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For all enquiries relating to this agenda please contact Charlotte Evans
(Tel: 01443 864210 Email: evansca1@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Date: 26th October 2016

Dear Sir/Madam,

A meeting of the **Caerphilly Homes Task Group** will be held in the **Sirhowy Room, Penallta House, Tredomen, Ystrad Mynach** on **Thursday, 3rd November, 2016** at **5.00 pm** to consider the matters contained in the following agenda.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Chris Burns'.

Chris Burns
INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

AGENDA

	Pages
1 To receive apologies for absence.	
2 Declarations of Interest.	

Councillors and Officers are reminded of their personal responsibility to declare any personal and/or prejudicial interest(s) in respect of any item of business on this agenda in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution and the Code of Conduct for both Councillors and Officers.

To approve and sign the following minutes: -

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 3 Caerphilly Homes Task Group held on 7th September 2016. | 1 - 6 |
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To receive and note the following information items: -

- | | | |
|---|---|---------|
| 4 | Housing Improvement Partnership. | 7 - 22 |
| 5 | Complaints and Representations - Caerphilly Homes. | 23 - 30 |
| 6 | Housing Revenue Account Budget Monitoring - Period 4 2016/17. | 31 - 40 |

**If a member of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group wishes for the above information report(s) to be brought forward for discussion at the meeting, please contact Charlotte Evans on 01443 864210, by 10a.m. on Wednesday 2nd November 2016.*

- 7 To receive any requests for an item to be included on the next available agenda.

Circulation:

Task Group Members: L. Ackerman, Mrs Y. Bryant, Mr C. Davies, Miss E. Forehead (Chair), Ms J. Gale, K. James, Mrs B. A. Jones, Ms S. Jones, Miss A. Lewis (Vice Chair), C.P. Mann, Mrs D. Moore, Mr J. Moore and D.V. Poole,

And Appropriate Officers

Agenda Item 3



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
(SIRHOWY ROOM) ON WEDNESDAY, 7TH SEPTEMBER 2016 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

E. Forehead – Chair
A. Lewis – Vice Chair

Task Group Members:

Mrs Y. Bryant, C. Davies, Ms J. Gale, K. James, Mrs B. Jones, Mrs S. Jones and D.V. Poole.

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), L. Allen (Principal Accountant - Environmental Finance Group), F. Wilkins (Public Sector Housing Manager) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

1. TO APPOINT THE CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR FOR THE ENSUING YEAR.

It was moved and seconded that Ms E Forehead be appointed as Chair of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group for the ensuing year and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that Ms E. Forehead be appointed Chair of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group for the ensuing year.

It was moved and seconded that Ms A. Lewis be appointed as Vice Chair of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group for the ensuing year and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that Ms A Lewis be appointed as Vice Chair of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group for the ensuing year.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr C. Davies thanked the Task Group for their support during his term as Chair and expressed special thanks to Mr P. Davy for his advice and support and wished him a long and happy retirement.

Councillor D. Poole also wished to extend his appreciation to Mr Davies, on behalf of the Task Group for his work on the Task Group and additional groups he participates in as a tenant and thanked him for his involvement and feedback to the programme.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from L. Ackerman, C. Mann, D. Moore and J. Moore.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mrs Y. Bryant, C. Davies, Mrs B. Jones, Mrs S. Jones and Miss A. Lewis, as Council Tenants declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in all agenda items.

4. MINUTES – 30TH JUNE 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 30th June 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE TENANCY REVIEW PANEL

Mr C. Davies, Caerphilly Homes Task Group Member called the information item forward for discussion at the meeting.

The report informed the Caerphilly Homes Task Group (Task Group) of the outcomes of cases presented to the Tenancy Review Panel, which was set up in June 2014.

The report provided details of the cases presented to the panel from June 2015 to May 2016, during which, 68 cases were considered by the Panel. Of the 68, 63 were recommended to the Chief Housing Officer and an eviction order applied for; the remaining 5 were adjourned pending further enquiries. The Task Group noted that eviction dates were obtained on the 63 cases however only 32 evictions actually progressed and the properties taken back. When an eviction date is received tenants have the right to apply to the County Court to have the eviction warrant set aside and officers continue to try to work with the tenants to avoid progressing to eviction. The 31 cases that did not progress to eviction were due to a number of reasons such as, in cases of no access the tenant can allow access which would result in the eviction being set aside or in cases of rent arrears tenants may pay the debt in full or a lump sum to reduce the balance which would result in the eviction being set aside.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

Clarification was sought on the role of the Tenancy Review Panel and the Council's duty of care to those presenting as Homeless. The Officers confirmed that the Council is not required to house those deemed to be intentionally homeless, however, they will be provided with support through the Homelessness Prevention team, if they are not already in receipt of these services.

A Member, having considered the report, queried the increase in rent arrears. Officers explained that the reasons are dependent on individual cases, however it was noted that a great deal of intervention services would have been provided to the tenant/tenants. Welfare Reform has had an impact on the affordability of tenants, as has Universal Credits; however a number of cases have been ongoing for a considerable time and therefore all support services have been exhausted and have been referred to the Panel.

The Panel discussed the reasons for eviction and sought further information on the issues pertaining to access. It was noted that a Tenant is required to provide access to the property for a number of reasons such as Asbestos assessments, gas service, maintenance/repairs, etc., which are requirements under Health and Safety Legislation. Where access to the premises is denied, this is often an indication of other underlying problems, which could include rent arrears, the property in a poor state of repair etc. In such cases, third sector agencies are often required to assist and provide support services to help prevent eviction.

The Task Group discussed eviction arrears and it was confirmed that 24 of the 68 recommended for eviction were for rent arrears, of which £3,500 was the highest amount owed. Officers highlighted that, whilst it is not clear how much has been recovered, all steps available are undertaken to track down and try to reclaim the money. If the tenant later applies for a tenancy, the arrears are also included on the new tenancy. It was confirmed that the debts are not written off. However, the Task Group was assured that Court proceedings and evictions are always a last resort and that there is ample support available to tenants who are struggling with arrears. The majority of evictions were served to tenants who had vacated the property.

It was noted that the Tenancy Review Panel conducts investigations into the circumstances of the arrears and evictions prior to the recommendation being approved by the Chief Housing Officer. As a result of these investigations, it was found that a number of properties were allocated to more vulnerable tenants, who often were reluctant to engage with support services and as a result have vacated the properties. As a result, the Council have worked with Supporting People in order to improve contacts with support providers and improve connections with an aim to reducing vacant properties and rent arrears.

A Task Group Member sought further information on the Council's Policy where a family has been deemed to be intentionally homeless but there are children within the family. Officers explained that there would be a number of support and prevention services offered to the family in order to prevent homelessness and cases in which there are children, checks are undertaken with Social Services. However, once a family has been deemed to be Intentionally Homeless, the Council has no obligation to re-house them. There is an element of protection for the children and Social Services will be required to provide support also.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and noted its content.

6. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT OUTTURN 2015/16

Ms A. Lewis, Caerphilly Homes Task Group Member called the information item forward for discussion at the meeting.

The report provided the Task Group Members with information on the outturn expenditure for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2015/16 financial year.

The Task Group were reminded of the distinction between the HRA, which is funded by rental income received from council tenants, and General Fund Housing and Private Housing, which fall under the General Fund and is funded via the Council taxpayer. Although there is a clear separation of these funds, the majority of council tenants rent is funded from housing benefits which is derived from the tax payers purse and therefore value for money must always be sought.

The Task Group noted that there was a total of £6.8m underspend during the period 2015/16 in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), which represents 15% of the total HRA budget. The Officer outlined that the underspends included Salaries and Mileage, CFR Charges, Service Specific Related and Office Related and Building Maintenance. The Task Group were asked to note that there was a nil variance on the Revenue Contribution to Capital.

