



## CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 17TH OCTOBER 2013

**SUBJECT: GILFACH FARGOED: OFFICE CONVERSIONS TO FLATS**

**REPORT BY: INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Members of the Task Group of a proposal to convert the Neighbourhood Housing Office and the Tenants & Residents Office in Gilfach Fargoed to 4 x 1 bedroom flats.

### 2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Neighbourhood Housing Office closed temporarily in March 2010. Since then there have been no plans to re-open it.
- 2.2 The Tenants & Residents Association Office, which is semi detached to the Neighbourhood Housing Office, had been used part time by the Association's Committee who were also able to use the local Community Centre to conduct their business.
- 2.3 The Tenants & Residents Association were recently asked to relinquish their interest in the office which they agreed to do.
- 2.4 The vacant office premises appears to be ideal for conversion back into residential use. The proposal is to change them into much needed smaller units of housing accommodation that will assist those in the community to downsize to more affordable and manageable housing.

### 3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 **National Housing Strategy:** The Welsh Assembly Government's National Housing Strategy 'Better Homes for People in Wales' (2001) has key themes of quality and choice. The WAG vision for housing "*wants everyone in Wales to have the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing*".
- 3.2 **Community Strategy:** Living Environment Objective A: "*Encourage the development and maintenance of high quality, well designed and efficient, sustainable homes and residential environments that can meet all needs*" which promotes the vision of good quality housing.
- 3.3 **Local Housing Strategy 2008-2013:** Property Theme: "*Providing the opportunity for everyone to live in affordable, sustainable, good quality housing, regardless of tenure.*" And links specifically to Strategic Aim 6: Housing Management, "*To provide good quality, well-managed homes in communities where people want to live, and offer people housing choices which meet their needs and aspirations.*"

#### **4. THE REPORT**

- 4.1 The Neighbourhood Housing Office was closed temporarily in March 2010 when several members of staff vacated their positions. The office remained shut partly for vacancy management reasons; partly because of the consultation with tenants over stock transfer; and partly because the council had an established Area Housing Office in William Street, Bargoed which could serve the Park Estate, Gilfach Fargoed.
- 4.2 Since the closure, consideration was given to whether or not the office should re-open or be put to another use for the benefit of the community.
- 4.3 More recently, with the review of Tenant Participation and the approval of a new Local Tenant Participation Strategy, attention was turned to the future use of the Tenants & Residents Association office. No other Association in the County Borough has the use of a dedicated property at nil cost and it was subsequently agreed with the Association that they would relinquish their interest in it.
- 4.4 With the Council dealing with increased demands on its resources as a result of the Welfare Reform Act and in particular the bedroom size criteria, the option to convert the 2 offices into flats was quickly identified.
- 4.5 The pair of semi detached properties are currently security screened and alarmed. They are an unattractive sight in a prominent area of the Park Estate and the sooner they can be brought back into beneficial use, the better.
- 4.6 Planning permission for the conversions into 4 x 1 bedroom flats, each with its own private access, could be submitted shortly.
- 4.7 Subject to the necessary approvals, the conversions should be completed by July 2014.

#### **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment is not needed because the issues covered are for information purposes only, therefore the Council's full EIA process does not need to be applied.

#### **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The cost of the conversions can be met from within existing budgets.
- 6.2 Detailed estimates of the cost for the work will be prepared and the initial guide price is approximately £150,000, which also includes the costs for the 4 units to fully meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, environmental works, planning and Building Regulations Fees.

#### **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no Personnel implications as the remaining staff at the Neighbourhood Housing Office were transferred within the Housing Service.

#### **8. CONSULTATIONS**

- 8.1 All views and opinions following consultation have been incorporated within the report.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 The Task Group is requested to support the conversion of the two properties into four one bedroom flats and recommend accordingly to the Cabinet Sub Committee.

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

- 10.1 To bring the properties back into beneficial use and support the increased demand for smaller units of accommodation due to the Welfare Reform Act.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

- 11.1 Housing Act 1984 and 1996.

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