



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 29TH OCTOBER 2015

SUBJECT: TENANT PARTICIPATION IN THE HOUSING SERVICE

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR - COMMUNITIES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This is an information report to update Caerphilly Homes Task Group Members on tenant participation activities and also responds to a request for an update on the pilot review undertaken by the Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP).

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report covers activity and progress under the four main objectives of local tenant participation with additional information on the tenant participation budget.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 Tenant involvement most closely links with the current Local Housing Strategy aim of
- 3.2 “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 ‘Improving Lives and Communities’ emphasises the need to
- 3.4 ‘Give tenants a clear voice in decisions that affect them’ and that
- 3.5 ‘Services should reflect the needs of those who use them, not the needs of the organisations that deliver them’
- 3.6 The Single Integrated Plan 2013-17 has a priority to ‘improve standards of housing and communities giving appropriate access to services across the county borough’.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 At a local level there are four key objectives for tenant participation. These are outlined below with details of progress and activity.

1. To develop tenant review

At a strategic level the Caerphilly Homes Task Group remains the main mechanism to review housing services. In August 2014 an election was held for tenant representatives who will serve until 2017. Three new representatives were elected.

At an operational level there are a number of continuing activities and some new initiatives:-.

- The Repairs and Improvements Group continues to monitor the progress of the WHQS programme and the response repairs service. Two new members were recruited to the Group in 2014. The Group meets fortnightly.
- The Caerphilly Service Improvement Monitors (CSIMS) have continued to carry out face to face surveys with tenants who have had WHQS works undertaken. Since August 2014 48 surveys have been carried out.
- A new activity under the CSIMS umbrella has been Mystery Shopping; a mystery shop of the centralised repairs line was carried on in June/July 2015 and the results and recommendations have been given to the Service Manager, Paul Smythe.
- Tenants have continued to be involved in procurement and their involvement helped to secure a recent Government Opportunities-UK Excellence in Public Service Award for the procurement section.
- The Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP) was established in February. The purpose of the HIP is to understand real customer demand and to produce a staff handbook to help Caerphilly Homes to improve housing services. The HIP analyses real customer interactions from real service requests to identify what tenants want and value from a service. This evidence is provided by staff through copies of letters, emails or transcribes of face to face conversations or telephone calls. The HIP examines this evidence to identify the purpose of the service, what tenants value, what factors are important to tenants and how tenants expect to be treated.

Evidence was grouped into four stages, request, confirm, deliver and aftercare.

The HIP has recently participated in its first review of the Council's landlord consent procedure. The HIP produced a staff handbook which identifies, based on the evidence, the outcomes expected by tenants from the landlord consent service. Findings have been presented to senior managers in landlord services and managers responsible for delivering the service will use the handbook to review the landlord's consent procedures. A report will go back to the HIP in six months outlining changes made to the service as a result of this work.

The intention is for the HIP to carry out two reviews each year and the next review is due to start in late October. This review will focus on succession of tenancy.

Feedback from staff and HIP members has been positive and the support of an independent facilitator has been recommended and welcomed by the HIP. The use of the facilitator will be reviewed after the production of the next handbook. There are currently eight tenants on the HIP and they have suggested that new members be encouraged to join. A HIP members guide will be developed to assist with the recruitment of new members.

- In June/July 2015 five focus groups were held with tenants attending to discuss the Council's rent policy. Welsh Government required consultation with tenants about new factors that could be considered when setting rent including location of the property and energy efficiency. Fifty six tenants attended and the views gathered will be considered by the Rents Manager in formulating a report on next year's rent policy. There were also unexpected benefits from these events; some tenants attending were able to discuss issues directly with rents staff that resulted in additional income being secured for them and some tenants have been recruited for other participation activities.
- A Recharge Review Panel has recently been established which includes two tenant representatives.

2. Increased tenant engagement

The rent consultation focus groups were particularly successful in bringing in tenants who had not previously engaged with the housing service. The majority of HIP members were also new to any kind of tenant participation.

Associations

Grant payments have supported the running costs of Associations and Participation Officers have given specific advice and support to the Association at Ysqwyddgwyn sheltered housing scheme and to Penyrheol Community Association to re-launch their groups. Assistance is also given to Pen y Dre and Graig Y Rhacca Associations to co-ordinate quarterly meetings between Association representatives, housing staff, police and community safety staff amongst others. During the year Fochriw Association's Officers decided they no longer wanted the Association to be recognised and funded by the Housing department and the Association in Nelson has also dissolved.

Sensory Loss Group

The group has worked in partnership with Action on Hearing Loss/RNIB Cymru on a project to ensure housing services meet the needs of people with sensory loss. The project was funded by Welsh Government via Action on Hearing Loss and has involved 3 focus groups from 3 different landlords; Caerphilly was the only local authority.

Seven tenants worked with Andy Harris of Action on Hearing Loss. They recorded their experiences of finding and living in social housing as part of digital storytelling and used those experiences to present to Officers practical recommendations that can be taken up by landlords to improve services. Some are straightforward and can be achieved quite quickly, others are longer term such as training for all staff on sensory loss awareness.

