



CAERPHELLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
(SIRHOWY ROOM)
ON THURSDAY 17TH OCTOBER 2013 AT 5:00PM**

PRESENT:

Ms. A. Lewis - Chairman
Mrs D. Price - Vice Chairman

Members:

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

Officers: P. Davy (Head of Programmes), J. Roberts-Waite (Strategic Coordination Manager) L. Lucas (Head of Procurement), G. North (Public Sector Housing Manager) and E. Sullivan (Democratic Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Brian Hoskins, Ms. Geraldine Henderson and Mrs M. Betts (Community Participation Officer).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 5th September 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

Requests were received for an update report on the Re-Let Standard and a feasibility report on the conversion of the Old Cash Office, High Street, Newbridge into flats in a similar scheme to that proposed for the Gilfach Fargoed conversion.

A Member also requested an update on a previous request for Ian Williams Contractor attendance at a future meeting. Officers explained that the contractor concerned was part of an ongoing procurement programme and whilst tenders were under consideration it would not be appropriate for him to attend a Task Group meeting, however once the process had been completed an invitation would be made.

5. WHQS SMALL LOTS CONTRACTS

The report outlined the bidder selection and procurement process in relation to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) Small Lots Contracts.

The Small Lots exemption was explained and the Officer outlined the external legal advice had been sought regarding the procurement process and restrictions to be impressed on contractor eligibility. The exemption would allow Small and Medium Enterprises to tender for a number of smaller packages of works for the WHQS programme to the benefit of the local economy.

Officers confirmed that the tendering process for the Small Lots Contracts would be restricted to firms that had a branch office and location of work within the Caerphilly County Borough as this would ensure local benefits from the contract spend. Market testing had shown there to be 26 potential bidders, which was sufficient to ensure adequate competition in the tendering process.

The Contract bands were explained and it was noted that potential bidders would be placed in one of the three bands according to their notational value detailed within Constructionline. A provisional assessment suggested that over the five year period around 48 contracts might be awarded to local businesses. These smaller packages of £500,000 or less would better support SME's participation with provision also being made for any larger contracts in excess of £500,000 up to the £869,670 exemption limit to be let subject to the approval of the WHQS Project Board. Members were advised that once a package of work had been awarded the contractor would not be able to tender for more until the existing contract had been completed and any contractor failing to meet quality standards would be removed from the Contract Band list.

Members were advised that there would be a single annual PQQ process for all contracts eliminating the need for multiple applications and repetition of information such as Health and Safety and Insurance checks. It was hoped that by doing so smaller businesses would be encouraged to tender for the lots.

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

Clarification was sought with regard to the date of the forthcoming Supplier Relationship event and it was confirmed that this would be scheduled in the next couple of weeks subject to the approval of the strategy.

Clarification was sought as to the inclusion of any 'social clauses' within the small lots contracts. Members were advised that these contracts did not readily lend themselves to 'social clauses' and great care had also been taken to ensure the ease of the application process for smaller firms. However, assurances were given that where possible and appropriate 'social clauses' would be sought.

A Member queried the award of larger contracts and specific reference was made to the supply partner contract awarded to Robert Price Ltd. The Officer confirmed the procurement process prior to awarding that contract and assured Members that this had been completed in an open and transparent way and was the most cost effective option going forward.

Members welcomed the small lots contracts and looked forward to seeing the benefits to local business and communities.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendations contained in section 10 of the Officer's report be recommended for approval by the Cabinet Sub Committee (WHQS) and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

6. ROWAN PLACE - TARGETED REGENERATION

The report outlined proposals to initiate a programme of targeted regeneration at Rowan Place Rhymney in order to make it a more desirable place to live.

Rowan Place is located within the Twyn Carno ward and is the third most deprived Lower Social Output Area (LSOA) in Wales and the second most deprived area in Caerphilly County Borough Council.

The area comprised of 80 properties of which 10 are privately owned and 70 are owned by Caerphilly County Borough Council, 48 x 2 bedroom flats, 5 x 3 bedroom homes and 17 bungalows. It was noted that the area had been stigmatised by anti-social behaviour and this had led to potential tenants refusing the offer of accommodation despite the fact that the size of the properties would be ideal for families and single people that may be affected by recent welfare reform changes. For the last 18 months a sensitive lettings policy had been introduced at Rowan Place and this helped to address some of the challenges but had also resulted in a significant number of properties remaining void. It was noted that some of the properties had been void for more than 500 days resulting in a significant loss of rental income.

The Officer confirmed that the internal works at Rowan Place are programmed for the current financial year and in order to increase the attractiveness of the properties it is proposed that some of the external works be brought forward to coincide with that timetable. Unfortunately due to the significant costs involved it would not be financially viable to bring forward all of the external works required.

Members noted that in order to address not only the physical elements of regenerating the area a multi-agency task group would be established to tackle the social and economic issues and provide support for social outcomes and community cohesion.

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

Members welcomed the regeneration project and particular reference was made to the proposal to utilise two void properties, one as a show flat, the other for welfare facilities.

Clarification was sought with regard to the alleyways within the development and how they could be improved going forward. Members were advised of the layout of these areas, which had become a magnet for litter and antisocial behaviour. The proposed regeneration programme would remove the breezeblock walls, and incorporate the former alleyways as private space. The multi-agency team would then support tenants to sustain.

A Member expressed concern that similar initiatives had been piloted over the years with little success and requested that a further report be brought back to the Task Group in order to monitor the progress made.

Officers acknowledged the challenges but emphasised the unique opportunity the WHQS programme provided for the improvement of the area. Members agreed that this was indeed an ideal opportunity to regenerate not just the internal aspects of a property but also the external aesthetic whilst developing a real sense of community. Members were advised of the holistic approach that would be taken to ensure the sustainability of the project in the long term.

Members expressed their thanks to the Officer and her team for all their hard work in the area and commended them on their knowledge and understanding of the issues involved.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendations contain in section 9 of the Officer's report and an additional recommendation that a further report be brought back to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group six months after the commencement of the regeneration programme in order to monitor the progress made, be recommended for approval by the Cabinet Sub Committee (WHQS) and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

7. HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2014/15

The report outlined the proposed HRA Capital Programme of 2014/15 and challenging programme of works scheduled to commence in April 2014.

The programme of works for the different community areas was confirmed and the projected expenditure detailed for Members information. Officers confirmed that this report provided an overview of the forthcoming programme and more detailed reports would be brought forward for Members consideration at future meetings.

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

Clarification was sought with regard to customer satisfaction surveys and the importance of ensuring that tenants were happy with the works undertaken was emphasised. The Officer confirmed that proposals were already in place for customer satisfaction surveys linked to the capital programme and the outcome of the surveys would be reported back to the Task Group at a future meeting.

It was proposed and seconded that the HRA Capital Programme 2014/15 be recommended to the Cabinet Sub Committee (WHQS) for approval and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

8. GILFACH FARGOED - OFFICE CONVERSION INTO FLATS

The report advised Members of a proposal to convert the Neighbourhood Housing Office and Tenants and Residents Office in Gilfach Fargoed to 4 x 1 bedroom flats.

Members were advised that the properties had been empty since 2010 and due to the increased demands for smaller units of accommodation as a result of the Welfare Reform Act and in particular the bedroom size criteria, the option to convert the 2 offices into flats afforded an ideal opportunity to provide some much needed accommodation.

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

Members welcomed the proposal and fully endorsed the report and its recommendations.

It was proposed and seconded that the conversion of the two properties into four one bedroom flats be recommended to the Cabinet Sub Committee (WHQS) for approval and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

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 18:29pm

CHAIRMAN