



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
(SIRHOWY ROOM) ON THURSDAY, 17TH SEPTEMBER 2015 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

C. Davies- Chair
E. Forehead – Vice Chair

Task Group Members:

Ms L. Ackerman, Ms J. Gale, K. James, Mrs B. Jones, Mrs S. Jones, M. McDermott, Mrs D. Moore, J. Moore and D.V. Poole.

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), P. Davy (Head of Programmes), P. Smythe (Housing Repair Operation Manager), M. Betts (Community Participation Officer), J. Green (Housing Manager - Older Persons Services), J. Carter (Senior Housing Officer), S. Isaacs (Senior Rents Officer), M. Jennings (Housing Strategy Officer), C. Evans (Committee Services Officer)

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

It was moved and seconded that C. Davies 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 C. Davies be appointed Chair of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group for the ensuing year.

It was moved and seconded that E. Forehead 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 E. Forehead be appointed as Vice Chair of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group for the ensuing year.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs G. Atkins, Miss A. Lewis and C. Mann.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr C. Davies, Mrs B. Jones, Mrs S. Jones, Mrs D. Moore, J. Moore, and Mr M. McDermott as Council Tenants declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in all agenda items.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE

At a meeting earlier in the week the Tenant Representatives of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group had met and discussed the Terms of Reference. It was noted that some minor revisions to the Terms of Reference were required and an updated Terms of Reference would be considered at the next meeting of the Task Group.

5. MINUTES – 2ND JULY 2015

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 2nd July 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6. PROPOSED INSPECTION PROGRAMME FOR COUNCIL PROPERTIES

The report, which was considered by the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 14th July 2015 (when representatives of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group were invited to give their views), proposed the introduction of regular property and tenancy inspections for Caerphilly Homes and sought the views of the Task Group prior to its consideration by Cabinet.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group highlighted concerns for the privacy of tenants and raised concerns about the inspection programme and standards. Officer's clarified that the inspections would be conducted by a variety of existing officers including Tenancy Enforcement Officers and Estate Management Officers, as part of their normal role and are intended to ensure that properties are being maintained to an acceptable standard, and identify any tenancy related issues, such as Health and Safety, Mental Health and Child Protection and signpost for support where required.

Having fully considered the report and the recommendations contained therein, the Caerphilly Homes Task Group recommended that Cabinet adopt the Proposed Inspection Programme for Council Properties.

By a show of hands, and in noting there was 1 against and 1 abstention, the recommendations were supported by the majority present.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that: -

- (i) Members note the views of the CHTG as detailed in the covering report.
- (ii) Consideration be given to pursue the introduction of regular property inspections, for all Caerphilly Homes tenants, as per the proposed procedure outlined in section 4.4 of the Officer's report;
- (iii) Implementation of the proposal be reviewed, and further annual reports be submitted to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group, in order to monitor progress and evaluate the success of the procedure.

7. REMODELLING OF SHELTERED HOUSING SCHEMES

The report was considered by the Caerphilly Homes Task Group (CHTG) on the 17th September 2015. It sought views on proposals for an in-principle agreement for feasibility studies to be undertaken for six sheltered housing schemes (Castle Court, Waunfawr House, TY Melin, Ynyswen, Britannia Court and St. Mary's Court) for remodelling, prior to its consideration at Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, and thereafter Cabinet.

The report also sought the views on proposals for the six schemes to be omitted from WHQS works programme, unless funding is available within the business plan to undertake work to one or two schemes depending on the detailed costs being within this budget.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group highlighted concerns for tenants within these schemes and the postponement of WHQS works. Officers highlighted that many of the bedsits are not fit for purpose and there are a higher number of voids within the Schemes. Officers also highlighted the fact that beyond the bedsits and flats, the schemes themselves lacked adequate facilities for our vulnerable tenants as circulation space and access throughout the schemes was limited, particularly for those with mobility or health issues. Therefore, it was proposed that the works take place following 2020 until 2025, remodelling the schemes to meet WHQS standards and become fit for purpose.

Having fully considered the report and the recommendations contained therein, the Caerphilly Homes Task Group recommended that the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee support the Remodelling of the Sheltered Housing Schemes and recommend its adoption at Cabinet.

By a show of hands, and in noting there were 3 against, the recommendations were supported by the majority present.

RECOMMENDED to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and thereafter Cabinet for a decision : -

- (i) Members note the views of the CHTG as detailed in the covering report.
- (ii) A full and comprehensive feasibility study is commissioned for the six sheltered housing schemes identified in the report.
- (iii) Following a positive outcome of the feasibility study, the schemes be removed from the WHQS programme with the intent of remodelling them post 2020, (with one or two before this time, if financially viable), with completion of all properties by the end of 2025.

8. COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT FUND

The report provided details of an application made for funding from the Community Improvement Fund by TARRAGON Educational Gardens. The TARRAGON project aims to encourage people living in Greater Bargoed to get involved in conservation and gardening by using the green space site that they currently have for outdoor recreation. TARRAGON Community Gardens have applied for £3,854.11 from the Community Improvement Fund, to help finance the expansion and redevelopment of the site.