Their contributions, along with the other participants in the project have been produced as a best practice guide for housing providers. This was launched by Lesley Griffiths, AM, Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty at the Welsh Government offices on 25th June and group members attended the launch. The guide is to be circulated to all social housing landlords.

The Group were runners up in their category at the Caerphilly Homes Transforming Lives and Communities Awards in September 2015.

Estate Walkabouts

The first estate walkabout was held in Lansbury Park, While there was no initial response from tenants, tenant views were gathered by door knocking in the area.

The second walkabout was held in Graig Y Rhacca in June, While representatives of the local Tenants and Residents Group attended the general tenant response was again disappointing,

It is intended to try one more walkabout in an Area rather than Neighbourhood location and advertise by SMS messaging rather than printed flyers (see section 3).

Training/Conference Attendance

Tenants have been supported to attend various training and conference events during the year including :-

Monitoring and Evaluation Training (GAVO)

CSIMS training (in-house)

Mystery Shopping Training (TPAS Cymru)

Equality and Diversity Training x 2 (1 Corporate, 1 External trainer)

TPAS Cymru Annual Conference

Welsh Tenants Annual Conference x 2

CIH Annual Conference

TPAS Disability Network

TPAS Tenant Partnership Network

Some involved tenants have also participated in one to one sessions with Participation Officers to identify future training needs.

3. Improve Information Flow to the Wider Tenant Body

The tenant involvement team has supported the production of:-

-the 'happy 'video in summer of 2014 starring many of our involved tenants and community members from Trinant. -community digital story telling project for Penyrheol Community Association in August 2015 -digital story for the Tenancy Support Officers in the Rents Section in September 2015

In conjunction with the Rents Manager we have also utilised text messaging to advertise involvement opportunities. This was very successful for the rent consultation where we had a very poor response to printed flyers and recruited all but two of the participants via text message.

In March 2015 tenant participation officers and area housing staff supported the Trevelyan Court Group to undertake a two week community consultation on proposals for environmental improvements in Trevelyan and adjacent courts in Lansbury Park.

Participation Officers have also attended community events in Rhymney, Penllwyn, Lansbury Park and Blackwood to give information about involvement opportunities

The Armchair Reviewers Group continues to receive the tenant newsletter and other housing publications for review and comment before publication.

Several tenant representatives were involved in a joint working group with staff, facilitated by the Communications and Tenant Engagement Officer, to review the Caerphilly Homes Communications Strategy.

Tenant Information Exchange (TIE) meetings have been held in September 2014, January and June 2015 and another is scheduled for November 2015. The Exchange is an informal meeting that gives involved tenants an opportunity to network and to discuss different housing issues. Since January staff involved in delivering the housing service have shared information at the TIE covering the Floating Support service, the work of the Tenancy Support Officers Anti-Social Behaviour, Common Housing Register, and the work of the Sensory Loss Group

4. Mainstreaming of Tenant Participation

Interaction with tenants is part of day to day business for housing officers. Encouraging tenant involvement and seeking tenant views on services should also be part of that day to day business especially when planning and reviewing services.

During the past year the Tenant and Community Involvement Team has participated in a project run by the Chartered Institute of Housing. The project called 'Working Together to Challenge the Future of Tenant Involvement' involved various organisations (local authorities and housing associations) looking at the future of tenant involvement.

As well as discussing national trends and local initiatives organisations have been encouraged to review their own tenant involvement structures and activity and to look at how tenant involvement can be developed to achieve improvements in service delivery. An essential part of this process is to involve staff and tenants in discussions on how we develop in future.

A joint staff and tenant focus group was held on 5th/6th October and this included discussion on how tenant participation can be 'mainstreamed'. The outcome of these discussions will form part of future strategy development.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None. The report is for information only.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are two budget allocations for participation activities, a general budget for direct participation support and an additional resource of £150,000 identified in the Offer Document to support increased and improved participation arrangements. This additional allocation is itemised in the table below.

Budget Item	Budget Figure 2014/2015	Actual Expenditure 2014/2015
Projects	100,000	28,912
Contribution to Salary Costs	26,000	27,372
Training	10,000	5,292
Transport	14,000	12,391
TOTAL	£150,000	£73,967

6.2 Within the Projects budget expenditure included the election costs for the Task Group members and the establishment and running of the HIP.

6.3 There was additional expenditure of £10,469 from the general tenant participation budget including items such as £3,274 for the TPAS subscription, £2,788 grant funding to Associations, £1,807 room hire and £1,701 for meals and refreshments.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

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

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 The views of consultees listed have been incorporated within this report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Members are asked to note the information provided.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 To keep members of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group updated on tenant participation progress and activities.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Housing and Local Government Acts.

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Sandra Isaacs, Rents Manager
Elizabeth Bayliss, Tenant Participation Officer
Gail Taylor, Tenant Participation Officer
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Background Papers:

Supporting People with Sensory Loss: Best practice Guide for housing providers
HIP: Landlord's Consent Handbook