



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH QUALITY HOUSING STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
(RHYMNEY ROOM) ON THURSDAY 25TH OCTOBER 2012 AT 5:00 PM**

PRESENT:

R.T. Davies - Chair
A. Lewis - Vice Chair

TASK GROUP MEMBERS:

Ms. L. Ackerman, C. Davies, R.T. Davies, B. Hoskins, G. Jones, Mrs S. Jones, K. James,
Ms. A. Lewis, L. Lewis, Mrs A. McConnell, C.P. Mann, and K.V. Reynolds,

Officers: N. Barnett (Deputy Chief Executive), P. Davy (Head of Programmes, Housing),
S. Couzens (Head of Housing Services), R. Matthews (Communications & Engagement
Manager, Housing), J. Roberts-Waite (Strategic Coordination Manager), G. North (Public
Sector Housing Manager), S. Martin (Energy Officer) and E. Sullivan (Committee Services
Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from K. James, Mrs D. Price and N. Scammel.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was received from Mr Nigel Barnett (Agenda Item 4.4) details are
minuted with the respective items.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th September 2012 be approved as a
correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Minute No. 4 - Terms of Reference

A Member requested that consideration be given to the removal of titles from Task Group
agendas and minutes so no distinction was made between Councillor and Tenant
representatives and they be listed together as 'Task Group Members'.

The Task Group agreed that in all documentation going forward its membership would be noted as 'Task Group Members' and listed alphabetically.

Officers confirmed that advice had been sought from the Monitoring Officer in relation to the quorum for meetings and advised that the Task Group itself did not require a fixed quorum, however in terms of good practice, it was recommended that 25% of Members be present. For the Cabinet Sub Committee all three Members would need to present for the meeting to be quorat.

Members agreed that a quorum of 25% should be applied to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group and noted the quorum requirements of the Cabinet Sub Committee.

Members noted that the recruitment process for the vacancy in the Eastern Valley was underway and further information would be provided at the next meeting. Officers confirmed that the 'Talk About' newsletter circulated to all tenants had been used to highlight the vacancy and encourage expressions of interest.

5. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT SUBSIDY REFORM

The report sought to update Members on the current review by Welsh Government in respect of the payment of subsidy by Local Authorities to Welsh Government and then to Central Government.

Members were advised that Welsh Authorities who have not transferred their housing stock were subject to a negative subsidy payment to HM Treasury. It was noted that Caerphilly County Borough Council currently pays £7m to HM Treasury and following a similar review in England, which resulted in Local Authorities buying themselves out of the system; the position of Welsh Authorities was now under review. Assurances were given that any agreement reached would need to be cost neutral and would not have an adverse effect on the Business Plan.

Officers confirmed that further updates would be reported to the Task Group when more information became available.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and full discussion ensued.

The Task Group having fully considered its content noted the report.

6. TRANSFORMING LIVES AND COMMUNITIES

The report outlined the scope of the new Lives and Communities work stream, which sought to bring together external and internal bodies in order to secure successful outcomes for the communities of Caerphilly in terms of their life chances, opportunities and aspirations.

Members were advised that a Task and Finish Group would be established to focus on addressing the social and economic issues that prevail within communities and a separate sub group would also be formed to explore and evaluate opportunities for the physical improvement of green spaces.

The Officer confirmed that the quarterly reports would be brought back to the Task Group to keep them updated on the progress made.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her report and full discussion ensued.

Clarification was sought in relation to the make-up of the Task and Finish Group. Members

were advised that this would be fully discussed with tenants and they would decide who would best represent them. Along with tenants: officers, surveyors, highways and other relevant bodies would be pulled together under the remit of the Task and Finish Group. Principal WG programmes such as Communities First, Supporting People and Families First would also be engaged to facilitate change and ensure the sustainability and vitality of local communities. Members asked that consideration be given to increasing the frequency with which they received the update reports, and requested that if possible they been brought to the Task Group at the same time as the Project Board rather than wait for quarterly updates. The Officer confirmed that they would be happy to accommodate the request.

Officers confirmed that tenants who lived on estates where work is to be carried out would be fully engaged in the process and development of projects in their locality. Members were reminded that the communities in question were of mixed tenure and the importance of embracing this in the wider engagement process was recognised.

The Task Group having fully discussed its content noted the report.

7. THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMON HOUSING REGISTER AND COMMON ALLOCATION SCHEME

The report sought the endorsement of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group on the principle of jointly establishing a common housing register and common allocation scheme.

The present system of applying for housing can be confusing and complicated for the customer, with each of the four main Housing Associations maintaining its own register and allocation process. The development of a common housing register and allocation scheme would offer a greater degree of strategic control, as well as offering those in need of housing greater flexibility and fairness. Applicants would have a single form to complete simplifying and demystify the process. Members noted that all other local authorities in the region have or are in the process of implementing a common allocation scheme.

Members were advised that the implementation of the scheme would require the purchase of a specialist IT management system at a cost of approximately £50,000 with additional modules costing around £15,000 each.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and full discussion ensued.

Reassurances were sought that tenant choice would not be limited under a common allocation scheme and Officer's confirmed that it would secure a wider choice for tenants available from a single point of contact.

