



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 2ND JULY 2015

SUBJECT: CAERPHILLY HOMES COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

REPORT BY: INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present members of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group with a new communications strategy and action plan for implementation. The report is seeking the views of CHTG prior to its consideration at Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, and thereafter Cabinet.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Effective communications is essential to ensuring all stakeholders have an awareness of the Caerphilly Homes brand and are kept up to date on progress across the housing service. Key to effective communications is the delivery of timely messages, using a range of methods appropriate for specific target audiences. But, more than simply sending messages out, effective communication also relies upon creating opportunities for open and transparent two way dialogue with stakeholders.
- 2.2 The draft strategy and action plan proposed in this report replace the former 'Housing and WHQS Communications Strategy' which elapsed in 2015. The new draft strategy strongly advocates a 'one housing service' approach to communications in order to more effectively embed the Caerphilly Homes ethos throughout the division.

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 The Single Integrated Plan 2013-2017 has a priority to "improve standards of housing and communities, giving appropriate access to services across the County Borough".
- 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."
- 3.5 Other relevant internal strategies include the corporate communications strategy 'One Voice' and Caerphilly Homes' local tenant participation strategy.

4. THE REPORT

4.1 Effective communications is essential to ensuring all stakeholders have an awareness of the Caerphilly Homes brand and are kept up to date on progress across the housing service. Key to effective communications is the delivery of timely messages, using a range of methods appropriate for specific target audiences.

4.2 There had previously been very little evaluation carried out with regards communications activities and service user involvement in this had also been limited. For example, whilst service users are asked to provide feedback on specific tenant communications, via Armchair Reviewers, there had been no formal mechanism in place for gaining their input on our general approach to communications.

Without evaluation or feedback from our service users, we do not know how effective our communications with them are and whether we are achieving value for money through our current activities.

4.3 As the former 'Housing and WHQS Communications Strategy' came to an end in 2015 it seemed timely to use this as an opportunity to undertake a communications review with stakeholders. In order to achieve this, a working group of tenants and staff was established with support from the Tenant and Community Involvement Team. The group met in a series of workshops which were facilitated by the Communications and Tenant Engagement Officer.

During the review process, a number of key questions were asked including:

- What are our current goals and objectives for communications?
- How well is the current communications strategy / plan working?
- How clear, consistent and persuasive are our messages?
- What communications have been most effective?
- What do stakeholders think of our communications?
- What would make our communications more effective?
- What communications opportunities are we missing?

4.4 The review also gave recognition to work that has taken place to raise the Caerphilly Homes profile since the stock transfer ballot. Strengths identified by the group include the increased opportunities provided for informal engagement with tenants, including attendance at high profile events and smaller scale estate based events. Other successes recognised by the group included the increased use of different mediums, including the damp and condensation information video and the community film project 'Let's Get Happy'.

4.5 As well as a great deal of positive work, the review also highlighted a number of areas where improvement is needed. Particular themes that arose during the review were the need for greater consistency and coverage in communications across Caerphilly Homes, to ensure stakeholders are aware of the range of services delivered by the council's housing division. Also, whilst the work undertaken to develop a clear brand identity was congratulated, there was agreement that further work is needed to ensure that the brand and Caerphilly Homes ethos is embedded throughout the housing division.

The lack of tenant profiling data was also flagged as a concern, as this information is vital if we are to target our communications and engagement activities more efficiently and effectively.

4.6 Communications and customer service are intrinsically linked; with effective communications necessary to deliver high levels of customer service and vice versa. The review included a session which focussed specifically on customer service, which raised a number of issues affecting the end service received by customers. The issues raised included poor internal communications and a lack of consistency in the standards of customer care throughout the

division. Many of the actions contained within the associated action plan aim to address some of these issues, particularly those pertaining to internal communications. Separate work is also being undertaken by the HR Development Officer, in conjunction with the communications strategy, which focusses upon customer service.

- 4.7 The Caerphilly Homes Communications Strategy for 2015-18 covers the range of services delivered by Caerphilly Homes and takes a whole service approach to communications. By doing so it aims to ensure consistency across the housing division and address the issues highlighted around internal communications.
- 4.8 For the purposes of this strategy, a number of target audiences have been identified and divided into two groups – internal and external stakeholders:

Internal stakeholders:

- Caerphilly Homes staff
- Local elected members
- Other council departments, e.g. Communities First, Highways, Education

External stakeholders:

- Tenants
- Leaseholders
- Applicants / prospective tenants
- AMs and MPs
- Welsh Government
- Housing associations
- Suppliers and contractors

- 4.9 The key aims and objectives of this strategy, developed through the communications review process, are:
1. To raised the awareness of stakeholders on:
 - a. The range of services we provide
 - b. How to access our services
 - c. Our performance in providing these services
 - d. How they can influence our services
 2. To promote Caerphilly Homes' reputation locally, regionally and nationally.
 3. To develop a consistent brand image and positive identity for Caerphilly Homes.

A plan has been produced, accompanying the strategy and this report, which sets out the shorter term actions needed to deliver these aims and objectives. The plan was developed in conjunction with the communications working group and is based upon SMART principles to ensure it can be delivered, measured and monitored effectively. Regular monitoring reports on the delivery of this plan will be presented to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 An EqIA 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 has been identified. Therefore a full EqIA has not been carried out.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There is a dedicated annual communications and tenant engagement budget of £49.646. A fully costed action plan for implementation of the strategy accompanies this report.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 This report has no direct personnel implications.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 The views of consultees listed are incorporated within the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 The CHTG supports a recommendation to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet to adopt the communications strategy and action plan.

10. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

- 10.1 In order to provide a clear strategic direction for Caerphilly Homes in its approach to communications.

11. STATUTORY POWER

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

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Consultees: Cllr. David Poole, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing
Cllr Barbara Jones, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Corporate Services
Cllr Ken James, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Sustainable Development
Phil Davy, Head of Programmes
Shaun Couzens, Chief Housing Officer
Nicole Scammel, Acting Director of Corporate Services and S151 Officer
Jane Roberts-Waite, Strategic Coordination Manager
Stephen Pugh, Corporate Communications Manager
Mandy Betts, Tenant and Community Involvement Manager

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Communications Strategy

Appendix 2 - Communications Action Plan