The total cost of the project is estimated to be a total of £20,770.56, and two quotes for the entire project have been included, along with a copy of their constitution with the application. The remaining £16,916.45 has been secured from other sources including the Community Regeneration Fund, Bargoed Town Council and Communities First.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the Caerphilly Homes Task Group support the application made by TARRAGON Educational Gardens. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report, the Caerphilly Homes Task Group support the application which will have a positive impact on the health and well being of tenants living within the adjacent housing area and subject to the following condition:

- Copies of relevant permissions including planning and change of use are submitted before any claims are made.

9. COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS – CAERPHELLY HOMES

J. Carter (Senior Housing Officer) and M. Betts (Community Participation Officer) provided an overview of the report, which highlighted the contacts in relation to complaints and representations received by the Authority's Housing Customer Services Section, from 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015.

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. Last year saw a corporate change in the complaints procedure with more emphasis on learning from complaints. There have been examples of complaints which have led to changes in policies and procedure, which were outlined within the report.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued. Financial implications were discussed as a result of compensation payments and staff time. A Member suggested that Complaints be resolved sooner and lessons learnt from recent cases where possible, in order to avoid further costs.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the detailed report and noted its contents.

10. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE TENANCY REVIEW PANEL

S. Isaacs presented the report which highlighted the outcomes of cases presented to the Tenancy Review Panel.

The Tenancy Review Panel was set up in June 2014. It was noted that during the period of June 2014 to May 2015, 51 cases were considered by the Panel and a recommendation was made to the Chief Housing Officer that an eviction warrant should be applied for in all cases.

The Task Group noted further information on the cases, reasons for the applications and outcomes of the warrants, as outlined within the report.

A Task Group Member sought further information on the Homelessness and Housing application process for previously evicted tenants. It was noted that a process is in place which would allow a previous Council tenant to be housed within the Authority, following an eviction from Private Rented accommodation, however, the arrears would be incorporated within the new tenancy agreement and support processes would be put in place, if deemed necessary.

The Task Group discussed the report and data within and sought clarification on the amount of arrears that would be successfully retrieved by the Authority. It was noted that there were 32 cases for eviction, which totalled £76,000 in arrears and it was unlikely that the Authority would recover this amount. The Task Group were asked to note that the eviction process is a long process and is used as a last resort and a variety of support services are offered to the tenant before eviction notice is served.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group noted the report.

11. A PROGRESS REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMON HOUSING REGISTER AND COMMON ALLOCATION POLICY

M. Jennings (Housing Strategy Officer) provided the Task Group with an update on the progress being made in the development of the Common Housing Register and Common Allocation Policy, and builds upon a previous update report to CHTG in May 2014.

Task Group Members noted that a number of working groups have been established to progress key elements of the project, a 12-week public consultation exercise had been undertaken on the draft allocation policy and that, Abris was awarded the contract to provide a new IT system to manage the Common Housing Register.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and sought further information on the tender and award process for the IT System. It was noted that a number of IT systems were considered through various partners and organisations and following considerable research, the contract was awarded via the G Cloud framework to Abris, area market leader in common housing register IT systems.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and noted the contents.

12. HANDLING OF DAMP AND CONDENSATION COMPLAINTS – UPDATE REPORT

The report, which was presented to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 14th July 2015 is an update report and was originally presented to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee in September 2014.

The original report provided data from the last six years in relation to incidence of damp and condensation in the Council's Housing stock. The update report provided details of incidence following the winter period of October 2014 to March 2015.

The Task Group noted that, as a result of the previous report, an area for improvement was highlighted in the difficulty identifying the common causes of dampness within properties. As a result, a simple coding has been devised and implemented at the point the repair and provides a breakdown of the total number and type of works order related to dampness which has been received during the period and compares it with the same period last year.

It was noted that there are varying types of damp issues which include a high incidence of condensation related to tenants' lifestyles; dampness related to building defects often highlighted by energy improvement works and damp related leaks from the plumbing in the property or other types of leaks.

Additional training has been provided to relevant Officers in order to assist in effective diagnosis of causes of damp related problems and revisions have been made to the damp and condensation leaflet and the Task Group received a demonstration of the updated video, which is available on Social Media, YouTube and disk for tenants.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and video and sought information on the costs of producing the video. The Officer highlighted that considerable improvements have been made to in-house technologies in order to bring communications into the 21st Century and promoting awareness via Community Groups, Tenant Groups and through relevant Officers. The Task Group noted that production costs were inexpensive and aims to remedy a number of issues.

13. END OF YEAR REPORT ON THE HOUSING DIVISION'S 2014/15 SERVICE PLAN

The report provided the Task Group with an end of year update on progress made against the key outcomes contained within the 2014/15 divisional service plan.

The 2014/15 service plan was produced in accordance with corporate guidance issued by the performance management unit and allows the housing management team to focus the efforts of the division on increasing efficiency and maximising the effectiveness of the range of services that are provided.

The Task Group noted those key priority areas that had either been fully or partially successful.

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

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

The following requests were received:-

1. Councillor E. Forehead requested advice on the progress of a previous request for a report on the number of Council House properties within the WHQS Programme which are 7.5 Meters in height or above (3-storey).

The meeting closed at 6.25 p.m.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 29th October 2015.

CHAIR