It was noted that the total expenditure on the WHQS capital programme was £28.6m against a budget of £36.3m. The HRA RCCO was therefore fully utilised to fund this spend in addition to the £7.3m Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) from Welsh Government and £7.9m from HRA balances earmarked for WHQS. The remaining balance was the funding of the delivery team fees from the HRA of £1.6m. Working balances at the end of 2014/15 stood at £21m. This has been reduced by the £7.9m funding required for the WHQS programme but has increased by the £6.8m underspend from the HRA this year. The total working balances as at the 1st

April 2016 (unaudited) is therefore £19.8m. The majority of this funding is earmarked to fund the WHQS programme. To date no borrowing has been undertaken to fund the WHQS programme.

A Task Group Member sought clarification on the variance between the actual spend and the estimate. Officers explained that there is always some difficulty estimating the spend, the underspends are as a result of slippage in the programme, income in other areas and underspend on salaries, due to the high turnover. As a result, the underspends are incorporated into the Business Plan to take forward into the next financial year and should therefore reduce the required borrowing amount.

The Task Group were offered additional sessions to consider the HRA account and budget setting processes, on a one to one basis should they be required. The Task Group thanked the Officer for the detailed report and agreed to make arrangements with the Officer, should they wish further information.

7. SHELTERED HOUSING SCHEMES

Mr C. Davies, Caerphilly Homes Task Group Member called the information item forward for discussion at the meeting.

The report provided the Task Group with an update in relation to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) investment programme to the sheltered housing schemes.

It was noted that a report was presented to the Task Group on 19th May 2016, which advised members that the WHQS work to sheltered housing schemes will be managed internally.

The internal workforce will undertake the WHQS improvement works, both internally and externally to the majority of the sheltered housing schemes, supported as necessary by subcontractors. The feasibility/design studies for the six sheltered schemes identified for possible remodelling proposals is being taken forward by the Council's Building Consultancy Team.

The report provided further update on progress and outlined the scheduled programme for the delivery of schemes being undertaken by the in-house workforce. Further reports will be submitted in the future in relation to the schemes identified for remodelling purposes.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued. A Task Group Member noted that there was a reference to the Savills Survey, which is outdated and queries the timescales and procurement process for the Sheltered Schemes. Officer explained that the Savills Survey was conducted on 15% of the stock and provided an indication on the works required, but not a complete survey, which would be undertaken following consultation with the tenants. In terms of the procurement process, it has now been agreed that the works will be conducted by the in-house services, with the exception of some specialist service requirements, and thus reducing the procurement process.

A Tenant Representative expressed their deep disappointment that, to date, there has been no communication with the tenants within the Sheltered Schemes under discussion. It was also queried why some bungalows and communal areas are not included in the Programme. The Officer explained that, as previously discussed, it was difficult to consult with Tenants when it was unclear on what the programme of works was to be, however, the Task Group was assured that consultation exercises are a priority following this meeting of the CHTG. In addition, the Task Group noted that all communal areas that are within a sheltered scheme and under one roof would be covered, as would residential bungalows. However the communal areas that are a separate block to the residential buildings have had some refurbishments carried out, but there is no requirement under WHQS to consider these. Following discussions, further clarification was sought on when a programme would be in

place that could be communicated to the Sheltered Schemes and tenants. Officers outlined that, provided the CHTG agree the programme, communication was to be the number one priority and it was anticipated that the main focus would be the schemes to be looked at next year. However, it was advised that communication would be undertaken when surveys had been completed on the schemes. Task Group Members felt that tenants should be provided with communications prior to this about the proposed programme and surveys to be completed, with more details consultations undertaken post survey completion.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation to communicate with tenants within Sheltered Schemes, about the proposed programme of works to be conducted, with detailed consultations undertaken post survey; be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons outlined at the meeting, communications be conducted with tenants about the proposed programme of works within Sheltered Schemes and further, detailed consultations to be undertaken post surveys.

8. TO RECEIVE ANY REQUESTS FOR AN ITEM TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA

The following requests were received:-

1. S. Jones requested an update on the Consultation with Tenants within Sheltered Housing Schemes.

The meeting closed at 6.09pm

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd November 2016.

CHAIR

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CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 3RD NOVEMBER 2016

SUBJECT: HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR - COMMUNITIES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide information to Caerphilly Homes Task Group (CHTG) on the work of the Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP) and the subsequent service improvements introduced as a result.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The HIP is a partnership between tenants and Caerphilly Homes working together to improve the effectiveness of housing services. The HIP's methodology is to use real tenant experiences to understand what matters to our tenants when they use our services.
- 2.2 Over the last year, the HIP has undertaken two service reviews covering the Landlord Consent Service and the Tenant Support Service. Two Staff Service handbooks have been produced by the HIP, which sets out the key outcomes that our tenants expect from each service area.
- 2.3 The CHTG requested an update report on the HIP on 31 March 2016. This report provides CHTG with information on the changes that have been introduced to the Landlord Consent Service and the Tenant Support Service as a result of the work of the HIP.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, list 7 goals that provide a shared vision for public bodies to work towards. The goal that most closely links with Tenant Participation is "*A Wales of cohesive communities - attractive, viable, safe and well connected communities*".
- 3.2 Tenant Involvement also links with the current Local Housing Strategy Aim 6:
"providing good quality, well managed homes in communities where people want to live and offer people housing choices which meet their needs and aspirations"
- 3.3 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 who deliver them"
- 3.4 The Tenant Participation Strategy Purpose is "To have tenant driven and continually improving services" and Objective 1 states "*we will understand the needs of our current and future tenants*".

4. THE REPORT

• What is the HIP and what does it do?

4.1 The Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP) was established in late 2014 and currently has 11 tenant members. The aim of the HIP is to work with Caerphilly Homes to improve housing services and take an independent view of service delivery from the tenant/leaseholder perspective.

4.2 The work of the HIP is focussed on the real experiences of actual tenants/leaseholders who request and receive services from Caerphilly Homes. In partnership with Caerphilly Homes, the HIP identifies a service area for review. In order to facilitate the work of the HIP staff gather evidence of actual service requests. This can include letters, emails, telephone calls or face to face requests. All information is anonymised and transcribed before being presented to the HIP. The HIP also receives evidence of how Caerphilly Homes responded to service requests and how the service was delivered. This approach provides the HIP with access to the experiences of the wider tenant population, which enables the HIP to base its work and outcomes on a wide range of evidence and not their own experience of accessing our services.

4.3 The HIP members review the evidence available to them and seek to understand what really matters to tenants/leaseholders at each point of service delivery. The aim is to provide an outcome that Caerphilly Homes can use to improve the way services are delivered. The work of the HIP aims to provide valuable information that can help Officers make our services more efficient and effective by understanding what matters to tenants. This enables Officers to focus their work on:

- what needs to be done to deliver what tenants want and value from a service and;
- how we can design the way we work to deliver that service and cut down on unnecessary and inefficient costs, for example; repeat telephone calls.

• What does the HIP produce as a result of its work?

4.4 The outputs generated by the HIP are Staff Service Handbooks identifying key areas of the service that are of importance to tenants. A Handbook is produced for each service area reviewed by the HIP and these Handbooks (the HIP reports) are used as a service improvement tool for Service Managers. Each Handbook identifies examples of excellent customer service and its structure identifies the:

- Purpose of the Service
- Outcomes tenants expect from the Service
- Experience tenants expect to receive and;
- Measures that are important to tenants

• What has the HIP done so far?