Members queried if the applicants right to refuse housing would be retained within the proposed scheme. Officers confirmed that this would be considered as part of the policy process and further reports would be brought back to the Task Group for discussion.

Members expressed concern with regard to the standard of accommodation provided by some private sector landlords and requested that consideration be given to ensuring that before any housing was included on the register it must be of a certain standard.

Having fully considered the report the Caerphilly Homes Task Group endorsed the principle of jointly establishing a Common Housing Register and Common Allocation Scheme and that further reports be submitted to provide Members with more detailed information as the structure and content of the proposals were developed.

8. ENERGY EFFICIENCY WORKS TO DOMESTIC PROPERTIES

Mr Nigel Barnett declared an interest in that his wife works for one of the companies carrying out works in the County Borough and left the meeting when the report was discussed.

The report provided Members with information on the various efficiency works that had been undertaken to both Council and privately owned dwellings within the Caerphilly borough and the benefits already being experienced by residents.

Members noted the initiatives that have been progressed to date, including cavity wall and loft insulation, double-glazing, solar panels, draft proofing and energy advice. The Strategic Energy Investment Programme was outlined and Officer's confirmed that the Council had benefitted from £2.5m of grant funding.

The new Green Deal/Energy Company Obligation (ECO) was introduced to Members and Officers confirmed that further details on how the scheme was intended to operate were still being finalised. The three roles that the local authority could play were identified and it was noted that initially the Council would be a 'Promoter' whilst it assessed the benefits of becoming either a 'Producer or Provider'.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and full discussion ensued.

Further information was sought in relation to the fitting of the solar panels in Rhymney. Officers confirmed that the installation had been fully funded by WAG and as such was not eligible for a feed in tariff, so there was no direct benefit to the tenant. Members asked if consideration would be given to installing solar panels in sheltered accommodation facilities. Officers confirmed that this could be considered as part of future planning discussions going forward.

The Task Group having fully considered its content noted the report and supported the continuation of accessing grant funding to provide energy efficiency works to dwellings within Caerphilly Borough.

9. WHQS DELIVERY TEAM - ORGANISATION STRUCTURE

The report detailed the proposals for the structure of the WHQS Delivery Team and its management responsibilities between programme delivery and day-to-day service responsibilities.

Members noted that current arrangements were fragmented and did not align with the implementation of the programme going forward. Having taken on board the views of tenants it became apparent that staff resources needed to be reorganised and brought together. To this end the proposed delivery team would be aligned into 3 area groups, team managers would each take responsibility for programmes of work within their area and would also be designated with special responsibilities that crossed all three housing areas. The different areas of responsibility were outlined for Members information and the importance of the Tenant Liaison Officer (TLO) role was recognised. It was proposed that additional TLO's be recruited and a specialist TLO appointed to advise on adaptations in the household. Officers confirmed that there would be additional costs associated with these appointments but they had been factored into the business plan.

Accommodation for the Delivery Team was discussed at length and Members noted the importance of integrating all resources under one roof. Officers confirmed that there would be some one-off costs associated with the move for IT and telephony installation. Officer's emphasised that the successful delivery of the programme was dependent on having the necessary staff resources properly aligned with the strategy for implementation and suitable accommodation was essential to facilitate this requirement.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and full discussion ensued.

Clarification was sought as to the preferred accommodation options and this was confirmed as Cherry Tree House in Oakdale.

Clarification was sought in relation to the recruitment process for the new members of staff and Officers explained the procedures involved and confirmed that it would take 3- 4 months to fill the vacancies.

Clarification was sought as to the facilities at Cherry Tree House and Officers confirmed that as it was a modern building it required only minor internal alterations to be ready for occupation.

Having fully considered the report the Caerphilly Homes Task Group endorsed the Officers recommendations and recommended that the Cabinet Sub Committee approve: -

1. the proposed structure for the WHQS Delivery Team and the principle of physically integrating the team in suitable accommodation be supported;
2. the transition to the new structure be implemented as soon as possible.

10. HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2013/2014

The report outlined the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme for 2013/2014. This interim programme for the WHQS was based mainly on allocating work to the in-house workforce focusing on internal works, kitchens, bathrooms, rewires and central heating.

Members were advised that the procurement of contractors would take place during 2013 with new contracts anticipated to commence in April 2014 and were pleased to note the overwhelming interest expressed in the process to date.

The internal works programme was outlined for Members information and Officers confirmed that a number of non traditional properties that required more extensive structural work would also be included in the programme and undertaken by the in house workforce. In addition 26 Cornish houses that required a specialist repair would be included subject to external tender.

Funding had been included in the programme to commence improvements to the HRA garages. A report would be presented to the next meeting of the Task Group with recommendations following a comprehensive review of the garage stock.

Members noted the Council's success in securing energy efficiency grants and were advised that further grant funding would be pursued in 2013/2014.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his report and full discussion ensued.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group fully considered and endorsed the budget estimates and the associated programme of renewals as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report and recommended that the Cabinet Sub Committee approve the Capital Programme for 2013/2014.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group Meeting held on Thursday 6th December 2012.

The meeting closed at 18:17 pm.

CHAIRMAN