service to every scheme.

The Floating Support Service was outlined and the role of the Floating Support Officer confirmed. Members were advised that the post would be advertised shortly and these Officers would be responsible for assessing the needs of all sheltered housing tenants if the cluster group service delivery model was approved. The recruitment of an Activities Coordinator funded by the Supporting People Team was noted and the range of activities and role of the Coordinator was defined.

Officers also hoped that the review would provide opportunities to explore partnership working and collaboration with Social Services and the Local Health Board and any developments in this area would be reported back to future Task Group meetings.

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

Clarification was sought the regard to any extra costs associated with the proposed cleaning arrangements. Officers confirmed that requirements would be reviewed in order to ensure a balanced overall service, this might result in a small increase in costs but this would be looked into before proceeding.

Clarification was sought in relation to the extent of the variations between facilities in schemes, and the impact that this could have on the type activities open to tenants. Officers confirmed that all schemes had the same standard facilities although it was noted that some had larger lounge spaces available that would better lend themselves to certain group activities. In these circumstances travel arrangements would be made to enable tenants from other schemes to take up those opportunities.

Clarification was sought in relation to the different banding services and the services provided at bronze, silver and gold levels were fully explained.

Members congratulated the Officer on her presentation and for all her hard work during the consultation process and fully endorsed the report.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendations detailed under section 9 of the Officers report be recommended for approval by the Cabinet Sub Committee and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

## **10. COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT FUND**

The report sought approval for two applications received from community groups seeking funding from the Community Improvement Fund.

The applications from the Britannia Community Association and the Graig y Rhacca Resource Centre were detailed for Members information. Officer confirmed that the Britannia Community Association were seeking a grant of £2,300 to fund improvements to the front and back gardens of the property in order to develop a community garden. The Graig y Rhacca Resource Centre sought £5,000 to assist in the relocation and expansion of the 'Ann's Kitchen' facility.

Officers recommended the approval of both applications subject to the conditions contained in the report.

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

Members welcomed the applications and it was proposed and seconded that subject to the conditions contained in the Officer's report both applications be recommended for approval by the Cabinet Sub Committee and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

## **11. ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME - ENGAGEMENT AND INVOLVEMENT PLAN**

The report sought approval for the resources required to deliver an Engagement and Involvement Plan to underpin the WHQS Environmental Programme and to deliver strategic projects identified by communities, for communities as part of the programme.

Officers confirmed that this would be a three-stage process and the different phases were detailed for Members information. The importance of tenant's involvement was emphasised and the engagement process was outlined. Communities would be encouraged to become involved in identifying and planning improvement projects that they believed would have the greatest impact. Resources would be equally spread across the three housing areas and would need to be prioritised in order to ensure the best use of the funding available.

Members were advised that any possible opportunities to secure match funding would be fully explored and a dedicated Caerphilly Homes Environmental Team would be seconded to work with the Community Regeneration team in each cluster area to organise the engagement process.

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

Members acknowledged the importance of providing external environmental improvements to compliment the internal improvement programme but wanted to ensure that any projects considered were easily maintainable and sustainable in the long term.

Officers confirmed that maintenance would be a primary consideration of any project and it was hoped that through active engagement and community ownership the ongoing care and protection of the projects would be secured.

Clarification was sought with regard to the start date of the programme and Officers confirmed that the appointment of the Environmental Team would take some time but hoped to be able to start events in during Spring 2014.

Members welcomed the start of the Environmental Programme and fully endorsed the report.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendations detailed in section 9 of the Officer's report be recommended for approval by the Cabinet Sub Committee and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

## **12. WHQS PROGRAMME CHANGES**

The report outlined changes to the WHQS programme in light of the progress made with the 2013/14 capital programme.

Officers confirmed that the work was progressing ahead of schedule and in order to ensure the continuity of workflow certain elements of the internal work programme needed to be brought forward.

The number of properties to be brought forward was confirmed as 174 with a projected expenditure against those properties of £1.316,650.

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

Clarification was sought in relation to property surveys and Officers confirmed that some surveys had already been undertaken and tenants were happy to bring the work forward.

Members commended the programme team for their hard work and fully endorsed the reports recommendations.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendations in relation to the changes to the WHQS programme be approved by the Cabinet Sub Committee and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

## **13. COMMUNICATION AND TENANT PARTICIPATION UPDATE**

Members were updated on the progress made in relation to Communication and Tenant Participation.

The developments in tenant scrutiny in order to improve services were noted and the different groups and their roles were detailed. Members noted the work done by the Repairs and Improvements Group, Caerphilly Service Improvement Monitors (CSIMS) and the Older Persons Group.

Officers also confirmed that Welsh Government were reviewing tenant participation on a national level and Caerphilly would be part of the Local Government representation on the Review Steering Group.

The progress made in increasing tenant and resident engagement was noted and reference was made to the Tenant Information Exchange. Meetings would be held in different community area, with guest speakers invited to provide information to tenants on topics of interest. The next meeting was scheduled for the 23rd September 2013 in Gilfach Community Centre and Tenancy Enforcement Manager Rachel Thornett would be speaking.

In relation to Tenants and Residents Associations, Members were advised that there was potential for new groups in Panside, Cefn Fforest and Bedwas areas and assistance was being provided to re-launch the Graig-y-Rhacca Environment and Conservation Group.

An update was provided on the tenant newsletter and the recruitment of 'arm chair' editors to assist the production process were noted.

Individual learning plans had been produced for all involved tenants and these would be used to develop relevant training for working groups and individuals as part of an overall training strategy.

Tenant participation on the Caerphilly Disabled People's Forum was noted and an update on the Welsh Tenant's Conference was given. Four tenants from Caerphilly would be attending the conference and tenant representatives would also be attending the TPAS conference in November.

Mechanisms for improving communication were noted and Officers confirmed that TP Officers were briefing other teams to ensure that information was being successfully cascaded throughout the public sector housing department. An action plan was currently being formulated which would identify key staff to assist in culture change and training that would be needed going forward.

Finally Members were advised of the improvements being made to improve the flow of information to the wider body of tenants and the role of the new Communications Officer was explained. Reference was also made to the work undertaken with Leaseholders, which included information sessions and consultation arrangements.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her update and Members questions were welcomed.

Members commended Officers for the work being done in relation to communication and tenant engagement and referenced the improvements noted in the relatively short time that the new Communications Officer had been in post.

Due to the improvements noted it was proposed and seconded that updates on Communication and Tenant Engagement be amended to a quarterly report and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the standing agenda item Communication and Tenant Engagement be reported on a quarterly basis.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on

The meeting closed at 7:00 pm

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CHAIRMAN