4.5 Since commencing its work in April 2015, the HIP has undertaken two service reviews. The first service review was a pilot to 'test' the HIP methodology and covered the Landlord Consent Service. Landlord Consent is the process whereby Caerphilly Homes responds to requests by tenants, leaseholders or former tenants (who have purchased their home through the Right-to-Buy), who wish to make improvements to their homes. On completion of the pilot, a review was carried out to understand how successful it had been and this information was presented to Senior Managers Briefing (SMB) in September 2015.

4.6 Following the presentation to SMB, the Rents Manager requested the help of the HIP to work with the Tenancy Support Team to help them understand what tenants want and value from this service. The Tenancy Support Service works with our tenants to help them sustain their tenancies by ensuring they maximize the income they are entitled to and provide advice and

signposting to other support agencies. They also provide assistance in accessing other services, such as completion of Discretionary Assistance Fund applications (DAF), for white goods. It is understood that the HIP can assist to improve the effectiveness of already successful services through its approach of using real evidence from actual tenants. The HIP provides a 'fresh pair of eyes' and the insight it provides can empower our service delivery teams in their quest for continuous improvement. The review of the Tenancy Support Service was completed in April 2016. The HIP is now on its third service review covering Income Recovery and this is due to be completed by the end of November 2016.

- 4.7 Two Staff Service Handbooks have been produced by the HIP setting out the key outcomes that our tenants expect from both service areas reviewed. Both Handbooks have been positively received by Managers and the staff responsible for the delivery of these two services on a day to day basis (See Appendix 1 for copies of the Handbooks).
- 4.8 The Service Managers responsible for providing Landlords Consent and Tenancy Support service attended a HIP feedback session in September 2016 to update HIP members on what changes have been introduced to our processes as a result of the Handbooks. A workshop session was also held in September 2016 at the Tenant Information Exchange to highlight the work of the HIP and the changes to services that have been introduced as a result. In order to advise all tenants on the changes to the services and highlight the work of the HIP, an article will be included in the next tenant newsletter.

- **How has Caerphilly Homes used the Handbooks to improve services?**

- 4.9 Managers and staff responsible for the day to day delivery of both services have considered the Handbooks. Listed below are the changes that have been made to procedures as a result of the HIP's work and the benefit they will bring to tenants and staff:

Landlord Consent Service:

- 4.10 Previously tenants, leaseholders and former tenants were only able to make a request for Landlord consent in writing. As a result of the evidence presented to the HIP requests can now be made through the communication channel of their choice - letter, email, telephone or face to face. A pro-forma has been designed (for staff use) in order to record and facilitate a verbal request. When the request is made by telephone or visit to a Housing office, the Officer responsible for processing Landlord Consent will record the details on the pro forma and the appropriate survey questions (that were previously sent out in the post) are asked over the telephone or direct to the tenant (at the first point of contact). When a request is made face to face on site, the details will be taken by the visiting Officer. On return to the office the details will be passed to the responsible Officer who will ensure the tenant is contacted (by telephone if possible) in order for the survey questions to be asked. Email requests are now also responded to via the same method with the relevant information and survey questions attached (previously a letter would have been sent in response to an email request). These changes will reduce the timescales involved in the process which will allow a decision to be reached and notification given much earlier.
- 4.11 If a verbal request is made for landlord consent and the Officer identifies a pre inspection is required before consent can be granted, an appointment will now be made there and then for a Surveyor to visit. If no inspection is required, a confirmation letter or email will be sent providing the details of the request and the conditions with which the tenant, leaseholder or former tenant has to comply.
- 4.12 Overall, the introduction of verbal requests will make it easier for tenants, leaseholders and former tenants to access the Landlord consent service, especially for those who may not be able (for whatever reason) to make a request in writing. Also as the process is now easier, it is likely that those who may have been 'put off' submitting a request in writing will no longer carry out unauthorised changes to their home. Verbal requests will also facilitate the recording of accurate information and provide the opportunity for staff to ask additional questions at the first point of contact (rather than send a letter out if the submitted forms were incomplete or more information was required).

- 4.13 Timescales have now been introduced to advise tenants of the length of time it will take for a decision to be reached. The HIP evidence showed that Officers were being contacted to find out when to expect a visit from a Surveyor or to know when their request would be answered. Confirmation of timescales and offering appointment times (when a Surveyor is needed) will provide tenants, leaseholders and former tenants with the information they want to know at the first point of contact. It is expected that this will now reduce the number of calls taken by Housing staff asking 'when someone would call' or 'when will I hear about my request?'
- 4.14 For those who submit requests in writing, all standard letters have been updated to provide information on the new timescales and advise 'what happens next'.
- 4.15 Previously there was no way to measure satisfaction levels on the Landlord Consent service. A satisfaction survey is currently being designed and the Tenant Measures identified by the HIP will be included. This will provide more information to empower the teams to make further improvements to the service.
- 4.16 The work of the HIP on the Landlords Consent Service is a good example of the partnership between tenants and staff working together to improve the customer experience.

Tenancy Support Service:

- 4.17 Working together the following seven service improvements have been implemented:
- 4.18 The HIP evidence showed that tenants wanted reassurance and information on what the Tenant Support Officer's (TSO) visit was all about and how it would help them. In order to reassure and prepare tenants for the TSO visit, the Officer booking the TSO appointment now clearly explains to the tenant, what the TSO can help with and provide information on what the tenant can do to prepare for the visit eg; paperwork in relation to any outstanding debts, energy bills etc. If the Tenancy Support Team is unable to contact the tenant by telephone a letter is sent out with the appointment date. As a result of information from the HIP, these letters have been amended to also include the same information to ensure that as much reassurance and preparation can be given to tenants in advance of the visit.
- 4.19 Appointment reminders of the TSO visit are now provided by text, letter or via telephone conversations. Previously if the Team was unable to speak to the tenant directly, answerphone messages were left on mobile phones. The evidence presented to the HIP identified that some tenants did not access the messages as some providers charge to retrieve messages. This new practice has already cut down on the number of missed visits. This means we are able to help the tenant sooner and the TSO is not wasting time on no access calls.
- 4.20 When the appointment is booked, the name of the TSO is now given. In the case of tenants who had accessed the service previously, the HIP identified that tenants valued the assurance provided by knowing a familiar face would be visiting them and that the person calling already had understanding and information on their circumstances. Also it became apparent that tenants valued knowing whether the TSO visiting would be male or female. Tenants are now asked if they have a preference over who visits.
- 4.21 The evidence identified that tenants valued achievable appointment times (specific or a timeframe). Due to the nature of the TSO's work, it is impossible to know how long each visit will take so specific appointment times are difficult to achieve. However, the Manager and staff involved in delivering the service have introduced appointment 'slots' for visits and an Officer will ring the tenant to advise them when the TSO is on their way.
- 4.22 An Action sheet with useful telephone numbers is now left with the tenant. The HIP identified that tenants valued a summary of what was discussed during the visit and information on what will happen next. Often the tenant discusses numerous issues with the TSO, this acts a reminder for the tenant if they need to attend for example, a CAB appointment or need to

contact the DWP. It also clarifies what actions the TSO has taken or will take as a result of the visit.

- 4.23 The HIP identified tenants valued knowing that they could contact the TSO at anytime in the future. A contact card is already left after each visit with the TSO contact details and this practice will continue.
- 4.24 A tenant satisfaction survey was already in place in relation to the Tenancy Support Service. The service Manager on receiving the Handbook said it *“turned their original survey questions upside down”*. The Satisfaction survey has been completely re-written to measure satisfaction based on what the HIP has identified as what tenants want & value. This will provide more information to empower the Team to make further improvements to the service in the future.
- 4.25 Officers of the TSO Team have valued the evidence provided by the HIP which has helped them identify and implement these service improvements.

