



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN THE SIRHOWY ROOM, PENALLTA HOUSE, ON
THURSDAY, 1ST NOVEMBER 2018 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Mr C. Davies – Chair (Presiding)

Councillors:

M. Davies, B. Jones, L. Phipps, L.G. Whittle

Tenant Representatives:

M. James, S. Jones, D. Moore, L. Pewtner, R. Thompson

Officers:

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), J. Roberts-Waite (Strategic Coordination Manager),
Lesley Allen (Group Accountant Housing)

CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENT

It was noted that an apology had been received from Councillor D. Price (Chair), in her absence Mr C. Davies (Vice-Chair) presided as Chair for the meeting.

The Chair confirmed that information items Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring – Period 1 2018/19 (Agenda Item No. 6) and WHQS Environmental Programme (Agenda Item No. 7) had been brought forward for discussion.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L. Harding, A. Hussey D. Price and Tenant Representatives Mrs Y. Bryant and Ms M. James.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 4TH SEPTEMBER 2018

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on the 4th September 2018 be agreed as a correct record and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 4th September 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair

4. MINUTES – 20TH SEPTEMBER 2018

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on the 20th September 2018 be agreed as a correct record and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 20th September 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. MATTERS ARISING

In relation to minute no. 5 on the 20th September 2018, WHQS – Acceptable Fails Update, a Member referenced issues regarding blown rendering and scaffolding issues in the Penyrheol area, to the extent that tenants were taking down the scaffolding themselves. The Chief Housing Officer noted the concerns raised and agreed that this was unacceptable. He advised that he would personally look into the issues raised and liaise directly with the Member concerned.

6. FOCUS ON FINANCE - PRESENTATION

Ms Lesley Allen, Group Accountant - Housing gave a presentation which explained how housing is financed.

The Officer confirmed that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is separate from the main Council fund and as such is ring-fenced which means it cannot be used to offset any other budget. The HRA is funded by tenants rent and covers the costs for managing tenancies and maintaining the 10,777 Council houses. Private Housing and General Fund Housing are outside of the HRA and funded by Council Tax and Government grants.

The HRA fund contributions were detailed and it was noted that employee salaries formed part of that expenditure, of those salaries about 5% relate to agency staff. Members were asked to note that tenants rent made up £47.1m of the fund, services charges £1.6m and garage and shop rent £241k and about 70% of the rent is paid by Housing Benefit.

Members expressed their concerns in relation to the roll out of Universal Credit and the impact that this would have on the HRA. The Officer acknowledged that they did anticipate an increase in rent arrears as a result of the change and confirmed that additional support had been identified in order to try and mitigate issues.

It was noted that 58% of the WHQS Programme is funded by HRA contributions with the rest comprised from Welsh Government (WG) Major Repairs Allowance, Borrowing, Grants and Capital Receipts from Right to Buy sales. The Officer confirmed that MRA funding was conditioned on WG receiving an annual Business Plan to demonstrate that the WHQS programme is affordable.

Members noted that the Business Plan projects the income and expenditure for Caerphilly Homes over the next 30 years and queried whether a 30 year projection was reliable.

The Officer confirmed that a 5 year projection would have safe assumptions anything over and above that would be more challenging; however WG required a 30 year plan. Assumptions and their impact on the Business Plan were explained and Members noted the

number of tests and sensitivities that were run.

The WHQS spend profile was outlined in terms of direct spend and other spends and the expenditure against financing elements of the Business Plan were explained. With regard to borrowing, the Officer detailed the level needed to complete the programme and how this funding would be obtained. It was noted that the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), which is the most competitive market for Local Authorities would be used. The Officer also confirmed that WG has recently abolished the cap on PWLB and the impact this would have on the programme was explained.

Members noted the borrowing profile and asked if this would have any impact on the completion deadline. Officers confirmed that this was still on course for 2020.

Members thanked the Officer for the presentation which used plain language and was easily understood by the layman and wished their thanks for all her efforts for be formally noted.

Having fully considered its content the Caerphilly Homes Task Group note the presentation.

7. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET MONITORING – PERIOD 4 2018/19

Ms. Lesley Allen, Group Accountant Housing introduced the report which updated Members on the projected outturn for the HRA based on the expenditure and income for the first four months of the year. The Officer confirmed that the figures summarised within 2.3 of the report had already been discussed during the previous presentation.

Members were referred to section 4.6 of the report and the revenue contribution to capital it was noted that the under-spend quoted had been achieved through staff salary savings. Updated figures were then provided in the relation to sections 4.6.5, 4.6.6 and 4.6.7 which noted that internal works had now achieved 79.8% compliance, external works had now achieved 59.1% compliance and total WHQS compliance was now at 51.7%.

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

A member requested that if it would be possible to include figures as well as percentages for future reports in order to make them easier to understand. The Officer confirmed that this would be done.

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

8. WHQS ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME

Ms. Jane Roberts-Waites, Strategic Co-ordination Manager introduced the report which highlighted the progress made regarding the delivery of the WHQS Environmental Programme.

The Officer provided a summary on the history of the environmental programme and confirmed that £106m had been set aside in the Business Plan agreed by WG specifically for this purpose. It was noted that over 300 minor projects were initially identified across the borough the majority of which had been progressed with some repackaged into larger schemes. The second phase of the programme had now commenced with Environmental Officers undertaking an extensive engagement programme within communities.

It was acknowledged that the programme still had a long way to go, of the 82 communities identified 36 had received consultation events, with 22 ongoing and 24 still to do. Identified projects have included new parking infrastructure, new or the renewal of play facilities, skate parks, the installation of green gyms, planting projects and actions designed to improve

safety and accessibility within communities. Efforts were also being made to extend the lifecycle of existing community infrastructure through the renewal or repair of existing assets and amenities. This would future proof communities and safeguard provision for the generations to come.

Members were advised that in order to drive projects forward a specific WHQS Project Officer is to be recruited within Grounds Maintenance and should be in post by December 2018. Assurances were given that even though the programme is incredibly complex, it will be delivered on time. The Chief Housing Officer also provided assurances that any slips in the programme would be closely monitored and the appropriate action to mitigate any delays.

Concerns were expressed in relation to the consultation process on certain projects and Officers outlined the level of consultation undertaken and the 'walk arounds' aspect of the process. Members noted the importance that the input from other Directorates such as Highways and Leisure would have on the environmental programme and agreed that they would like to have representatives from those areas attend future meetings to allow a more rounded scrutiny of progress.

The Chief Housing Officer confirmed that when future progress reports were brought forward those Officers would be in attendance.

Clarification was then sought on funding levels and whether the budget allocation for the environmental programme would be sufficient to secure a 2020 completion deadline and assurance was given that it would be sufficient to secure completion for 2020.

Reference was made to the matrix attached at appendix 1 of the Officers report and the size of print and whether this could be increased. The Officer confirmed that this could and would be improved for the next update.

Clarification was sought in relation to projects within the Argoed area and if anything other than parking had been identified. An Officer confirmed that projects identified in the matrix could change throughout the consultation process with others coming forward at different times so Members should expect to see a change in the matrix as more projects come on line.

A Member passed on his compliments to the Environment Support Officer for the Rhymney area for the excellent work undertaken.

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

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

A request was received for a report on the training and development provided to front-line staff on communication with disabled, disadvantaged and hard to reach residents for example older tenants with Alzheimer's.

The meeting closed at 18:00pm.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 6th December 2018.

CHAIR