



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
(SIRHOWY ROOM) ON THURSDAY, 29TH MARCH 2018 AT 5P.M.**

PRESENT:

C. Davies – Chair
Mrs D. Price – Vice Chair

Task Group Members:

M. Davies, Ms M. James, L. Harding, A. Hussey, Mrs S. Jones, Mrs D. Moore, Ms L. Pewtner, Mrs L. Phipps, and L. Whittle.

Officers:

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), F. Wilkins (Public Sector Housing Manager) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from E. Forehead, Ms M. James and Ms L. Pewtner.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Tenant Representatives C. Davies, Ms M. James, Mrs S. Jones, Mrs D. Moore and Ms L. Pewtner declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in all agenda items as Council Tenants.

Mrs D. Price declared an interest in Item 5 – Review of Rechargeable Repairs and Appeals Panel. Details are recorded with the respective item.

3. MINUTES – 15TH FEBRUARY 2018

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15th February 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Task Group raised concerns that there had been reports requested at previous meetings, which had not yet been scheduled and sought officer clarification.

Officers sought clarification in respect of the Community Fund Report, as there are 2 funds available. Discussion ensued and it was clarified that a report is sought on Community Fund, which is supported through Internal Works contracts. Officers agreed to provide a report.

Discussions took place around the Affordable Homes Report request and it was noted that this is due to be presented to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet and considers the introduction of an additional Social Housing provider to the Borough. Another report is also being developed which considers the building of additional Council Homes, which can be made available for the next meeting.

A Task Group Member requested information on the Valleys Task Force. Following discussion, it was noted that, as the Task Force is still in its infancy, there is not currently a Caerphilly CBC representative on the Group, and it is not within the remit of the Task Group, that this may not be an appropriate forum for discussions at this time.

Finally, Officers explained that, due to work pressures and deadline, it may not always be possible to provide the Task Group with the requested reports to the next meeting, and asked that the Task Group allow 2 meetings cycles for requested reports.

4. WALES AUDIT OFFICE REVIEW UPDATE (VERBAL)

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group noted the update.

5. REVIEW OF RECHARGEABLE REPAIRS AND APPEALS PANEL

Mrs D. Price declared an interest in this item as she is a Member of the Panel, and left the room during its consideration.

The report sought the views of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group on the review of the operation of the Rechargeable Repairs and Appeals Panel and the need to consider revising the way in which second stage reviews are considered, prior to its presentations to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

It was noted that the Rechargeable Repairs Policy was approved at Cabinet on 18th March 2015. The Policy included a revised review process that allows tenants to request an independent review of their recharge if they have good reason to disagree with a previous decision made by the officers/ managers.

There are currently 3 stages to the process:

- An informal review by Officers
- A first stage formal review by a manager
- A second stage formal review, undertaken by the Rechargeable Repairs and Appeals Panel. The Panel makes a recommendation to the Chief Housing Officer on whether the recharge should be upheld. The Chief Housing Officer's decision is final.

The Panel was suggested by the Repairs and Improvements Group in August 2014 when consulted on the introduction of the Rechargeable Repairs Policy and was considered an opportunity to involve tenants and Members in reviews.

The report detailed the second stage reviews considered by the Panel to date, including outcomes and recommends that, due to the extensive additional resources required in facilitating the panel, cost implications, consequential delays in decision making and the limited number of cases being brought forward, the use of a panel for second stage reviews be replaced with a procedure that would mirror the second stage of the Corporate Complaints Procedure. In addition the report further proposed that alternative arrangements be put in place to ensure that the quality and consistency of decision making in relation to reviews be maintained, and to keep tenants informed about decision making in respect of rechargeable repairs.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and discussed the report at length.

The Task Group raised concerns that there is not accurate representation for Tenants on the Panel and felt that, should the Panel be abolished, there would not be an option to get the voice of the tenant heard. In addition, the Task Group felt that the proposed process should provide more regular reporting. Officers explained that, due to the costs associated with the Panel, which are covered through the HRA and the number of cases they are required to deal with, the Panel is not cost effective or fit for purpose. Officers acknowledged the need for tenant representation in matters, however it was noted that should a complainant be dissatisfied with the outcome of the Appeal, they are entitled to contact the Ombudsman to consider the case.

A Task Group Member queried how long the new system would take to implement, and Officers assured Members that it could be implemented with immediate effect, as there are similar systems in place for Complaints.

Discussion took place around call recording and the Task Group were keen for Officers to consider this option, which could ultimately reduce the number of Recharge Appeals being made. Officers explained that options have been considered corporately and there have been some concerns around Data Protection, however these discussions are ongoing.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands (and in noting that there were 4 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that for the reasons outlined in the Officers report:

- i) the Rechargeable Repairs and Appeals Panel be discontinued;
- ii) all second stage reviews of rechargeable repairs be investigated using a process that mirrors the second stage of the Corporate Complaints Procedure;
- iii) monitoring of consistency of implementation of the Rechargeable Repairs Procedure in relation to requests for review and the application of discretion be undertaken by a Housing Manager Panel on a quarterly basis;
- iv) an annual report be provided to the Repairs and Improvement Group on the number, nature and outcome of second stage reviews of rechargeable repairs considered under the revised procedure, together with decisions taken in respect of informal and stage 1 formal reviews.

6. ABOLITION OF THE RIGHT TO BUY AND ASSOCIATED RIGHTS

The report provided Members with information on the Welsh Government's intention to introduce legislation on the abolition in Wales of the Right to Buy and Associated Rights.

It was noted that the Right to Buy was introduced by the UK Government through the Housing Act 1980 with the aim of extending levels of home ownership throughout the UK. Since the introduction of the Right to Buy and Right to Acquire, around 139,000 social rented dwellings have been sold across Wales.

Against a backdrop of considerable housing pressure in Wales, Welsh Government intends to introduce legislation, which abolishes the Right to Buy and Right to Acquire. The Abolition of the Right to Buy and Associated Rights (Wales) Bill has passed its final stage in the National Assembly for Wales on 5th December 2017. The Bill became an Act in January 2018, following receipt of Royal Assent.

Social Landlords were required to ensure that all affected tenants were provided with relevant information issued by Welsh Government that landlords consider to be relevant to their tenants by 17th March 2018.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

A Task Group Member sought further information on the application process in relation to the WHQS works and it was clarified that any improvements scheduled would halt on the receipt of an application to purchase their property. It was also noted that a £8,000 discount would be applied to the property value of each eligible Council tenant wishing to purchase their home.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and noted its content.

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

There were no requests made by the Task Group at the meeting.

The meeting closed at 6:15 p.m.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 17th May 2018.

CHAIR