



## CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 5TH DECEMBER 2013

**SUBJECT: COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE**

**REPORT BY: INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide members of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group with an update on communications activities undertaken over the previous quarter.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 Effective communications with stakeholders is essential in developing awareness of the 'Caerphilly Homes' brand and building a positive reputation for the WHQS programme and housing service. The delivery of timely messages which are appropriate for the target audience is an essential element in getting communications right, thereby raising the profile of Caerphilly Homes.
- 2.2 A great deal of work has been taking place over the past three months to raise the profile of Caerphilly Homes and to develop a number of key communications materials.
- 2.3 Priorities identified within the last three months were the publication of a tenant newsletter, production of key materials to support the role of the Tenant Liaison Officers, marketing of the Community Improvement Fund and the implementation of effective methods of communicating with staff.

### **3. LINKS TO STRATEGY**

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 The Council is committed to ensuring that the WHQS investment transforms not only homes but also lives and communities.
- 3.3 Relevant policy documents include the National Housing Strategy "Sustainable Homes" WAG; the Council's Community Strategy; Corporate Improvement Plan; Safer Caerphilly Community Safety Plan; Regeneration Strategy; Children and Young People's Plan; Tackling Poverty Action Plan 2012-2016 and Building Resilient Communities.
- 3.4 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."

## 4. THE REPORT

- 4.1.1 Timely press releases, relaying 'good news stories', are an effective method of communicating with key stakeholders and the wider public. Positive media coverage helps to raise awareness of the 'Caerphilly Homes' brand and create a positive public perception of the housing service.
- 4.1.2 A number of press releases have been issued to local media over the past three months, with reasonably good coverage received on the WHQS programme and other activities across the housing service. A steady flow of information to the media will be maintained into the future, with regular items included in the Corporate Communications media planner.
- 4.2.1 Newsletters are a good way of ensuring consistent messages are given to all tenants. Two tenant newsletters have been produced in the past year and this six monthly frequency has been maintained, with November's edition recently distributed to all tenants and leaseholders of Caerphilly Homes. This recent edition contained information from across the housing service, including updates on the WHQS programme.
- 4.2.2 It has been recognised that greater tenant involvement in the production of the newsletter is vital in ensuring the publication's content and layout is engaging and tenant focussed. Work is now underway to recruit tenant 'Armchair Reviewers' whose role will be to provide feedback on the newsletter and other communications materials. A telephone survey with a random sample of tenants is also a potential method of measuring the effectiveness of the newsletter, along with actively encouraging tenant feedback via social media, etc.
- 4.3.1 Social media is a particularly effective method of engaging with those tenants who have traditionally been classed as 'hard to reach', e.g. young tenants. Caerphilly Homes established its own Facebook page in May this year, but its use had been limited. Over the past three months the page has been updated on a daily basis, which has led to an increase in the number of tenants actively engaging with Caerphilly Homes.
- 4.3.2 A campaign is currently being planned to increase the number of tenants engaging via the Facebook page. Further promotion of the page is planned through use of tenant newsletter, branded merchandise, inclusion in press releases and through corporate social media pages.
- 4.4.1 The website offers tenants and other stakeholders an invaluable resource for locating important information about Caerphilly Homes and the services it provides. Improvements are needed to the structure and content of the housing pages of the website, in order to ensure they are tenant focussed, easy to navigate and contain relevant, up to date information. The development of online reporting would also lead to improved customer service and a more efficient service.
- 4.4.2 A working group of staff representatives from across Caerphilly Homes has been established to take forward a review of the website. The group has agreed a way forward for the review, including methods of engaging tenants in the process. 'Armchair Reviewers' will help test the site and complete surveys to provide feedback on current housing pages of website; this will continue to be carried out at regular intervals throughout the review process.
- 4.5.1 Internal communications was identified as a key priority for the Communications and Tenant Engagement Officer, as staff had raised concerns around the frequency and relevance of information provided to them previously. In response, a brief monthly bulletin has been implemented which contains key updates from across each area of service delivery at Caerphilly Homes.
- 4.5.2 Positive feedback has been received on the bulletin and staff are actively engaging by suggesting content for future bulletins. The number of staff engaging in the Caerphilly Homes Facebook page has also increased, so some consideration could be given in the future to the benefits of internal social media specifically for Caerphilly Homes staff.

- 4.6.1 The Community Improvement Fund was launched in April this year with very low level promotion. Marketing materials have now been produced for the fund, which were distributed at the recent One Beat volunteering event and have also been circulated to Tenants and Residents Associations in the county borough, via the Tenant and Community Involvement Team. The fund has also been promoted via Facebook, the tenant newsletter and November's edition of Newsline.
- 4.7.1 The Tenant Liaison Officer (TLO) is a key role in the delivery of the WHQS programme. Tenant Liaison Officers identified a number of key materials that were necessary in order to enable them to carry out their roles effectively.
- 4.7.2 Tenants are given a great deal of information by their TLO at survey stage and there were concerns that much of this information is forgotten after the visit. An Improvement Guide has now been produced for TLOs to leave with tenants at the survey. The guide contains vital information for tenants on what they can expect whilst works are being carried out and what they can do to prepare. Contact sheets have also been produced which contain contact telephone numbers for the tenant's designated TLO, along with photographs of them and the Foreman who will be working in their area. These contact sheets help to ensure that tenants know who to contact if they have any queries or concerns.
- 4.7.3 An Aftercare Pack has also been produced, for TLOs to leave with tenants when WHQS works have been completed. This pack contains useful guidance for tenants on taking care of their new kitchen and bathroom, along with other useful advice, such as tips to reduce energy bills and staying safe at home.
- 4.8 A communications strategy had been produced by the former interim Communications Officer, but work on the associated action plan had been left incomplete. There is now a need to review this strategy, to ensure it is still fit for purpose, and to develop a delivery plan.
- 4.9 Development of a robust action plan, based on SMART objectives, will be a key priority over the coming months. Progress updates on the delivery plan will be provided to the Task Group at regular intervals.

## 5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This report is for information purposes only, so the Councils EqIA process does not need to be applied.

## 6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Key items of expenditure over the previous three month period:

### Tenant Newsletter

Design and print	£1,827.00
Packaging and mailing	<u>£6,102.57</u>
Total	£7,929.57

### Community Improvement Fund materials

Design and print of flyer x 1000	£ 136.00
Design and print of booklet x 400	<u>£ 231.00</u>
Total	£ 367.00

### Staff Bulletin

Printing costs x 2 editions	£ 240.00
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## **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 This report has no direct personnel implications.

## **8. CONSULTATIONS**

8.1 The views of consultees listed are incorporated within the report.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 That the contents of this report be noted.

## **10 REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION**

10.1 To provide a progress update on communications.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

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

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Consultees: Cllr. Gerald Jones, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing.  
Cllr. Keith Reynolds, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services.  
Cllr Ken James, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Sustainable Development.  
Phil Davy, Head of Programmes.  
Shaun Couzens, Chief Housing Officer.  
Dan Perkins, Head of Legal and Democratic Services.  
Nicole Scammel, Acting Director of Corporate Services and S151 Officer.  
Jane Roberts-Waite, Strategic Co-ordination Manager .  
Stephen Pugh, Corporate Communications Manager .  
Mandy Betts, Tenant and Community Involvement Manager .