- **The Next Steps**

- 4.26 The HIP will continue to work with Caerphilly Homes to identify other service areas where its approach can be applied and is currently progressing a review of the Income Recovery Service. The HIP has played a role in helping Caerphilly Homes make already good services better.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This is an information report only. As a result there are no equalities implications and no requirements to complete an Equalities Impact Assessment.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 As with other tenant participation initiatives, any activities associated with the HIP are accommodated within the existing Tenant Participation budget.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct personnel implications. The HIP will be supported through the Tenant & Community Involvement Team and when required other existing staff resources (to gather evidence).

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 The views of consultees listed have been incorporated/reflected within the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 This report is for information only.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To keep members of the CHTG updated on tenant participation activities.

Author: Elizabeth Bayliss - Tenant Participation Officer
Consultees: Councillor David Poole - Cabinet Member for Housing
Christina Harry - Corporate Director Communities
Shaun Couzens - Chief Housing Officer
Marcus Lloyd - Deputy Head of Programmes
Fiona Wilkins - Public Sector Housing Manager
Mandy Betts - Tenant & Community Involvement Manager
Gail Taylor - Tenant Participation Officer
Debbie Bishop - Area Housing Manager (Upper Rhymney Valley)
Sandra Isaacs - Rents Manager
Kelsey Watkins - Communications & Tenant Engagement Officer

Background Papers:

CHTG Reports - March 2014 & September 2014 on the introduction of the HIP

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Landlord Consent & Tenancy Support service handbooks

Landlord Consent Handbook

The purpose of the Landlord Consent service is:-



“to enable a tenant or leaseholder to gain approval to make certain changes to their home”

This handbook has been developed by the Housing Improvement Partnership and informed by the evidence of real service requests received by Caerphilly Homes

Outcomes

“The outcomes we expect from the landlord consent service”

Request	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ I want you to understand what I am asking for▪ I want to be treated as an individual
Confirm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ I want to be told what will happen next and how long it will take
Deliver	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ I want a clear answer from you about your decision and the reasons for your decision▪ I want to know what the next steps are
After Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ I want to know how to appeal your decision if I am not happy with the outcome & I want to know what conditions I must comply with if you approve my request▪ I want any works inspected and signed off promptly

Experience

“The experience we expect from the landlord consent service”

Request

- I want to be able to make my request through the communication channel of my choice (by phone, email, letter, face to face)
- I want you to listen to my request
- I want to be spoken to in a polite and professional manner
- I want the person I contact to provide their name
- I need to feel that the Council understands my individual circumstances
- I need to feel that my request has been understood and will be acted upon
- Throughout the whole process I want you to use language I understand
- I want you to listen to my concerns

Confirm

- I want you to make me feel you understand my request
- I want you to tell me what you are going to do next (clear explanation)
- I want you to reassure me that you will take my individual circumstances into account
- I want you to provide me with any information I need to make the process run smoothly
- Tell me how long I will have to wait before I hear from you (timescales)
- I want you to be flexible
- I want you to keep me informed if there is a delay
- I want to respond in the communication channel of my choice
- I want you to allow me to provide information in the media of my choice

Deliver

- I want you to inform me of your decision promptly
- I want to be given a clear explanation of the reasons for your decision
- I want to be given a clear explanation of any conditions I must comply with
- I want you to respond in the communication channel of my choice
- I want to understand what I can do if I am not happy with your decision

After Care

- I want you to advise me what I can do to appeal the decision if I am not happy
- If you are sending a surveyor, I want you to tell me when they are coming to inspect the work done to my home – at a time that suits me (and be punctual)
- I want the Council to learn from my experience by asking me how well you did

Tenant Measures

“The measures that are important to us”

Request

- Was it easy to contact Caerphilly Homes to make your request?

Confirm

- Are you happy with the information you were given (did the first contact count)?

Deliver


- Did we provide you with the reason/explanation at the time we said we would?
- Did we clearly explain to you the reason for our decision?

After Care

- How happy are you with the overall experience?

Tenant Support Service Handbook

The purpose of the Tenant Support service is:-



**“to provide practical support,
advice and guidance to help people
sustain their tenancies”**

This handbook has been developed by the Housing Improvement Partnership and informed by the evidence of real service requests received by Caerphilly Homes

Outcomes

“The outcomes we expect from the tenant support service”

Request

- I want to be confident that you understand my specific & wider circumstances
- I want to be treated as an individual
- I want to know who to contact if I need help

Confirm

- I want to know who is visiting me, when they are visiting and have their contact details
- I want to know how I can prepare for the visit
- I want to be reassured that you can help me
- I want you to outline what help I need

Deliver

- I want to be given the advice and support I need (e.g; forms completed)
- I want to be feel more secure as a result of your visit (reassured)
- I want to know what is going to happen after your visit
- I want you to help me apply for any additional income/assistance to which I am entitled

After Care

- I want you to follow up/act on any outcomes from the visit (keep me updated)
- I want the TSO to refer or signpost me (to others who can help me)
- I want you to tell me how I get help or guidance from other people/organisations
- I want to know who to contact if I need further help or support
- I want you to maintain an ongoing relationship with me as required

Experience

“The experience we expect from the tenant support service”

Request

When I contact you:

- I want the person I contact to provide their name
- I need to feel that the Council understands my individual and wider circumstances
- I need to feel that my request has been understood and will be acted upon
- Throughout the whole process I want you to use language I understand
- I want you to tell me how you maybe able to help (reassure me)
- I want you to explain what will happen next (prepare me)
- I want you to confirm your contact details
- I want you to be sensitive to my circumstances

When you contact me:

- I want the person who contacts me to provide their name, tell me where you are from and why you are calling
- I need to feel that the Council understands my individual and wider circumstances
- I need to feel that my request has been understood and will be acted upon
- Throughout the whole process I want you to use language I understand
- I want you to tell me how you maybe able to help (reassure me)
- I want you to explain what will happen next (prepare me)
- I want you to confirm your contact details
- I want you to be sensitive to my circumstances

Confirm

- I want you to offer me a choice of achievable appointment times (specific or a timeframe)
- I want you to tell me who is visiting me
- I want you to listen to me if I have a preference over who visits
- I want you to provide me with the information I need to prepare for your visit
- I want you to confirm the visit (appointment) through the communication channel of my choice (by phone, email, letter, face to face - not an answerphone message)
- I want you to keep me informed if there is a delay
- I want you to reassure me

<p>Deliver</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I need to feel that the Council understands my individual and wider circumstances (not just the reason for your visit) ▪ I want you to be sensitive to my circumstances ▪ I want you to tell me how you maybe able to help me and summarise what will happen next ▪ I want you prioritise what needs to be done during your visit (if more than one issue to address) ▪ I want you to help me with difficult paperwork ▪ I want you to leave your contact details (reassure me)
<p>After Care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I want you to keep me updated of progress on what occurred during the meeting ▪ I want to know you are there if I need you again at anytime (for any reason)

Tenant Measures

“The measures that are important to us”

<p>Request</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How easy was it to contact the Tenant Support Service? ▪ Was it clear why the Council contacted you?
<p>Confirm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did you know what was going to happen, how to prepare for your visit and timescales?
<p>Deliver</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did we respond well you your needs? Eg: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Understanding your circumstances/needs ○ Prioritising ○ Providing solutions ▪ Did we help?
<p>After Care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How happy are you with the overall experience of the service? ▪ Was it easy to engage with the Tenant Support Service?

