



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH QUALITY HOUSING STANDARD)

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

PRESENT:

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

TASK GROUP MEMBERS:

Ms. L. Ackerman, C. Davies, R.T. Davies, 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), S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), G. North (Public Sector Housing Manager), M. Betts (Community Participation Officer), K. Watkins (Communications & Tenant Engagement Officer) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer) J. Roberts-Waite (Strategic Coordination Manager).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Brian Hoskins, Cllr K. James, G. Henderson.

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.

Councillor G. Jones, Mrs S Jones and J. Moore sought advice on declaring an interest in item 5.2 as they have a current or previous involvement in Associations. Members were advised that a declaration would not be required.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 17th October 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

Councillor L. Ackerman requested a report on the number of void properties in the public and private sector.

Mrs S. Jones requested information on the progress in the Addendum Document.

5. 2013/14 SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN - HOUSING DIVISION

The report outlined the improvement plan process and advised on progress being made against key outcomes of the divisional service improvement plan (SIP).

The service improvement plan for 2013/14 is produced in accordance with corporate guidance issued by the performance management unit. The service improvement planning process focuses on increasing the efficiency and maximising the effectiveness of the range of services provided. Members were asked to note that a review of performance in Quarter 2 was being conducted at the time of writing the report and no areas of underperformance had been identified. The Officer highlighted relevant information in the report and SIP, which referred to Improvement Objectives and Key Outcomes and progress made against these to date.

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

A Member expressed concerns as to the timeliness of the plan, the lack of data for Quarter 2 and the accuracy of the data provided in the SIP. Target setting was challenged and concerns raised on budget advice for tenants with limited income, as it was felt that this should be a key issue.

The Officer apologised for the timeliness of the report and confirmed that a meeting has been arranged with the Housing Management Team next week, which will look at the SIP and the concerns highlighted by Members will be raised.

Clarification was sought on the lack of information under actions and contributions within the plan. Officers confirmed that there are areas within the plan, which coincide with work that is ongoing or completed under the Sustainable Development, and Equalities Impact Assessments.

Members were asked to note that the SIP is a working document and is amended and updated as required, Members therefore requested that the SIP be presented to the Group more frequently. Officers confirmed that a Corporate Review is underway to look at timescales and frequency of reporting; therefore this is subject to possible change.

Members noted the contents of the report, in particular the progress being made against the Key Outcomes in 2013/14 SIP.

6. TENANTS' AND RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATIONS

Councillor G. Jones, Mrs S Jones and J. Moore sought advice on declaring an interest in this item on current or previous involvement in Associations. Members were advised that a declaration would not be required.

The report updated Members on the Tenants' and Residents' Associations that are recognised by the Housing Department for consultation and/ or funding purposes.

Funding is provided from the Housing Revenue Account and is calculated on a formula basis. The purpose of the funding is to assist with the running costs of the organisation. To qualify for funding an Association must meet certain criteria and include specific information in its constitution. If an Association meets the criteria, Officers grant recognition under delegated powers and an information report is prepared for Members. Members are also advised when an Association is established in their ward.

Clarification was sought on the area covered by the Associations. The Officer confirmed that when an Association is set up, they are required to list the area, including streets they represent. This would not necessarily coincide with ward boundaries.

A Member queried the impact of the proposed savings on the budgets. The Officer assured Members that grants can be made from the budget this financial year and ongoing support was not currently under threat.

Members thanked the Officer for the report and noted the contents.

7. COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

The report provided Members of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group with an update on communications activities undertaken over the previous quarter.

Effective communications with stakeholders is essential in developing awareness of the "Caerphilly Homes" brand and to build a positive reputation for the WHQS programme and housing service. The delivery of timely messages, which are appropriate for the target audience, is an essential element in getting communications right, thereby raising the profile of Caerphilly Homes. A great deal of work had taken place over the past three months to raise the profile of Caerphilly Homes and to develop a number of key communication materials. Priorities identified within the last three months were the publication of a tenant newsletter, production of key materials to support the role of tenant liaison officers, marketing of the Community Improvement Fund and the implementation of effective methods of communicating with staff.

Members thanked the Officer for the report and the work being conducted with the Tenants Representatives to get more tenants involved.

Clarification was sought on the key materials identified and requested that Councillors also be provided with these. The Officer agreed to provide materials to local Councillors when they are printed and these included Improvement Guides and After Care Packs, which provide tenants with all the information they require about the work being conducted for WHQS.

A Member queried the survey and feedback process and where the information is reported. The Officer informed Members that the majority of customer satisfaction surveys are posted but a sample are undertaken directly by a tenant group. Comprehensive feedback is not currently available but a report will be provided to the Task Group in due course.

Members noted the contents of the report.

8. WHQS PROGRAMME MONITORING REPORT APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2013

The report provided details of the 2012/13 statutory return required by the Welsh Government, along with a narrative on the expected compliance of the housing stock during the period 2013-20. Details the capital expenditure programme for 2013-14 for WHQS works were also highlighted.

The report outlined the arrangements that have been put in place to monitor and manage the performance of the WHQS programme for 2013-14. This included a number of performance dashboards used by a range of staff within the WHQS team.

Members thanked the officer for the report and accompanying presentation, which provided a detailed demonstration of the Keystone Asset Management System and the relevant 'Dashboards' that track the progress made within the programme and budget management.

Members queried the under-spend on the budget. Officers confirmed that this is due to a number of properties being compliant to the standard as a result of previous work or where tenants had refused the works. As a consequence it had been possible to bring forward a number of properties originally programmed for the 14/15 financial year.

