

Caerphilly Homes Communications Strategy

2015 - 2018

1. Introduction

Effective communications is essential to ensuring all stakeholders have an awareness of the Caerphilly Homes brand and are kept up to date on progress across the housing service.

Key to effective communications is the delivery of timely messages, using a range of methods appropriate to specific target audiences. But, more than simply sending messages out, effective communications relies upon creating opportunities for two way dialogue with stakeholders; by actively engaging them and using their feedback to improve services.

This strategy replaces the former 'Housing and WHQS Communications Strategy' which elapsed in 2015. A considerable amount of work has taken place since the last strategy was produced, which will be reflected upon and used as a foundation for this strategy and associated action plan.

2. Where are we now?

Stakeholders have been heavily involved in the development of this strategy, through a working group of tenants and staff facilitated by Caerphilly Homes' Communications and Tenant Engagement Officer. Tenant members of the group varied between those currently heavily involved in service deliver, e.g. Task Group members, to those who have had minimal involvement to date, i.e. Armchair Reviewers. Staff members of the group were also spread evenly across Caerphilly Homes' different areas of service delivery, to ensure adequate representation and a range of viewpoints from across the division.

Members of the working group:

Tenants

- Sandra Jones
- Max McDermott
- Barbara Brown
- Margaret Gardner
- Ken Bridgeman

Staff

- Kevin Fortey, Housing Enabling Officer (Housing Strategy)
- Andrew Jeffries, Senior Housing Officer (Housing Repair Operations)
- Rachel Williams, Service Development Officer (Public Sector Housing)
- Lisa Vokes. Senior Administrator (WHQS)
- Richard James, HR Development Officer

The working group met on a task and finish basis to undertake a review of existing communications methods and to develop the strategic direction for communications over the next three year period.

The review gave recognition to work that has taken place to raise the Caerphilly Homes profile since the stock transfer ballot. Strengths identified by the group include the increased opportunities provided for informal engagement with tenants, including high profile events such as Blackwood Beach Party and smaller scale estate based events. Other successes recognised by group included the greater use of different mediums, for example the damp and condensation information video and the community film project 'Let's Get Happy'.

As well as a great deal of positive work, the review also highlighted a number of areas where improvement is needed. Particular themes that arose during the review were the need for greater consistency and coverage across Caerphilly Homes, to ensure stakeholders are aware of the range of services delivered by the council's housing division. Also, whilst the work undertaken to develop a clear Caerphilly Homes brand and identity was congratulated, there was agreement that further work is needed to ensure the brand and ethos are embedded throughout the division.

The lack of tenant profiling data was also flagged as a concern, as this information is pivotal if we are to target our communications and engagement activities efficiently and effectively.

The findings from the review have been incorporated in this strategy and associated action plan. The working group also worked to develop many of the actions included in the implementation plan.

3. Definition and scope

This strategy covers the range of services delivered by Caerphilly Homes and aims to take a whole housing service approach to communications in order to ensure consistency across the division.

The following list provides a summary of some of the services delivered by Caerphilly Homes:

- Public Sector Housing
 - Estate management
 - Tenancy enforcement
 - Rents
 - Tenancy support
 - Tenant and community involvement
 - Older persons housing
- Housing Repair Operations
 - Response repairs
 - Planned maintenance
 - Handy Person service
- Private Sector Housing
 - Housing advice / homelessness / allocations
 - Housing strategy
 - Affordable housing

- Private rented sector
- Adaptations
- Housing grants and loans
- Welsh Housing Quality Standard
 - Internal and external improvement programme
 - Environmental improvement programme
 - Transforming lives and communities agenda
 - Tenant liaison service

As well as publicity and promotion of services, this strategy also includes the development of effective engagement and opportunities for real two way dialogue with stakeholders.

This strategy also has links to the corporate communications strategy 'One Voice' and to Caerphilly Homes' Local Tenant Participation Strategy. The review also highlighted a number of issues relating specifically to customer care, which will be picked up as a separate piece of work being undertaken by the HR Development Officer.

For the purposes of this strategy, a number of target audiences have been identified and divided into two groups – internal and external stakeholders:

Internal stakeholders:

- Caerphilly Homes staff
- Local elected members
- Other council departments, e.g. Communities First, Highways, Education

External stakeholders:

- Tenants
- Leaseholders
- Applicants / prospective tenants
- Welsh Government
- AMs and MPs
- Housing Associations
- Suppliers and contractors

4. Strategic aims and objectives

The key aims and objectives of this strategy, developed through the communications review process, are:

1. To raise the awareness of stakeholders on:
 - The range of services we provide
 - How to access our services
 - Our performance in providing these services
 - How they can influence our services

2. To promote Caerphilly Homes' reputation locally, regionally and nationally.
3. To develop a consistent brand image and positive identity for Caerphilly Homes.

5. Implementation of the strategy

A plan has been produced which sets out the shorter term actions necessary to achieve the strategy. The plan was developed in conjunction with the communications working group and is based upon SMART principles to ensure it can be delivered, measured and monitored effectively. The action plan will regularly be reviewed and revised, as necessary, to reflect our changing needs.

In implementing the strategy and action plan, we will ensure that the diverse needs of our customers are taken into account; for example, by ensuring written materials and venues are accessible to all.

6. Resources

The Communications and Tenant Engagement Officer is responsible for the delivery of the strategy and associated action plan; the officer is supported by a Programme Support Assistant.

A dedicated Communications and Tenant Engagement budget of £49,646 (aligned to the activities outlined in the associated action plan) has also been allocated to facilitate the implementation of this strategy.

Wherever possible we will seek to work in partnership with other relevant agencies, such as Communities First, in order to pool our resources and deliver maximum outcomes for local communities. We will also seek to enhance this strategy and further maximise outcomes for tenants through the delivery of community benefits from our contractors and suppliers.

7. Monitoring

Delivery of this strategy and its accompanying action plan will be monitored by the Caerphilly Homes Task Group. Update reports will be provided to the group by the Communications and Tenant Engagement Officer at regular intervals or upon request from the Caerphilly Homes Task Group.

In line with Caerphilly Homes' commitment to ensuring tenants are placed at the heart of decision making, an annual review of the action plan will also be undertaken with tenants and staff.