



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
(SIRHOWY ROOM) ON THURSDAY, 29TH OCTOBER 2015 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

C. Davies- Chair

Task Group Members:

Ms L. Ackerman, Mrs G. Atkins, Miss A. Lewis, C. Mann and D.V. Poole.

P. Davy (Head of Programmes), P. Smythe (Housing Repair Operation Manager), M. Betts (Community Participation Officer), F. Wilkins (Public Sector Housing Manager), C. Evans (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs G. Atkins, Miss A. Lewis and C. Mann.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mrs G. Atkins, Mr C. Davies and Miss A. Lewis as Council Tenants declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in all agenda items.

3. MINUTES – 17TH SEPTEMBER 2015

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 17th September 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. REVIEW WORKSHOP – FEEDBACK REPORT

The report provided the Task Group with details of the Review Workshop, which was arranged on 8th September for the Caerphilly Homes Task Group (CHTG), to further develop the working relationships between councillors and tenants and to review and refocus the activities of the CHTG.

The key outcomes were:

- The opportunity to discuss and clarify the roles of tenants, councillors and officers
- The recognition that mutual respect and trust between all partners is essential
- Reaffirmation of the commitment to work together based on shared goals where there is common ownership of problems and solutions.

- The primary objective remains to achieve WHQS by 2020 which requires speed of delivery but without compromising quality.
- The sharing of views in an informal setting.

The suggested actions that came from the workshop were:

- Refine the Terms of Reference to better reflect priorities
- Explore ways of engaging and involving the wider tenant population
- Organise regular informal review sessions
- Improve communications especially where changes to plans occur
- Learn from mistakes and continually improve
- Continue to find ways of minimising disruption to tenants during the work within their homes.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued. Task Group Members wished it noted that the workshop was very beneficial and provided an opportunity to discuss any issues within the WHQS Programme, such as contractor issues with key Officers, as well as make any necessary revisions to the Terms of Reference.

A Task Group Member sought further information on the proposed agenda and reporting process and it was highlighted that, the Terms of Reference have been revised and future reporting and agenda's would be considered in a similar manner to Scrutiny, in which information reports could be called forward for discussion, if necessary. Agenda's would clearly outline to the Task Group, the process in which to follow in order to call forward a report and the deadline in which to do so.

Discussions ensued in reference to WHQS contracts and concerns were raised about tenant involvement in contract compliance and possible cost implications to the Authority and WHQS Programme. It was noted that there had been some issues raised with Officers in the past, which had not been addressed, and it was felt that the Tenant Representatives should be made aware of any contractual issues. Officers explained that Contract Management was a recognised risk from the outset of the programme and acknowledged that tenants have raised concerns about one particular contract. Due to the scale of the programme and the number of contractors and sub-contractors and pressing timescales, there is an expectation that things will not always go to plan. Tenants were reminded to bring any concerns they have to the Head of Programmes for WHQS who will instigate an appropriate investigation.

The Task Group were provided with an update on the recent issues highlighted in Argoed. It was noted that, following recent works to replace kitchens, further inspection had highlighted defective ground floors of 6 properties, 3 of which had had replacement kitchens. Following consideration, it was agreed that the ground floor throughout the 6 properties would be replaced, which would delay the programme in Argoed and raised further issues for living arrangements for the 6 resident families during the works.

A Task Group Member queried why the issues had not been identified when surveying the properties. Officers highlighted that the defect was picked up by a sub-contractor. The ground floors are not normally checked as part of the survey process and due to the area and location of properties, and the form of construction of the ground floor could all be contributing to the problem.

The Task Group sought information on the financial position when having to fund additional works. Officers explained that there are currently no estimates on the additional cost of the works in Argoed; however it would be funded by the Programme and this was no different to absorbing additional costs in other part of the County Borough arising from defects in the properties.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officers report:: -

- (i) the minor changes to the Terms of Reference be agreed;
- (ii) the procedural amendments in respect of information items be accepted;
- (iii) the proposal for an annual review workshop be supported;
- (iv) any actions arising from the workshop, within day to day business be incorporated as appropriate.

5. FIRE SAFETY MEASURES FOR COUNCIL OWNED FLATS

Following a Members request, F. Wilkins, Public Sector Housing Manager presented the report, which provided details on the fire safety measures already provided and planned to be undertaken to all three storey Council owned flats, to comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

It was noted that the Councils housing stock currently stands at 10,865 properties which includes 184 three storey Council owned flats, which are required to comply with the regulations as the individual entrance doors to the flats open onto an enclosed communal landing and stairway.