Officers informed Members that works are anticipated to be more complex next year with both internal and external works being conducted by both internal workforce and contractors. The process will be reviewed twice annually with reports provided to the Task Group. Feedback and an updated Business Plan, will be provided to the Welsh Government as part of the MRA application submission, which is due to be submitted by 17th January 2014.

A Member queried whether there is a plan in place to revisit the homes that have refused works. Officers confirmed that it would depend on the circumstances of the refusal and the contract. A number of properties where there was an original refusal have subsequently been incorporated as tenants often change their mind when they see the improvements in neighbours properties.

Members sought clarification on the boiler and kitchen replacement timescales, taking into account that many may be compliant at present, but this would not be the case in 2020. Members were advised that lifecycle considerations were taken into account when surveys are undertaken to determine component replacement having regard to the likely condition in 2020.

Members thanked the Officers and noted the informative report, presentation and system demonstration.

9. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET MONITORING 2013-14

The report provided information to the Task Group Members on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The Report projects the anticipated final outturn for the HRA based upon the expenditure and income trends for the first six months of the financial year.

Members noted that the under-spends identified in the report had been fully committed to other projects and consequently cannot be allocated elsewhere.

A Member queried the anticipated impact to budgets following the introduction of Welfare Reforms and Universal Credits. Members were informed that a pilot exercise was being conducted in another Local Authority, which would look at the impact of the changes and processes to manage them. At present, Caerphilly were unsure as to when Universal Credits would be introduced.

Following a full discussion, the Committee noted the contents of the report.

10. IMPLICATIONS OF MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN FOR THE HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

Members were provided with a report, which was presented to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 4th December 2013. The report provided the context and outlined the savings that the Council are required to make over the next three financial years.

The report referred to the 2014/15 Provisional Local Government Settlement announced in October 2013, which showed a decrease in funding. Following this, the Medium Term Financial Plan was amended to show a projected three-year savings requirement of £28.13m (£14.53m for 2014/15, £6.54m for 2015/16 and £7.06m for 2016/17). Since the announcement of the Provisional Settlement, Officers have been preparing a list of potential savings and efficiencies for Members to consider. This list was distributed at a Members Seminar on 21st November 2013. A series of Special Scrutiny Committee meetings are being held during the first 2 weeks of December for Members to review and comment upon the proposed savings.

The potential savings/ efficiencies in the Housing Revenue Account were extracted for further consideration by the Caerphilly Homes Task Group (CHTG). Members were asked to note that no decisions have been made and the CHTG were invited to make observations, which would be taken into account by the Cabinet along with all other consultation responses across all service areas when they deliberate on the budget recommendations to be made to the Council.

The report and savings proposals were debated in detail. Members acknowledged the level of savings required and the low impact to services and delivery that were proposed. Concerns were raised about the proposed deferral of £10.5m environmental spend to 2020/21; and the impact this would have on WHQS.

Members were assured that the budget deferral would not have any impact on the work being conducted to the properties and the curtilages. Members were asked to consider the saving requirements and were assured that the works to the environment would be capable of being funded from future HRA surpluses.

It was agreed that Officers would present full details of the budget at a seminar for the CHTG Tenant Representatives, and the implications of the Medium Term Financial Plan for the Housing Revenue Account will be reconsidered at a special meeting of the CHTG to be convened in early January 2014.

11. 22-24 HEOL ANEURIN: CONVERSION TO FLATS OF FORMER SOCIAL SERVICES CHILDREN'S HOME

The report advised Members of the Task Group of a proposal to convert semi-detached properties at 22-24 Heol Aneurin, Caerphilly, a former Social Services Children's Home, to 4 x 1 bedroom flats.

The former Children's Home at 22-24 Heal Aneuin in Penyrheol recently became surplus to requirements and a business case was submitted to Corporate Property for the Housing Service to acquire the premises. The intention is to convert this block of semi-detached properties into 4 x 1 bedroom flats providing much needed smaller, more affordable homes, which will enable tenants to downsize.

Members were asked to note that following consultation proposals were submitted for consideration that these properties be advertised on the open market for sale and as a result a capital receipt would be obtained by CCBC. Whilst this is an option, private investors and Housing Associations may be interested in purchasing these properties for the same proposed use as being recommended within this report i.e. conversion to smaller units of accommodation.

Members thanked Mr North for the report and agreed that it is a positive step towards mitigating the impact of the implementation of Bedroom Tax.

Members queried the management of the properties and whether the flats would be offered to local people wishing to downsize or those currently on the allocations waiting list. The Officer confirmed that lettings would be undertaken in accordance with Council policies.

It was proposed and seconded that for the reasons contained in the officer's report, Members recommend the Cabinet Sub Committee supports the conversion of the two properties into four one bedroom flats and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

12. COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT FUND APPLICATION

The report sought approval to grant a fund proposal received from the Oaklands Hall Community Association from the Community Improvement Fund.

Members were asked to consider an application for monies from the Community Improvement Fund by Oaklands Hall Allotments Association, Bargoed who are seeking £4750.00 to re-roof two of the communall buildings within the allotment site to enable them to be used for community activities during poor weather.

Members discussed the report and application and queried the number of applications received for the fund. Officers outlined that three other applications had been received, which they were currently unable to process, as they required planning consent.

Members thanked Officers for the report and the work being conducted.

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

The meeting closed at 19:27pm

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd January 2014.

CHAIRMAN