



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH (SIRHOWY ROOM) ON THURSDAY, 23RD JANUARY 2014 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Mrs D. Price - Presiding Chairman

TASK GROUP MEMBERS:

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

Officers: P. Davy (Head of Programmes), S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer) M. Betts (Tenant and Community Involvement Officer), J. Roberts-Waite (Strategic Co-ordination Manager) and E. Sullivan (Democratic Services Officer).

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

In the absence of the Chair, Mrs D. Price (Vice Chair) presided as Chair for the meeting.

Members were advised that Anna Lewis had been admitted to the hospital over the weekend but was making good progress and hoped to be discharged by the end of the week. Members expressed their support and best wishes to Anna for a speedy recovery.

Officers also advised that C. Davies, G. Henderson, K. James, G. Jones and J. Roberts-Waite had been delayed at a previous meeting but would be in attendance.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from A. Lewis and C. Mann.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

During the course of the meeting Councillor G. Jones declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 4(2) Transforming Homes, Lives and Communities - Local Employment Fund details are minuted with the respective item.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 5th December 2013 (minute nos. 1-12 on page nos. 1-6) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. WHQS - COMMUNITY SAFETY FUND

The report sought approval to commit expenditure from the 2013/14 budget created to support community safety initiatives and interventions.

The Officer confirmed that a maximum of £50,000 would be available annually for three years to support community safety projects. Partners from other agencies and organisations involved in addressing community safety would be involved in determining how the fund should be distributed.

The Caerphilly Community Safety Team in partnership with the Council's Regeneration and Tenancy Enforcement Teams had recently purchased two 3G mobile cameras and successfully trialled them at different locations and events in the county borough. The cameras were small enough to be mounted on 8m lighting columns and would transfer images wirelessly to the Community Safety Team at Tir y Berth Depot. It was proposed that Caerphilly Homes Task Group purchase two additional cameras for use in residential areas to monitor incidents of anti-social behaviour and ensure that the environment within communities is safe and secure.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report, Members questions were welcomed and full discussion ensued.

Clarification was sought as to the positioning of the cameras and why only 4 camera moves had been specified within the three-year arrangement with the supplier. The Officer confirmed that camera locations would be designated by referral and the duration of the monitoring would depend of the nature of the incidents. In respect of the camera moves, Members were advised that further moves could be negotiated with the supplier if required.

Clarification was sought with regard to signal black spots and how monitoring would be achieved in these areas. Officers confirmed that Community Safety camera vans could be accessed if required as they did not require wireless connectivity.

Members sought assurances that residents and tenants would be consulted before installation. Officers confirmed that the cameras' deployment would be as a result of community consultation and identification of problem areas.

Concerns were expressed with regard to the amount of surveillance already taking place through the CCTV network and whether there was the need for more cameras. Officers confirmed that the cameras would only be installed in response to community issues and although this would not resolve anti-social behaviour issues it would collect the necessary evidence to allow the appropriate interventions to be introduced in that area.

Members acknowledged the benefits for communities particularly if their use was linked with PACT meeting and other such community groups. Members also felt that a progress report when the cameras had been operational for a year would be useful in order to assess the progress made.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendations made in Section 9 of the Officer's report with the additional recommendation that a further report be brought back to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group in 12 months time in order to assess the progress made be recommended for approval to the Cabinet Sub Committee (WHQS) and by a show of hands

this was unanimously agreed.

5. TRANSFORMING HOMES, LIVES AND COMMUNITIES - LOCAL EMPLOYMENT FUND

Council Member G. Jones declared an interest as he is a Director of White Rose Information and Resource Centre however due to his late arrival at the meeting he was not present when the item was discussed.

The report sought approval to commit expenditure from the 2013/14 budget against the Local Employment Fund to support local community based projects that help provide people with greater access to employment and training opportunities.

Two projects had been identified and considered by the Project Board. The first sought a contribution of £10,000 towards the cost of refurbishing the Hafod Deg building into a multi-agency resource centre hosting Communities First, Job Centre Plus, the CAB and Community Education. The second was from the White Rose Resource Centre also seeking a £10,000 contribution to extend an employment support programme for young people in the Upper Rhymney Valley. The programme would promote the benefits of work to young people and the additional funding would enable the project to run for a full year.