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CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 3RD NOVEMBER 2016

SUBJECT: COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS – CAERPHILLY HOMES

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR - COMMUNITIES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide information on contacts in relation to complaints and representations received by the Authority's Housing Customer Services Section, from 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The monitoring of complaints and representations is carried out to provide information on the level of satisfaction with the service provided by Caerphilly Homes. The results enable Managers to focus on areas of concern to improve services and monitor performance and ensure that similar problems are avoided in the future. The corporate complaints procedure places an emphasis on learning from complaints. There have been examples of complaints which have led to changes in policies and procedures and these are explained in the report.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 Corporately, Complaints and Representations will link to the Council's Strategic Equality Objectives 3 and 4, and also to themes in "Caerphilly Delivers", the Local Service Board single integrated plan.
- 3.2 The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 sets out the following wellbeing goals which link with the aims of this report:-
- A sustainable Wales
 - A prosperous Wales
 - A healthier Wales
 - A more equal Wales
 - A Wales of cohesive communities
 - A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
 - A globally responsible Wales

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The annual report is based on information collected during the financial year 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016. Complaints received about the Housing Service are recorded and responded to in accordance with the Council's 2 stage corporate complaints policy which was implemented in April 2013. This was based on guidance issued by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. If, after following these 2 stages, the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint they can progress their complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

4.2 Overall Numbers

In addition to recording Stage 1, Stage 2 and Ombudsman complaints, Caerphilly Homes Customer Services Section also records any service requests received directly by the Customer Services Section and any housing related correspondence received by the Chief Executive. In general, contacts recorded as service requests relate to the first time the service area has been made aware of the issue concerned. Reasonable judgement is used, based on the information available at the time and these cases are often deemed to be 'business as usual' situations. However, if enquiries identify previous dealings on the same issue then the matter can be escalated through the complaints procedure. It is not necessary for the contact to specifically state that they want the issue dealt with as a complaint as this would be determined from the detail of the contact and any previous dealings on the same subject.

Between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016 the Customer Services Section of Caerphilly Homes recorded a total of 559 contacts from the public and/or their representative. This is in comparison with 520 between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015.

The table below details the contacts received by the Chief Executive and those recorded as service requests. Details of Stage 1 and Stage 2 cases are in 4.5 and 4.6

Function Area	Chief Exec		Service Request	
	2014/15	2015/16	2014/15	2015/16
Response Repairs	12	16	121	93
Housing Management	29	41	67	70
Antisocial Behaviour	1	6	65	29
Allocations	29	37	8	12
Homelessness	12	1	7	2
WHQS Internal	1	9	12	56
Heating	4	0	9	6
Sheltered Housing	1	8	10	3
Grants	2	7	5	4
WHQS External	0	4	6	16
Rents	2	1	5	3
Adaptations	1	3	5	4
Energy Works	2	0	0	0
Enforcement Action	0	0	4	1
Planned Maintenance	0	0	0	2
Leaseholder	2	1	0	1
Other	0	1	0	1
Housing Development	0	0	0	1
Tenant Participation	0	0	1	0
Private Landlord	0	3	0	0
Total	98	138	326	304

- 4.3 The number of contacts received via an advocate was 193 compared with 167 in 2014/15. Examples of the type of advocates used include MP, AM, Councillors, other tenants and family members.

4.4 Praise and Thanks

Records are also kept of any praise or thanks received by Caerphilly Homes. In 2015/16 there were 78 recorded. This is in comparison with 44 for 2014/15. These covered a number of service areas, as detailed below :-

Praise or Thanks		
	2014/15	2015/16
Rents	8	9
Allocation	3	1
Leaseholder Services	1	3
Housing Management	5	14
Responsive Repairs	14	24
Tenancy Enforcement	0	2
Tenant Participation	0	4
Sheltered Housing	3	7
WHQS	3	3
Private Landlord	2	1
Homelessness	2	1
Adaptations	2	7
Housing Development	1	0
Handy Person Scheme	1	0
Grants	0	1
Heating	0	1
Total	44	78

4.5 Stage 1 and Stage 2 Complaints

Stage 1 of the complaints procedure offers the opportunity for the complaint to be resolved at the point of service delivery. These complaints are referred to the appropriate service manager for any necessary action and response. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 they are advised how the complaint can be progressed to Stage 2. Alternatively, complainants can request their complaint is escalated straight to a Stage 2 investigation. In addition, where an appeals procedure is in place this must be exhausted before progressing to a Stage 2 complaint. Stage 2 complaints are investigated by the Customer Services Section, on behalf of the Head of Service or nominated Officer.

There were 81 Stage 1 complaints recorded for Caerphilly Homes in 2015/16 compared with 60 in 2014/15. There were 36 Stage 2 complaints in 2015/16 which is the same number as 2014/15. Of the 36 Stage 2 complaints received in 2015/16, 19 had progressed from a Stage 1.

As detailed in the table below the largest number of Stage 1 complaints (25) related to housing management issues. An analysis of the Stage 1 housing management complaints shows that they were in relation to a variety of aspects of the service including gardens/trees, mutual exchanges, successions, requests for rent free periods, parking and amount of decoration allowance awarded. 9 of these cases were not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction and progressed to Stage 2 complaints.

There were 23 Stage 1 complaints recorded for WHQS (internal works). An analysis of these complaints shows the majority related to the standard of work carried out. These included tenants being left without facilities for longer than expected, position of the electrical consumer unit and

damage caused during the works. The majority of complaints were resolved at Stage 1 with only 3 progressing to Stage 2.

The 17 response repair Stage 1 complaints were in relation to the quality of service provision and workmanship. 4 of these cases were not resolved to the tenant's satisfaction and progressed to a Stage 2.

Function Area	Stage 1		Stage 2		Progressed	
	5	6	5	6	5	6
Housing Management	17	25	21	26	2	9
WHQS (Internal)	14	23	6	4	4	3
Response Repairs	10	17	1	4	1	4
Allocations	3	3	0	0	0	0
Leaseholders	4	3	3	1	1	1
Grants	0	1	0	0	0	0
Planned Maintenance	1	0	0	0	0	0
Anti Social Behaviour	0	1	0	0	0	0
Heating	2	0	0	0	0	0
Sheltered Housing	0	0	0	0	0	0
WHQS (External)	3	5	1	1	1	1
Adaptations	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enforcement Action	2	0	2	0	2	0
Homelessness	2	0	1	0	1	0
Rents	2	3	1	0	1	1
Total	60	81	36	36	13	19

The majority of Stage 2 complaints (26) related to the Housing Management function. 14 of these cases were in relation to recharges and the remaining cases related to a variety of issues including parking, gardens, request for rent free period and the withdrawal of an offer of accommodation.

There were 4 WHQS (internal) Stage 2 complaints. 1 related to the positioning of the electrical consumer unit, 1 was in relation to the time taken to complete the kitchen works, 1 was in relation to the amount of work undertaken and the remaining case was a request for compensation following the removal of the tenant's own gas fire.

There were 4 Stage 2 complaints recorded for Response Repairs. 1 case was in relation to a request for compensation for loss of wages as a result of the contractor missing two appointments, 1 case related to the quality of repair work to steps and a handrail, 1 case was in relation to damp issues and the remaining case involved the tenant's concerns with draughts in the bathroom.

4.6 Outcome of Stage 1 and Stage 2 Complaints

The outcome of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints is recorded as not upheld, partially upheld or upheld. The table below shows the outcomes recorded for all Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints recorded for 2015/16.

