



## CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WHQS) - 21ST FEBRUARY 2013

**SUBJECT: COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT FUND**

**REPORT BY: DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To approve the criteria and mechanics for the operation of the Community Improvement Fund.

### 2. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 Relevant policy documents are the National Housing Strategy "Sustainable Homes" WAG; the Council's Community Strategy; Corporate Improvement Plan; Safer Caerphilly Community Safety Plan; Regeneration Strategy; and Children and Young People's Plan.
- 2.3 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. THE REPORT

The Council made a commitment to match all the specifically costed proposals that were set out in the Offer Document / Addendum prior to the ballot. Within the overall budget for the environmental programme it is proposed to establish a Community Improvement Fund (CIF). An annual budget of £50,000 will be set aside over a period of 5 years to contribute towards individual projects. The CIF will operate as a grant scheme.

➤ *Purpose*

The CIF is intended to foster community development by enabling community and tenant groups to bid for funding to support local initiatives and projects.

➤ *Who can apply*

Locally based groups who can evidence that grants awarded will be used for the direct benefit of residents on the Council's housing estates.

➤ *Eligible projects*

Grant funding can be used to improve the general appearance of estates, to provide new or improved parking, better lighting, landscaping, or play equipment. It could be used by the local community to better increase their understanding of the needs of their area and to encourage neighbours to become involved. The intention is not to be too prescriptive but all projects must demonstrate community benefit and community support.

➤ *Level of funding*

The CIF will provide a capital grant of up to £5,000 per project proposal. The grant must be spent within one year of the approval. Appropriate administrative arrangements will need to be in place to ensure probity and that money is properly used to fund the project. Applications will receive more favourable consideration where it is demonstrated that match funding is available from other sources.

➤ *Application Process*

Application forms will be available from, and completed applications should be returned to, the Strategic Coordination Manager, WHQS Delivery Team. Completed applications will be assessed for suitability for funding under the CIF and a report will be submitted to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group for decision on whether the application should be supported. The management of the CIF will be undertaken by the Strategic Coordination Manager. Some proposals may be better suited for consideration under the main environmental programme as the CIF is targeted at local small-scale projects. The CIF will operate from April 2013 on a first come first served basis. Applications can be made at any time and when all the necessary information has been provided will be submitted to the next available meeting of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group for decision. Any applications received after the annual allocation has been committed will be held over to the following financial year.

➤ *Publicity*

The availability of the CIF scheme will be communicated through tenants' newsletters, via GAVO to their network of voluntary organisations, housing officers, and Communities First staff.

#### **4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 An EqlA screening 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 have been identified, therefore a full EqlA has not been carried out.

#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The WHQS business plan incorporates financial provision for the environmental programme and an allocation of £50,000 per annum for 5 years will be set aside for the Community Improvement Fund. If the fund is not fully utilised any balance will be retained to support the main environmental programme.

#### **6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The fund will be managed within the WHQS Delivery Team by the Strategic Coordination Manager and Support Assistant.

#### **7. CONSULTATIONS**

- 7.1 Comments have been received that the "first come, first served" approach may result in an unfair distribution with some areas not benefitting because they are slower to come forward with proposals. The more deprived areas may lose out as a consequence. It is therefore suggested there should be quarterly application rounds with closing dates, also the fund should have a geographical spread.
- 7.2 The "first come, first served" approach is advocated to encourage spend against the fund. As there is a five year commitment to the Community Improvement Fund groups that are slower off the mark will not miss the opportunity to apply for a grant. Decisions will be linked to the

cycle of meetings of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group. There does not seem much to be gained by imposing quarterly application rounds.

- 7.3 It would be ideal to see a geographical spread of the fund but this is dependent on community groups coming forward with ideas and proposals. The Community Improvement Fund is a small top slice from the main environmental programme and will only support a limited number of projects each year. The main environmental programme will be developed to ensure there is benefit to all estates.
- 7.4 However it is for the Task Group to decide whether to adopt application rounds, the number of rounds per annum and whether there should be area based restrictions imposed on the allocation of the fund.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 8.1 The Task Group endorse the proposal to initiate the Community Improvement Fund and recommend that the Cabinet Sub Committee approve the grant scheme.

## **9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 To deliver a commitment made to tenants in the Offer Document / Addendum.

## **10. STATUTORY POWER**

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

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Consultees: Councillor Gerald Jones, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing  
Councillor Keith Reynolds, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Corporate Services  
Nigel Barnett, Deputy Chief Executive  
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