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

Members noted that these were two very localised projects and sought clarification as to whether any other areas had been identified that could benefit from the fund. Officers confirmed that the Local Employment Fund was a revenue budget and at this stage in the financial year it was vital to make a commitment against the fund rather than lose the money. As the fund was an ongoing commitment there would be an opportunity to support other projects in other areas going forward. Members agreed the need to ensure expenditure against the budget and requested that Officers make every effort to secure the carry over of any under spend against the fund.

Clarification was sought as to the age criteria for the White Rose Project and the type of interventions available and further information was requested on Communities 2.0 as referenced in the report.

The Officer confirmed that the project would assist young people up to the age of 24 by providing individualised interventions based on their specific needs e.g. basic skills, dyslexia support and other bespoke activities which are interesting, engaging and relevant. In relation to Communities 2.0 this was a Welsh Government initiative which looked to address digital exclusion through programmes of additional learning, computer access, on-line benefits applications, budgeting and money management.

Members requested that an update report be brought back to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group so that the success of the projects could be assessed .

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendations made in Section 9 of the Officer's report with the additional recommendation that a further report be brought back to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group in 12 months time in order to assess the success of the projects be recommended for approval to the Cabinet Sub Committee (WHQS) and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

6. TENANCY REVIEW PANEL

The Chief Housing Officer advised that since the writing of the report it had become apparent that further consultation would be required on this matter and sought Members approval to withdraw this item to allow that consultation to take place.

It was proposed and seconded that the report be withdrawn and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

7. DISPOSAL OF HRA LAND ADJACENT TO FORMER GREENHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

The Chief Housing Officer advised that since the writing of the report further legal advice had been received that recommended consultation with the Council's external auditors and sought Members approval to withdraw the item to allow that consultation to take place.

It was proposed and seconded that the report be withdrawn and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

8. YOUR HOME YOUR CHOICE ADDENDUM - REVIEW OF COMMITMENTS

The report updated Members on the progress of the commitments made in the addendum document at the time of the ballot in February 2012

Members were advised that changing circumstances may affect the ability to achieve full compliance with WHQS by 2019/20 were highlighted in section 4.5 of the report. Members noted that budget pressures would cut across the commitments made in the document and have an impact on timescales as would the due diligence required on tenders. The offer to buy out of the negative subsidy for the 11 authorities that had retained their housing stock would be implemented in April 2015. However Members were advised that Officers would need to ensure that the buy out would be cost neutral before progressing in order to safeguard the Business Plan.

Capacity issues within the WHQS team could also have a potential impact on deliverability. It was noted that the scale of works had doubled from £10m to £22m coupled with considerable changes to the organisation and to working processes and practices which would take time to embed.

Members were referred to Appendix 1 of the report which reviewed the progress made against the addendum using the same format as the original document.

Officers confirmed that during the 13/14 financial year over 800 properties will have benefitted from internal improvements, the sheltered housing review had been completed, tenant participation had been supported through an increased budget and a new Local Tenant Participation strategy had been approved and taken forward. Three applications had already been approved from the Community Improvement Fund and reports on this meeting recommended financial commitments in respect of Community Safety Initiatives and the Local Employment Fund. Officers assured Members that good progress was being made, however not everything can be done at once but the Council was keeping faith with the majority of the commitments made in the addendum document.

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

Members reiterated their disappointment and concern at the proposal to defer the environmental programme beyond 2019/20 and acknowledged the positive changes being seen in the areas where work has been completed.

Officers confirmed that a full progress report would be brought back for Members consideration at the end of the financial year. It was noted that feedback from customer satisfaction questionnaires and interviews would also be incorporated into the report and Members were advised that presently customer satisfaction rated 96%.

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

9. INFORMATION ITEMS

The following reports presented to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on the 21st January 2014 were noted for information without discussion: -

- (i) Outline Of A Model For Increasing Affordable Housing Provision;
- (ii) Housing Revenue Account Charges 2014/14;
- (iii) Performance Management Improvement Objective 5 - Investment In Council Homes To Transform Lives and Communities;
- (iv) Half Yearly Update On Improvement Objective 6 (2013/14) - Improve The Availability Of Private And Public Sector Housing.

10. TO RECEIVE ANY REQUEST FOR AN ITEM TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA

No requests were received.

Ms L. Ackerman asked for an update on a previous request on the possible conversion of the Old Cash Office, High Street, Newbridge. Officers confirmed that the property in question was no longer held within the HRA and investigations were underway as to how this could be brought back in. Once the feasibility of this had been established a further report would be brought forward for Members consideration.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 13th March 2014.

The meeting closed at 17:50pm

CHAIRMAN