Function Area	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Upheld	Did Not Proceed
Stage 1				
Housing Management	21	2	2	0
Response repairs	12	2	3	0
WHQS (internal)	6	7	10	0
WHQS (external)	2	1	2	0
Allocations	2	1	0	0
Leaseholders	2	0	1	0
Rents	2	0	1	0
Grants	0	1	0	0
Anti Social Behaviour	1	0	0	0
Total	48	14	19	0

Stage 2				
Housing Management	12	1	12	1
WHQS (internal)	1	0	3	0
WHQS (external)	0	0	1	0
Leaseholder		0	1	0
Response repairs	3	0	1	0
Total	16	1	18	1

4.6.1 Stage 1's - Upheld

The service area identified with the greatest number of Stage 1 complaints upheld (10) and partially upheld (7) was the WHQS internal works. The majority of these cases were resolved at Stage 1 with only 3 cases progressing to Stage 2. An analysis of all the Stage 1 WHQS (internal) complaints upheld and partially upheld shows that the majority of these related to the quality of service and standard of workmanship provided. Examples of the issues concerned included standard of electrical works carried out, the length of time tenants were without cooking facilities, the length of time for works to be completed and damage to tenants' goods. In these cases an apology was provided, actions were agreed to rectify the works and the contractor was reminded of the code of conduct. There were also two cases involving requests for a replacement bathroom and kitchen which were initially turned down but later agreed. One of the remaining cases involved the removal of a tenant's own gas fire which the tenant wanted to keep. In this case the tenant was referred to our Insurance Section to make a claim but this was later progressed to a Stage 2.

4.6.2 There were 3 response repair Stage 1 complaints upheld. In two cases an apology was provided for not being able to complete the works on the appointed days and the remaining case was in relation to a request for a replacement window which was later agreed. One of the partially upheld cases involved a problem with damp and it was agreed to provide the tenant with a decoration allowance and the other case included issues with a porch roof leak and the roof was renewed.

4.6.3 There were 2 stage 1 complaints upheld in relation to housing management issues. One case involved inconvenience and miscommunication in relation to a front door which was resolved by ordering a new front door and the second case was in relation to the length of time taken to remove a chimney stack. An apology was provided and the stack was removed. There were also two housing management stage 1 complaints partially upheld, one involved a further survey being undertaken for possible damp with some works agreed and in the second case a garage needed repairs which prevented its use so it was agreed to withdraw the associated rent charge.

- 4.6.4 The two WHQS (external) stage 1 complaints upheld both related to issues with scaffolding contractors. In one case an apology was provided and the contractor concerned was reminded of acceptable times to carry out works. The second case involved behaviour of the personnel from a different scaffold company which resulted in the company being removed from the remainder of the contract. The partially upheld complaint involved operatives entering the garden area of an owner/occupied property without prior consent and an apology was provided.
- 4.6.5 The stage 1 complaint upheld for leaseholder services related to a disputed charge to the leaseholder for repointing work. On further investigation the charge was removed.
- 4.6.6 The stage 1 complaint upheld for rents was in relation to a request to cancel contents insurance. The tenant complained he was initially advised that his cancellation would have to be in writing but he was later advised that it would be accepted verbally. Due to the confusion the insurance charge for the period concerned was removed from the rent account.
- 4.6.7 The partially upheld stage 1 case for Private Sector Grants was in relation to an applicant trying to secure loan assistance. An apology was provided for not informing the applicant sooner of the problems encountered with the associated savings plan.
- 4.6.8 Stage 2's - Upheld

There were 12 housing management Stage 2 complaints upheld. One case related to the removal of an offer of accommodation due to a misunderstanding over information provided by the applicant. On investigation it was considered that the applicant had provided reasonable information and an offer of alternative accommodation was made. In addition compensation of £350 was paid to cover expenses incurred by the applicant, which were evidenced, during this period. Two cases involved requests for rent free periods, one in relation to a garage which was in need of repair and one involved rent charged for the notice period on a tenancy. In both cases the rental charge was removed. Another case related to a misunderstanding and delay in providing a front door, which was later renewed. The remaining 8 cases related to recharges to tenants which were later removed.

- 4.6.9 The partially upheld stage 2 housing management case was in relation to a communal garden area dispute. Agreement was reached with the tenant regarding the position of a border and the erection of a small picket fence.
- 4.6.10 There were 3 stage 2 complaints upheld relating to WHQS internal works. One case related to the positioning of a new electrical consumer unit which was later repositioned to meet the needs of the tenant. One case was in relation to a tenant questioning the amount of work originally specified for the bathroom. Following a further survey it was agreed to renew the whole bathroom. The remaining case was the stage 1 case listed earlier regarding the removal of the tenant's own gas fire. The tenant was not satisfied with the offer of £50 made by Insurance. On further investigation it was agreed that Housing would award an additional £50 for inconvenience and upset caused.
- 4.6.11 The 1 stage 2 complaint upheld in relation to WHQS external works was in relation to the erection of a rear boundary chain link fence rather than a timber fence. On further investigation and consultation with the owner/occupier at the rear of the property regarding ongoing maintenance it was agreed to erect a timber fence.
- 4.6.12 The stage 2 Leaseholder complaint upheld was in relation to the standard of painting works on the communal stairway which the leaseholder paid a contribution towards. On further inspection it was agreed the area would be repainted at the Council's cost.

4.6.13 The response repair stage 2 complaint upheld involved a tenant taking two days unpaid leave for appointments to renew a back door. The contractor did not turn up on the first appointment and on the second occasion the contractor turned up with the wrong size door. The contractor paid £52 reimbursement to the tenant and reordered and fitted the correct size door.

4.7 Ombudsman Complaints

Of the 35 Stage 2 complaints responded to 6 were referred to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. None were investigated but one 'quick fix' was agreed. This was in relation to no access on an out of hours call. The Ombudsman was satisfied with our approach to resolve the case. The recharge was withdrawn and practices regarding out of hours calls were reviewed. The changes are detailed below in 4.9.2.

4.8 Response Target Times

The Customer Service Section monitors the performance in responding to all contacts recorded by the section, within the corporate timescales. 94% of complaints and representations were responded to within the agreed timescales in 2015/16 which is the same percentage as 2014/15.

4.9 Learning from Complaints

Complaints are used as a means of analysing the service provided by Caerphilly Homes and highlighting any areas for improvement or any necessary changes in existing policies and procedures. The following are some examples of 'lessons learned' and the associated changes that have been made to the appropriate procedures:

4.9.1. During WHQS rewiring works at a designated older person's property a new electrical consumer unit was fitted. However, a concerned family member brought to our attention that due to the location of the new consumer unit the tenant was unable to access it without assistance. As a result it was agreed that when being changed all consumer units must be located in easily accessible locations to meet the needs of the tenant.

4.9.2 We have come across a couple of occasions when repairs have been reported to the Out of Hours team and the operatives have attended the call and not gained access to the property. The operative would normally move on to their next call in this instance and the tenant would receive a recharge for this call. If a call is reported to the OOH's team, it is deemed to be an emergency and the tenant is expected to be at the property.

If a repair is reported during normal working hours and the operative fails to gain access the operative rings back to the Central Repairs Team who then try to contact the tenant to advise the operative is outside their property.

The Out of Hours Team is not operated by the Housing Division, however, we have worked with the team involved to adopt the same procedure that operates during normal working hours. If the Out of Hours operative is unable to gain access they now ring back to the Out of Hours control room who will then ring the tenant to advise them the operative is outside their property.

4.9.3 An officer could not get any reply when they attempted to ring a tenant to arrange a repair appointment so an appointment letter was hand delivered arranging the appointment for 2 days time. The tenant was not available for the appointment and was subsequently recharged for a missed appointment. When the recharge was appealed it was agreed that practices should be amended so that if the tenant could not be reached by telephone to agree a mutually convenient appointment a letter would be sent advising the tenant of the appointment date, giving at least 7 days notice.

4.9.4 In respect of complaints relating to recharges made to tenants, it was reported last year that a revised appeals procedure would be introduced which incorporated the use of an independent Recharge Review Panel comprising Senior Housing Officers, a Councillor and a Tenant. This

process has been in place with effect from July 2016.