In order to improve safety for tenants and comply with the Regulatory Reform Order, most blocks of flats within the Borough have been risk assessed by the Fire Officer from the Corporate Health and Safety Team. The risk assessments identified works, which are being progressed such as; ventilating enclosed communal areas with openable windows on landing areas or permanently open louvre vents; letters and detailed guidance notes have been sent to all tenants to advise them that communal areas must be free of any obstructions, combustible materials or items; Emergency lighting has been fitted within communal areas to ensure that walkways and access routes are lit in the event of power failure and all doors opening onto an enclosed communal area are required to provide a half hour fire resistance (FD30S). Due to the scale of works and cost associated to bring all internal doors to standard, the Fire Service accepted that this could be progressed on a planned basis, and work is ongoing to complete this exercise.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued around Mobility Scooters and storage within flats. It was noted that, if a resident is prescribed a mobility scooter by a GP, adaptations to accommodate the scooter would be considered within the property, however, if the scooter was purchased, it would be up to the tenant to ensure that the scooter is stored safely and appropriate, and in compliance with Fire Safety Regulations.

A Member queried the financial implications for the works, which were not available within the report. It was noted that due to the tendering process still being underway, financial information is not currently available, however, Officers assured the Task Group that information would be circulated by email in due course.

6. HOUSING LAND ASSET REVIEW

The report informed the Caerphilly Homes Task Group in respect of the progress of the Authority's Housing land asset review.

It was noted that significant land and property assets sit within the Housing Revenue Account, distributed throughout the County Borough. A review is being undertaken to provide base information about these assets to ensure that land and property meet objectives allied to the achievement of WHQS or longer term aims of developing new social housing. The review will also inform the delivery of the WHQS environmental programme, and provide a basis for the potential rationalization of land holdings.

To date, 1008 individual sites across seven estates have been surveyed, investigated and have received a recommendation under one of nine agreed categories, however, no final decisions have yet been taken in relation to the future of these sites, pending consultation with local residents and Members.

Task Group Members noted that an interactive database with online functionality has been developed to support the review, which is used to store and display the individual report produced for each site and a demonstration of the database was given, which highlighted the sites where the review had been completed.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group noted the report.

7. TENANT PARTICIPATION IN THE HOUSING SERVICE

M. Betts, Community Participation Officer provided an overview of the report, which provided an update to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group on tenant participation activities and also responds to a request for an update on the pilot review undertaken by the Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP).

The report detailed the activity and progress under the four main objectives of local tenant participation with additional information on the tenant participation budget.

- To develop tenant review – At a strategic level the Caerphilly Homes Task Group remains the main mechanism to review public housing Services. At an operational level there are a number of continuing activities and new initiatives, which includes The Repairs and Improvements Group to monitor response repairs, Caerphilly Service Improvement Monitors (CSIMS) to monitor and survey the WHQS works conducted and the Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP) was developed in February 2015 with the aim to understand customer demand and produce a staff handbook to help Caerphilly Homes to improve housing services.
- Increased tenant engagement – The rent consultation focus groups played an active role in bringing in tenants who had not previously engaged with housing services. Estate walkabouts were conducted in Lansbury Park and Graig Y Rhacca, the responses were disappointing from these, however it is intended to try more walkabouts in the future.
- Improve Information Flow to the Wider Tenant Body – The tenant involvement team has supported the production of a video, and digital story telling projects for Communities and Rents Section. In addition, and in conjunction with the Rents Manager, text messaging services have been utilised to advertise involvement opportunities.
- Mainstreaming of Tenant Participation – Tenant and Community Involvement Team has participated in a project run by the Chartered Institute of Housing to consider future tenant involvement. Organisations have been encouraged to review their own tenant involvement structures and activities and consider further development.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and further information was sought on the review of the Tenant Participation Strategy. Officers highlighted that work is currently underway with the Chartered Institute of Housing and there are plans to update the Strategy, which will take into consideration the changes and developments made since 2012, however, it was noted that there is no statutory requirement for the Local Authority to produce a Strategy.

The Task Group discussed Tenant Groups and Associations and queried whether there have been any changes in the numbers of functioning groups. Officers highlighted that, whilst there are changes taking place within estates and tenants associations, there haven't been any changes since the writing of the report.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and noted its contents.

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

The following requests were received:-

1. Mr C. Davies requested an update on the procurement process. Clarification was sought on the request and it was noted that the procurement process is an ongoing one, which has to respond to changing circumstances.
2. Mr C. Davies requested a status report on the Community Improvement Fund. The Task Group noted that a review is currently being conducted on the various funding initiatives established following the ballot. A report will be provided to the Task Group in due course.

The meeting closed at 6.20 p.m.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 10th December 2015.

CHAIR