



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 17TH OCTOBER 2013

SUBJECT: ROWAN PLACE – TARGETED REGENERATION

REPORT BY: INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To outline proposals to transform Rowan Place, Rhymney into a more desirable place to live.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Following the ballot in February 2012, the Council agreed that it would deliver the promises made in its Offer document to tenants and deliver WHQS by 2019/2020. It also gave a commitment to delivering numerous additional benefits which were also outlined in the Offer Document, which would add value to the WHQS programme and help deliver the Council's ambition of using the £210 million WHQS investment as a catalyst to Transform Homes, Lives and Communities.
- 2.2 Rowan Place is located within the Twyn Carno ward and is part of the Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) known as Twyn Carno 1.
- 2.3 Twyn Carno 1 is the third most deprived LSOA in Wales and the 2nd most deprived area in Caerphilly county borough.
- 2.4 According to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2011, of 1896 LSOA's in Wales, Twyn Carno 1 is the third most deprived in relation to unemployment, the 6th in relation to income and the 5th in relation to education.
- 2.5 53.4% of the working age population are claiming income related benefits and 68.3% of children live in households claiming income related benefits. Across Wales, the average figure is 25.2%. 44% of the working age population within the Twyn Carno 1 ward are claiming employment related benefits in comparison to the Welsh figure of 14.7%.
- 2.6 Twyn Carno 1 also exhibits the highest primary school absence rates within the county borough and the second highest rate in relation to secondary school absence rates.
- 2.7 95% of people aged 18-19 living within the Twyn Carno 1 LSOA do not enter higher education (1998-2005)
- 2.8 There are a higher proportion of people aged 18+ living within Twyn Carno with a limiting long term mental health problem than any other part of the county borough.
- 2.9 Rowan Place is characterised by high levels of anti social behaviour, drug and alcohol abuse and short term tenancies (flats particularly). The immediate environment is poor and tenants and residents have little personal outdoor space. The outdoor space that is available comprises unused and neglected grassed areas, parking and thoroughfares which have been closed to prevent criminal behaviour and which have now become a magnet for litter and anti social behaviour.

- 2.10 The report advocates a coordinated, but phased, approach to the physical improvement of the area alongside a targeted multi agency approach to tackle the social and economic challenges facing this particular area.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) is intended to ensure that all local authority and housing association homes are improved and maintained to achieve specified standards.
- 3.2 The Council is committed to ensuring that the WHQS investment transforms not only homes but also lives and communities.
- 3.3 Relevant policy documents include the National Housing Strategy “Sustainable Homes” WAG; the Council’s Community Strategy; Corporate Improvement Plan; Safer Caerphilly Community Safety Plan; Regeneration Strategy; Children and Young People’s Plan; Tackling Poverty Action Plan 2012-2016 and Building Resilient Communities.
- 3.4 The Council’s Local Housing Strategy “People, Property, and Places” has the following aim:
“To provide good quality, well managed houses in communities where people want to live, and offer people housing choices which meet their needs and aspirations.”

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 Rowan Place is an area in Rhymney comprising 80 properties of which 10 are privately owned (including 4 leaseholder properties) and 70 which are owned by CCBC (48 x 2 bedroom flats, 5 x 3 bedroom homes and 17 bungalows). For many years the area of Rowan Place in which the flats are located has been regarded locally as a ‘no go zone’ and largely been home to transient single people and families with particular challenges including drug and alcohol issues, criminal records and anti social behaviour issues.
- 4.2 For the last 18 months the local area housing office has implemented a sensitive lettings policy in relation to the allocation of properties in Rowan Place which has helped address some of the challenges but also resulted in a significant number of properties becoming void.
- 4.3 In July, 10 properties in Rowan Place were void and some for more than 600 days. All 10 properties currently void are 2 bedroom homes.
- 4.4 There are currently 161 people on the waiting list for Rhymney North. Half have requested a 2 bedroom property.
- 4.5 The stigma attached to the area has led to potential tenants refusing the offer of accommodation in Rowan Place despite the fact that the accommodation available lends itself to families and single people who may have been affected by recent welfare reform changes including the ‘bedroom tax’, changes to housing benefit and the introduction of Universal Credit in October this year.
- 4.6 Internal improvement works to the properties within Rowan Place are programmed for the current financial year. To increase the attractiveness of properties to individuals on the waiting list it is proposed that the void properties undergo a full internal refurbishment. This will include additional works to those already planned such as new ceilings, replastering throughout, new skirting boards, doors and linings and complete redecoration.
- 4.7 External works are not scheduled until 2016/17. Based on the Savills stock condition survey only limited external works were identified. However, the 76 properties (72 + 4 leasehold) have been resurveyed and it is considered that more external work is required including reroofing, external insulation and render, and remodelling of external curtilages to achieve the

physical transformation that is required. There are some significant additional costs which are addressed below. Due to the financial implications it is not proposed to bring forward all the external works apart from the remodelling of the curtilage around the flats where alley ways have previously been blocked up. This is to try and ensure the void properties once refurbished become more attractive for reletting.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 An EqlA screening has been completed in accordance with the Council's Equalities Consultation and Monitoring Guidance and no potential for unlawful discrimination and for low level or minor negative impact have been identified, therefore a full EqlA has not been carried out.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Internal works are currently programmed to commence in November 2013 and will be completed within the financial year. The budget estimate for the 72 Council owned properties is £563,900. The proposed refurbishment standard to the void properties is estimated at an additional £168,000. A budget of £100,000 is also proposed to advance some external works associated with remodelling the curtilage of the flats.
- 6.2 External works to Rowan Place are not scheduled until 2016/17. The budget based on the original Savills stock condition survey is £55,900. However surveys recently carried out have identified external works estimated at £2.2m. This will be a significant additional cost to the business plan. In light of the new information it is advocated that the position will be reviewed in 2016/17 and an assessment made at the time whether this cost can be accommodated.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct personnel implications arising from the report.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 All views and opinions following consultation have been incorporated within the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 The Task Group recommend to the Cabinet Sub Committee:
1. That the void properties within Rowan Place undergo a full refurbishment improvement to increase their attractiveness.
 2. That external works to the curtilage of the flats is brought forward and incorporated as part of the works programme being undertaken by the in house work force.
 3. That the budget for Rowan Place be increased by an additional £268,000 to implement recommendations 1 and 2. It is anticipated that this additional cost can be accommodated within the overall Capital programme for 2013/14.
 4. A multi agency task group is established to tackle the social and economic issues and provide support to lower the incidence of anti social behaviour, unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse.
 5. To support the proposals outlined, 2 void properties are utilised to create a show flat and provide welfare facilities.

10. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To help deliver the Council's ambition of using the WHQS programme as a catalyst to transform homes, lives and communities.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Housing Acts and Local Government Acts. This is a Cabinet Sub Committee function.

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