5 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Any complaints received by Caerphilly Homes that contain alleged discriminatory aspects to them are dealt with jointly by Caerphilly Homes and the Equalities and Welsh Language Team to ensure that the allegations are investigated thoroughly and appropriately, in line with both the complaints process and the requirements of the Strategic Equality Plan and Welsh Language Scheme

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Consultation responses have been considered within this report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 This report is for information purposes only.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 The monitoring of complaints forms part of the process to monitor performance and continuous improvement for Caerphilly Homes.

11. STATUTORY POWER

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

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Consultees: Christina Harray, Corporate Director of Communities
Cllr Dave Poole, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing
Shaun Couzens, Chief Housing Officer
Fiona Wilkins, Public Sector Housing Manager
Kenyon Williams, Private Sector Housing Manager
Paul Smythe, Housing Repair Operation Manager
Marcus Lloyd, Deputy Head of Programmes
Jane Roberts-Waite, Housing Strategic Co-ordination Manager
Gail Williams, Interim Head of Legal Services & Monitoring Officer
Mandy Betts, Tenant and Community Involvement Manager
Gemma Hoare, Housing Officer, Customer Services
Anwen Rees, Senior Policy Officer, Equalities and Welsh Language



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 3RD NOVEMBER 2016

SUBJECT: HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET MONITORING – PERIOD 4 2016/17

REPORT BY: ACTING DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES AND SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 1.1 The attached report, which outlined the projected expenditure for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2016/17 financial year, was considered by the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 4th October 2016.
- 1.2 Members were advised that the HRA is currently projecting a year end outturn of £870k underspend, which represents just under 2% of the total HRA budget. Members attention was directed to the main variances within this expenditure as detailed in the report, namely Salaries and Mileage (£86k overspend), Service Specific Related and Office Related (£92k underspend), Income (£1.3m additional), Building Maintenance (£283k overspend) and Revenue Contribution to Capital (£147k overspend). Full financial details relating to the HRA projected outturn for 2016/17 were appended to the Scrutiny Committee report.
- 1.3 Officers explained that the in-house workforce for the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) is expected to increase its spend to £10m due to the increase of properties expected to be completed this year compared to last year (an additional 240 properties). The additional costs are fully funded from the WHQS programme and therefore do not form part of the HRA variance in the report.
- 1.4 It was noted that the HRA working balances at the end of 2015/16 stood at £19.8m, with the majority of the funding earmarked to fund the WHQS programme. To date no borrowing has been undertaken to fund the WHQS programme. However, the current business plan anticipates a borrowing requirement of £57m to fully deliver the programme. In response to a Member's query regarding alternative solutions to borrowing, Officers explained that it is not permissible to use the General Fund to provide loans to the HRA, and that the cost of borrowing has already been factored into the business plan.
- 1.5 Following consideration and discussion of the report, the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee noted its contents.
- 1.6 Members are asked to consider the report and note its contents.

Author: R. Barrett, Committee Services Officer, Ext. 4245

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Report to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 4th October 2016 – Agenda Item 11

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POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 4TH OCTOBER 2016

**SUBJECT: HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET MONITORING – PERIOD 4
2016/17**

**REPORT BY: ACTING DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES AND SECTION 151
OFFICER**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is to inform members of the projected expenditure for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2016/17 financial year.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Members will be aware of the distinction between the HRA, which is funded by rental income received from council tenants, and General Fund Housing and Private Housing, which fall under the General Fund and is funded via the Council taxpayer. Although there is a clear separation of these funds, the majority of council tenants rent is funded from housing benefits which is derived from the tax payers purse and therefore value for money must always be sought.
- 2.2 This report outlines the projected outturn for the HRA based upon the expenditure and income for the first four months of the financial year.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The content of the report is in accordance with the budget strategy agreed by Council at its meeting of 24th February 2016. Cabinet approved the HRA estimates on the 3rd February 2016.
- 3.2 Budget management itself is in accordance with the Corporate theme of Delivering the Strategies.
- 3.3 The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 sets out the following wellbeing goals which link with the aims of this report:-
- A sustainable Wales
 - A prosperous Wales
 - A healthier Wales
 - A more equal Wales
 - A Wales of cohesive communities
 - A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
 - A globally responsible Wales

4. THE REPORT

4.1 HRA (£870k underspend)

4.1.1 The HRA is currently projecting a year end outturn of £870k underspend, which represents just under 2% of the total HRA budget. The main variances are summarised below and full financial details are provided in Appendix 1.

4.2 Salaries & Mileage (£86k overspend)

4.2.1 Salaries and associated costs within the HRA are currently expected to overspend by some £86k. This is a net position where underspends in some areas are offset by overspends in others, in particular underspends are expected in public sector area housing, sheltered and strategy (£230k). Historically there has always been a high turnover of staff in the area offices given the volume of staff and this budget tends to generate savings throughout the year. The offsetting overspends are projected mainly in the Housing Response Operations team and Building Maintenance (£252k) as a consequence of increased work in supporting the WHQS programme, and also in the Allocations team (£76k) which has been recently reviewed to address the new Common Housing Register. A further underspend of £12k is currently projected for other salary related budgets such as mileage allowances.

4.3 Service Specific Related and Office Related (£92k underspend)

4.3.1 Non pay related budgets (which include office running costs, one-off projects and tenant related expenditure) are predicting a £92k underspend. There are numerous headings that make up these budgets, including, Security of Void Properties, Energy Performance Certificates, Decoration Allowances, IT Equipment and Stationery.

4.4 Income (£1.3m additional)

4.4.1 The projected additional income is mainly as a result of the increased expenditure in the Housing Response Operations (HRO) team which is recharged to the WHQS programme.

4.5 Building Maintenance (£283k overspend)

4.5.1 The HRA is utilised to fund the maintenance of the public housing stock.

4.5.2 The HRO is projected to incur additional expenditure of £1m as a result of increased work in particular in supporting the WHQS programme and end of tenancy voids. The increase relates in the main to materials, sub contractors and tipping charges.

4.5.3 An underspend of £393k is anticipated for Revenue Projects. This category mainly includes budgets that fall outside of the other budgets remits (i.e. not planned, cyclical or in house responsive). The underspend mainly relates to the contingency budget (£162k) where a small provision is set each year for any unforeseen repairs. Projects for sheltered complexes are expecting an underspend of £85k and the environmental infrastructure works £47k. The Non-DLO budget which is typically used to contract works out that the HRO are unable to complete are expected to make efficiencies of some £182k as a result of more work being absorbed in-house and contracted work being controlled more efficiently. Damp proofing is projecting a £117k overspend based on its current expenditure pattern.

4.5.4 Planned Cyclical (£390k underspend) – this relates to costs associated with our statutory servicing and maintenance obligations, e.g. heating, electrical, and legionella testing. Underspends in this area relate mainly to Alarm & Light Servicing (£44k), Gas & solid fuel remedial works (£214k), and Gas & Solid Fuel Servicing (£116k),

4.5.5 As part of the merger of the Building Maintenance DLO with the HRA, the WHQS holding account was set up to monitor the in house workforce costs that would be recharged to the WHQS capital programme. A budget of £8.8m was allocated in 2016/17 along with an income

recharge to the capital programme so that the HRA had a nil cost. The same principle applied to the WHQS management team responsible for delivery of the WHQS programme where £2.1m budget was allocated with an associated income recharge to capital.

- 4.5.6 The in house workforce for WHQS is expected to increase its spend to £10m due to the increase of properties expected to be completed this year compared to last year (additional 240). The additional costs are fully funded from the WHQS programme and therefore do not form part of the HRA variance in this report.

4.6 Revenue Contribution to Capital (£147k overspend)

- 4.6.1 The HRA allows for some £13.5m of revenue contributions towards the WHQS programme this year, and £2.1m for the delivery team fees.

