

# CHTG Review Workshop 8<sup>th</sup> September 2015

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## Introduction

This a brief report of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group (CHTG) review workshop held on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2015 involving elected members, tenants and council officers.

It is a summary of the main points discussed rather than a comprehensive record. It has been drawn up by workshop facilitator Keith Edwards with support from Elizabeth Cooper and input from Phil Davy, both of whom have helped to fully capture the important points discussed and agreed upon.

## Purpose of the session

The original session aims as expressed in the brief from the CHTG were added to by participants on the day. These were:

- To further develop relationships **Councillors** and **Tenants** through:
  - Improving communication all round;
  - Ensuring CHTG plays a positive and supportive role;
  - Building a culture of working as a team and;
  - Keep tenants at the heart.
- To forward plan the business of **CHTG**.
- To review the **WHQS** programme and ensure goals are met by:
  - Learning both from what works well and where there are problems;

- Taking positive actions to put thing right;
- Improving the quality of some of the work;
- Setting targets and monitoring progress;
- Catching up where there had been delays and getting back on track and:
- Delivering a successful programme by 2020;
- Identify the aspects of the **Housing Service** to review recognising this role is a core / priority function.

## **Key issues and context**

The workshop discussed the key internal and external factors within which CHTG operated including:

- WHQS – this was a Welsh Government (WG) requirement originally set in 2003 for achievement by 2012 but with and agreed extension to 2020.
- Welfare reductions which were impacting on Caerphilly tenants with the prospect more cuts to come.
- Potential changes to WG rents policy including the possibility for freezes and reductions that, whilst benefitting working tenants, would impact negatively on the business plan.
- The continued uncertainty around Local Government Reorganisation and public service reform.
- The Welsh Assembly Elections in 2016.
- The impact of Welsh legislation such as the Housing Act and the Renting Homes Bill.
- Socio-Economic factors that continue to have a negative and disproportionate impact on tenants and disadvantaged communities.

## **Reviewing Terms of Reference**

A starting point was to review the current terms of reference to both prioritise the most important ones, amend them as appropriate and identify any gaps.

Participants agree that some areas are essential aspects of the work of CHTG:

- Reviewing WHQS strategic direction and the allocation of resources;
- Monitoring progress on the WHQS Addendum and;

- Contributing at the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee when public sector housing matters are under consideration.

There was support from some participants for attaching a high priority also to:

- Receiving Regular WHQS reports;
- Making recommendations to Scrutiny Committee / Cabinet and;
- Ensuring consistency with the Regeneration Strategy.

Generally, although not unimportant, the following were thought to be a lower priority given the scope of CHTG activities and the need to put time and resources into other priority areas:

- Acting as a consultative group on the Public Housing Service;
- Acting as consultative group on Welsh Government legislation & policy.
- Having information on annual review, service changes & performance and;
- Exploring collaboration with other councils and RSLs.

In addition the CHTG should consider what role it wants in other areas including:

- The wider anti-poverty agenda and;
- Dialogue with Welsh Government collectively.

## **The CHTG Story so far**

The workshop briefly considered the 'back story' of WHQS in Caerphilly. Key milestones included:

- the ballot on transfer in 2012 which cemented the councils commitments to tenant and set the course for achievement by 2020
- The WHQS programme that commenced in the 2013/14 financial year and from then to date around 2000 homes have benefitted from the internal improvements. The capital programme for the current financial year 2015/16 at £36m is the largest in the history of Caerphilly.

A number of challenges remained however including:

- The need to ensure there was sufficient capacity to deliver work to the highest quality;
- The complexity of managing such a massive and intricate programme and;
- Completing delivery of WHQS by 2020.

## **Developing Relationships**

Whilst acknowledging that CHTG had fundamentally changed the way the council and tenants work together, workshop participants recognised whilst many things were working well other clearly had room for improvement:

Things that were seen as positive were:

- There was now a clear mechanism for tenant engagement and tenants felt that CHTG was genuinely valued;
- Councillors valued the direct contact with tenants and their 'expertise';
- There was the commitment by all to genuine joint working;
- Parity of representation (7 tenants, 7 councillors) and sharing chairing responsibilities;
- The channels in to the heart of Council decision making via councillors and;
- The open invitation for tenants to attend as observers at council committees;

In other areas there was clearly room for improvement including:

- Adopting a more structured approach, e.g. developing a forward work plan;
- Improving attendance of some councillors at meetings; was viewed negatively by tenants;
- Ensuring there were less information items and more decision items at meeting;
- Taking more time out to review progress and strategy through away days, visits to other landlords, training and briefing sessions on legislation and other important changes for example;

- Giving tenants the opportunity to lead on items by drawing up reports and having time on the agenda to discuss these;
- Being clear that, whilst CHTG was not the place to discuss individual cases, that there were mechanisms in place to deal with them and that these were followed;
- Ensuring more timely actions and feedback on issues raised.

