



## CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP - 16TH MAY 2013

**SUBJECT: LOCAL TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY**

**REPORT BY: ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is to update members of the Task Group on the progress made in revising the Local Tenant Participation Strategy (LTPS).

### 2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Since 2008, social landlords have been required by Welsh Government (WG) to produce a three year Local Tenant Participation Strategy that outlines:
- how tenants' homes and local environment should be managed
  - what services and service improvements are needed
  - identifying priorities and how landlords and tenants will work together to achieve these.
- 2.2 Caerphilly County Borough Council's Strategy was due to be updated in October 2011 but due to the ballot process an exemption was granted.
- 2.3 An independent consultant, Gayna Jones of Central Consultancy, was engaged to assist in providing an independent review of current participation arrangements and in proposing the key elements for a new Strategy. Gayna has experience in this area and her background includes roles as a Housing Association Chief Executive and a member of the Regulatory Board for Wales. The recommendations made in her report, if approved, will form the basis of the LTPS submission to Welsh Government (WG) and will be accompanied by an Action Plan. The full report is attached as Appendix 1.

### 3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 Tenant involvement most closely links with the current Local Housing Strategy aim of
- "providing good quality, well managed homes in communities where people want to live and offer people housing choices which meets their needs and aspirations"* Local Housing Strategy 2008-13, Aim 6
- 3.2 The National Housing Strategy 2010 'Improving Lives and Communities' emphasises the need to
- "Give tenants a clear voice in decisions that affect them"* and that
- "Services should reflect the needs of those who use them, not the needs of the organisations that deliver them"*

## 4. THE REPORT

4.1 The Council's Additional Information document, issued as part of the ballot process, gave a commitment to increased tenant involvement. Since the ballot, tenants are equal partners in the Caerphilly Homes Task Group and the work streams covering the WHQS programme and the sheltered housing review have established working groups of tenants and officers. There will be future opportunities for tenant involvement in the work streams covering housing management, anti-social behaviour and transforming lives and communities. There are also other functions of the Housing service, outside of the work streams, where tenant involvement can help to drive improvement.

4.2 An updated Local Tenant Participation Strategy will provide the comprehensive framework for involving tenants in all areas of the housing service. It addresses the need to develop wider opportunities for tenant involvement and to mainstream tenant involvement to become a responsibility for all members of housing staff. While there are clearly overlaps with community development and regeneration, the focus for the participation strategy is about improving the landlord service.

4.3 The consultant's report has also taken into consideration the regulatory framework for RSL's as it appears likely that self-assessment will be a future requirement for local authorities and the updated Strategy needs to take account of the regulatory framework core principles for tenant engagement including:-

- to ensure that organisations work with their tenants and people who use their services in planning and assessing the quality of services
- to provide information that allows tenants and others to compare the performance of their organisation to that of others.

### 4.4 Strategy Outcome, Aim, Objectives

4.5 The purpose of having a participation strategy is to improve services to tenants and communities. The Strategy proposes that this can be achieved by:-

*Delivering efficient, effective landlord services through working honestly and openly with service users- putting them at the heart of delivering the service.*

To do this there are four key objectives:-

- to develop and implement a customer focus culture change programme based on outcome for tenants and enabling mainstreaming of participation.
- to develop tenant scrutiny
- to develop increased tenant and resident engagement through a new structure
- to improve information flow to the wider tenant body

4.6 The objectives reflect that there needs to be greater ownership from all staff of the responsibility to engage with tenants about involvement; every frontline contact with a tenant is an opportunity to encourage tenant involvement. Also policies and procedures do not currently focus on the outcome for tenants; rather they focus on internal processes that are followed so there needs to be a change of culture in order to change the focus. The objectives recognise the key role that the Task Group will play in future but also that there is room below this strategic level for increased tenant scrutiny of services.

4.7 The report recommendations focus on the development of a new structure for tenant involvement that while retaining the current working groups also allows for more flexible methods for involving tenants such as through specific interest groups for example a disability group, customer panels, mystery shoppers. Information flow has been identified by all stakeholders as needing improvement, particularly to the wider body of tenants and that there needs to be tenant involvement in the production and provision of such information.

## **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Participation of minority groups in developing council services is an essential part of successfully implementing any participation strategy.
- 5.2 The Council's Strategic Equality Objective 5 covers engagement and participation of minority groups and the Equalities Consultation and Monitoring guidance will be used as an additional practice document when engaging with tenants.
- 5.3 Linking with Section 7 below, Equalities and Welsh Language Training is available to council staff and partners in order to raise awareness of the issues involved when engaging with various groups in the community who fall under one or more of the protected characteristics.
- 5.4 A full Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken on the final Local Tenant Participation Strategy draft in order to ensure that the adopted strategy contains the relevant links to the Equalities and Welsh Language duties.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 An additional resource of £150,000 was identified in the Offer document to support increased and improved participation arrangements. While the development of the different structure and more flexible involvement options are likely to be accommodated within this budget, the staff training and development required for the mainstreaming of participation will have resource implications and will need to be the subject of a further report to the Task Group.

## **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There will be implications for staff training and possibly future updating of job descriptions to include a responsibility for tenant engagement.

## **8. CONSULTATIONS**

- 8.1 The consultant organised a focus group with tenants already involved with the housing service. The consultant also observed meetings of the Repairs and Improvement Group, the Older Persons' Housing Group, the Housing Task Group, the Tenant Empowerment Grant Group and visited six Tenants and Residents Associations. The consultant presented initial findings to the Tenant Information Exchange in November and Participation Officers facilitated a further feedback session with involved tenants in January.
- 8.2 The consultant also met with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Senior Officers including the Acting Chief Executive and the Chief Housing Officer and representatives of staff in the Tenant and Community Involvement Team and Area and Neighbourhood Offices.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 Recommend that the Cabinet Sub Committee approve the report as the basis for the submission of the Local Tenant Participation Strategy to Welsh Government
- 9.2 Recommend that the Cabinet Sub Committee adopt the proposals made under each key objective in section 8 of the report (Appendix 1).
- 9.3 Recommend that the Cabinet Sub Committee approve the proposed structure in section 9 of the report (Appendix 1).

## **10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 To implement the promises made in the Additional Information Document to increase participation opportunities.
- 10.2 To comply with WG requirements to submit an updated Local Tenant Participation Strategy.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

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

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### Appendices:

Appendix 1 Report From Central Consultancy And Training: Developing A New Local Tenant Participation Strategy