



CABINET – 30TH JANUARY 2019

SUBJECT: WHQS PROGRESS REPORT – FINAL STAGES

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

- 1.1 The attached report, which had been presented to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group on 6th December 2018, detailed the performance of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) Team to date, and set out the anticipated projected performance up to December 2020. Details of the capital expenditure for 2018/19 for WHQS works were also included, together with an overview of the many achievements made as part of the wider commitments and benefits delivered by the WHQS programme. The view of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee were sought on the contents of the report, prior to its presentation to Cabinet.
- 1.2 By way of an accompanying slideshow presentation, Officers summarised the progress of the WHQS programme to date, with further details set out in the report and its appendices. The Committee noted details of the background to the WHQS, the contracts established across internal and external works and the timeframes for the delivery of works, survey and compliance completion rates, tenant satisfaction levels, details of the Council's promise in respect of attainment levels, and pre-and post-work photographs showing the improvements that had been made to kitchens, bathrooms, and external fascia. Members also noted details of environmental works across housing estates, energy efficiency improvements, community benefits and investment, details of current and future expenditure, and the plans in place to achieve and validate the compliance of the WHQS programme by December 2020.
- 1.3 The current cumulative level of compliance is 80% for internal works and 62% for external works. Tenant satisfaction levels are 88% across internal works and 71% across external works. Total spend projected to March 2019 is £200m and borrowing of £20m will be required for this year. It is anticipated that the £220m estimate to deliver the WHQS programme is likely to be exceeded, although Officers confirmed that at this time no increase in borrowing would be required. Although full compliance is projected for 15th May 2020 for internal works and 10th April 2020 for external works, it is hoped that these can be brought forward to March 2020 to allow for any unforeseen contingencies and for full WHQS compliance to be achieved prior to the December 2020 deadline. A validation process is ongoing to ensure the accuracy of the data received
- 1.4 The Committee discussed the progress made to date across the WHQS scheme and a Member queried why the external compliance rate (projected to be 73% by the end of the financial year) had not met the target throughout 2018/19. Officers referred to the slippage across external works in the early stages of the programme arising from delays caused by contractor procurement issues, and it was explained that an accelerated rate of completions is now being achieved. A Member sought clarification on the amount of additional funding that would be needed to deliver the WHQS programme and when this would be considered by Cabinet. Officers explained that it is not expected that the amount of borrowing originally approved by Cabinet would be exceeded and hence there will be no need to take a further report to Cabinet to seek approval of additional funding.

- 1.5 In response to Members' queries, Officers provided further information on the remedial work carried out across non-traditional properties, together with details of the assessment processes to carry out environmental improvements. Clarity was sought on the underspend position across the Council's Promise for non-traditional homes and it was explained this is because the allocation had been based on the original Savills survey in 2008 and some works had already been done in this regard but had been incorporated into other spends. It is expected that the spend will rise by the time WHQS is achieved in 2020.
- 1.6 Reference was made to the disparity between satisfaction levels for internal and external works and a Member also highlighted higher levels of dissatisfaction for external works in parts of the borough and around the Penyrheol area in regards to the timescales for environmental improvements. He also suggested that some of the works set out in the Environmental Programme appended to the report for Penyrheol had not been completed. Officers outlined the consultation process that had been carried out with residents and explained that expectations may have been skewed by two separate consultations being carried out at that time. A Member subsequently suggested that staff from the Parks and Highways team be available to attend future meetings where environmental improvements are discussed in order for them to respond to such queries. Officers informed the Committee that an update report on environmental works is due to be presented to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group where the suggested Officers would be attending and that the minutes of the CHTG would be submitted to Members of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee so they could consider their comments. A Member queried the reasons for variation in satisfaction levels across areas of the county borough, particularly the north, and it was explained that the survey operates a tick-box structure but does not allow for additional comments to explain why the individual surveyed is not satisfied. The Officer confirmed that for this reason as well as a means of improving response rates, the customer satisfaction process was currently being reviewed, which would likely result in more telephone surveys which would assist in obtaining more details to help improve the service going forward.
- 1.7 Having considered and noted the report and the comments of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group, the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee unanimously recommended to Cabinet that the contents of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard Progress Report – Final Stages be noted.
- 1.8 Members are asked to consider the report and the above recommendation.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Report to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 15th January 2019 - Agenda Item 10