- 4.6.2 There is an expectation that the HRA RCCO will be fully utilised this year.

- 4.6.3 The delivery team costs are expected to be some £148k higher due to an increase in agency posts.

4.7 HRA Working balances

- 4.7.1 Working balances at the end of 2015/16 stood at £19.8m. The majority of this funding is earmarked to fund the WHQS programme. To date no borrowing has been undertaken to fund the WHQS programme; however, the current business plan anticipates a borrowing requirement of £57m to fully deliver the programme.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no potential equalities implications of this report and its recommendations on groups or individuals who fall under the categories identified in Section 6 of the Council's Strategic Equality Plan. There is no requirement for an Equalities Impact Assessment Questionnaire to be completed for this report.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 As detailed throughout the report.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct personnel implications arising from this report.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 There are no consultation responses, which have not been reflected in this report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 Members are requested to note the contents of this report.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To inform Members of the projected financial position of the Housing Revenue Account.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government Acts 1972 and 2003 and the Council's Financial Regulations.

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Shaun Couzens – Chief Housing Officer
Fiona Wilkins - Public Sector Housing Manager
Paul Smythe – Housing Repairs Operations Manager
Stephen Harris – Acting Head of Corporate Finance
Cllr Sean Morgan – Chair P&R Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Gez Kirby – Vice-Chair P&R Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Barbara Jones – Deputy Leader/Cabinet Member for Corporate Services
Christina Harry – Corporate Director Communities
Marcus Lloyd – WHQS Programme Manager

Appendices:
Appendix 1 HRA Financial Plan 2016/17 (Period 4 Projection)

HOUSING	Page	Revised Budget	Projected Outturn	Variance
	No	2016/2017	2016/2017	2016/2017
<u>HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT</u>		£	£	£
<u>SUMMARY</u>				
GENERAL MANAGEMENT		891,406	884,223	7,183
CAPITAL FINANCING		7,919,873	7,919,873	0
CENTRAL RECHARGES		2,178,519	2,178,519	0
STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE		1,580,675	1,411,332	169,343
PUBLIC SECTOR HOUSING		5,156,778	5,095,595	61,183
SUPPORTED HOUSING		0	0	0
BUILDING MAINTENANCE SERVICES		29,543,645	28,836,299	707,346
GROSS EXPENDITURE		47,270,895	46,325,841	945,054
INCOME		(47,270,895)	(47,195,801)	(75,094)
(SURPLUS)/DEFICIT CONTRIBUTION (TO)/FROM WORKING BALANCES		(0)	(869,960)	869,960
<u>HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT</u>		£	£	£
<u>GENERAL MANAGEMENT</u>		891,406	884,223	7,183
<u>CAPITAL FINANCING COSTS</u>				
Interest Charge		5,621,634	5,621,634	0
Principal		2,332,190	2,332,190	0
Debt Management		23,730	23,730	0
Resheduling Discount		(57,681)	(57,681)	0
EXPENDITURE TO HRA SUMMARY		7,919,873	7,919,873	0
<u>CENTRAL RECHARGES</u>				
Central Recharges		1,736,652	1,736,652	0
Grounds Maintenance recharge to HRA		441,867	441,867	0
EXPENDITURE TO HRA SUMMARY		2,178,519	2,178,519	0

<u>HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT</u>		£	£	£
STRATEGY & PERFORMANCE		85,169	22,582	62,587
PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT		623,238	607,916	15,322
COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT		96,867	96,922	-55
TRANSFORMING LIVES & COMMUNITIES		697,012	683,912	13,100
EXPENDITURE TO HRA SUMMARY		1,502,286	1,411,332	90,954
<u>HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT</u>			£	£
<u>PUBLIC SECTOR HOUSING</u>				
Landlord General		168,457	162,058	6,399
Sheltered Accommodation		1,434,092	1,410,532	23,560
Holly Road Community support		1,866	1,866	0
Lower Rhymney AHO		22,135	(13,690)	35,825
Eastern Valley AHO		642,690	646,321	-3,631
Upper Rhymney AHO		776,535	754,556	21,979
Gilfach NHO		0	0	0
Lansbury Park NHO		332,579	297,043	35,536
Graig Y Rhacca NHO		270,314	256,555	13,759
Allocations		141,285	177,372	-36,088
TENANTS & COMMUNITIES INVOLVEMENT		471,397	459,491	11,906
LEASEHOLDERS MANAGEMENT		49,038	50,988	-1,950
Tenancy Enforcement		271,266	263,008	8,258
Rents		697,844	673,824	24,020
Community Wardens		(44,329)	(44,329)	0
EXPENDITURE TO HRA SUMMARY		5,235,167	5,095,595	139,572

<u>HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT</u>			£	£
<u>SUPPORTED HOUSING</u>				
Dispersed Alarms		0	0	0
Telecare Centre		0	0	0
Ty Croeso Hostel		0	0	0
EXPENDITURE TO HRA SUMMARY		0	0	0
<u>HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT</u>			£	£
<u>RESPONSE REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE</u>				
Employee Expenses net of recharges		1,325,382	1,317,445	7,937
Repairs & Maintenance on Housing Stock				
Responsive Repairs		7,977,713	7,903,070	74,643
Revenue Contribution to Capital - WHQS Programme		15,615,928	15,763,871	-147,943
Group/Planned Repairs (priorities 5 & 8)		0	0	0
Void Repairs (priority 6)		0	0	0
Revenue Projects		2,234,000	1,841,047	392,953
Planned Cyclical		2,176,000	1,787,406	388,594
Planned Programme		0	(2,317)	2,317
		28,003,641	27,293,077	710,564
Transport Related		25,270	20,371	4,899
Supplies & Services		189,352	205,406	-16,054
EXPENDITURE TO HRA SUMMARY		29,543,645	28,836,299	707,346

<u>HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT</u>			
		£	£
<u>INCOME</u>			
<u>Rents - Dwelling</u>			
Gross Rent - Dwellings	(40,682,689)	(40,682,689)	0
Gross rent - Sheltered	(4,530,468)	(4,530,468)	0
Gross Rent - Hostel	0	0	0
Voids - General Needs Dwelling/Sheltered	600,000	688,512	-88,512
Voids - Hostel	0	0	0
Net Rent	(44,613,157)	(44,524,645)	-88,512
<u>Rents - Other</u>			
Garages	(360,120)	(390,869)	30,749
Garage Voids	144,354	161,685	-17,331
Shop Rental	(58,250)	(58,250)	0
	(274,016)	(287,434)	13,418
<u>Service Charges</u>			
Sheltered - Service Charges	(1,421,134)	(1,421,134)	0
Sheltered - Heating & Lighting	(158,230)	(158,230)	0
Sheltered & Dispersed- Alarms	0	0	0
Catering Recharge - Sheltered Accommodation	(53,657)	(53,657)	0
Voids Schedule Water	51,022	51,022	0
Non Scheduled Water Rates	(47,899)	(47,899)	0
Welsh Water Commission	(705,624)	(705,624)	0
Leaseholder - Service Charges	(10,000)	(10,000)	0
	(2,345,522)	(2,345,522)	0
<u>Government Subsidies</u>			
Housing Subsidy	0	0	0
	0	0	0
<u>Interest Receivable</u>			
Mortgage Interest	(1,200)	(1,200)	0
Investment Income	(7,000)	(7,000)	0
	(8,200)	(8,200)	0
<u>Miscellaneous</u>			
Miscellaneous	0	0	0
Private Alarms	0	0	0
Ground Rent	(30,000)	(30,000)	0
	(30,000)	(30,000)	0
<u>INCOME TO HRA SUMMARY</u>			
	(47,270,895)	(47,195,801)	-75,094