## Setting Future Priorities

Participants considered the current and emerging challenges to CHTG. These included:

- The lack of control over any changes implemented by the UK or Welsh Governments and how to respond effectively;
- Social & Economic Challenges including poverty and financial exclusion;
- Securing the financial resources to deliver in challenging times;
- Ensuring there were sufficient and high performing staff and contractor personnel to deliver;
- Ensuring the quality of the work was to a high standard;
- Adhering to the *Charter for Trust*;
- Improving tenant satisfaction;
- Delivering the potential *WHQS plus* benefits – jobs, training and community regeneration for example;
- Dealing with the many social issues - for example tenants with a wide range of problems and;
- Maintaining the spirit of working together and mutual respect and recognising all parties wanted to achieve the same objective.

Potential responses to challenges included:

- Ensuring there was training on new legislation and welfare reform;

- Sharpening up the way CHTG worked by focussing on effective meetings, monitoring progress and reporting outcomes;
- Improving communication all round;
- integrating the work of CHTG into wider council strategies including for example mitigate the impact on tenants of welfare reform via financial inclusion, advice, promoting credit unions etc.;
- Maximising the opportunities for tenant involvement in the WHQS Environmental Programme with an estimated £10.6m available;
- Exploring innovative ways to broaden tenant engagement.

## A CHTG Action Plan

Participants were asked in constituent groups (tenant and councillors) what they wanted from their partners to make things work – their ‘asks’; and what they were prepared to commit in return – their ‘offers’.

The following asks and offers were identified by tenants:

<b>asks</b>	<b>offers</b>
<p>The opportunity to have views heard.</p> <p>Respect between all stakeholders.</p> <p>Respect from contractors and compliance with <i>Charter for Trust</i>.</p> <p>Continued commitment to deliver the programme and meet promises.</p> <p>Learn from mistakes. And make improvements.</p> <p>Questioned the role of the Task Group – as ambassadors for the WHQS Programme.</p>	<p>Act as Ambassadors for the programme.</p> <p>Ensure that tenants understood difficulties and challenges.</p> <p>Ensure mutual respect.</p> <p>Understanding constraints and that sometimes things don't go to plan.</p> <p>Monitor progress in a fair and equitable manner.</p> <p>Make sure that positive progress was feedback to other tenants.</p> <p>Find ways of increasing involvement and reaching under-represents groups.</p>

The following asks and offers were identified by councillors:

<b>asks</b>	<b>offers</b>
<p>Capturing wider tenant perspectives.</p> <p>Increase tenants returning Customer Satisfaction Surveys.</p> <p>Ensuring clarity about role of tenant representatives on the CHTG; recognising the differences between the councillors, tenants and officers</p> <p>Where tenants carry out face to face surveys ensure continuity of the process and a focus on the general experience – this is not a snagging exercise.</p>	<p>Recognising where satisfaction surveys raise issues tenants should receive a timely response.</p> <p>Offer an incentive, such as a monthly prize, to return satisfaction forms.</p> <p>Support tenants by feeding through surveys in a more timely fashion.</p> <p>Ensuring Project Managers respond to issues identified in to satisfaction surveys.</p> <p>Provide more training including explaining the contract management process.</p>

## Outcome of Workshop

Participants were asked what the **most important outcome** from the workshop had been and this included:

- Greater clarity on roles of tenants, councillors and members;
- Reinforcing Mutual respect and trust between partners;
- Reaffirmation of a commitment to work together based on shared goals where everyone 'owns' problems and solutions;
- A feeling of 'One Team' with everyone heading in same direction and 'on the same side'
- A commitment to achieve WHQS by 2020 with speed and ensuring quality work;
- Speed and quality together

- The positive opportunity to meet and have an honest and open discussion and share views in an informal setting.

Immediate priorities were to:

- Revise the Terms of reference to reflect current and future priorities;
- Explore ways of broadening tenant involvement;
- Organise other regular review sessions to take stock of progress and review priorities;
- Improve communication especially where changes to plans occur;
- Improve the way mistakes are learnt from and improvements made and ensure these are not repeated and;
- Continue to find ways of minimising disruption to tenants during works.

## **In Your Own Words!**

Participants were very positive about the workshop and the CHTG itself. The table below includes specific comments that reinforce this:

'The partnership between Councillors and tenants is working well'

'The end goal is in sight; it has been clear today that we all want success and are working as one team to succeed'

'The CHTG is working'

'We all have the same commitment'

'We own the programme and we are headed in the same direction'

'We all recognise we are committed to delivering the programme'

'Relationships within the CHTG have matured'

'The most important outcome is that we have taken time to share views'

'Recognise the progress in development and maturity since the last event'



'An open and honest discussions, working together, speaking up and listening.

'We should all work together to achieve positive outcomes'

'It has been great to listen to councillors'

'Hopeful that councillors, officers and tenants continue to work together to ensure delivery of the Programme by 2020'

'Tenant representatives are doing an excellent job and we should respond promptly to their feedback'

'The CHTG brings additional benefits to the programme in a supportive way'

## **Conclusions**

The review workshop seems to have achieved most of its aimed based on participants' comments. The next task is for CHTG to agree specific actions to keep the momentum going and ensure the right priorities are set at a critical time in WHQS programme delivery:

- In addition to the points below CHTG should review this report and decide what actions need to prioritise;
- There is a general feeling that the partnership between councillors and tenants is working well but the terms of reference for the CHTG could be refined to further develop the relationship;
- There needs to be a mutual trust between tenants, councillors and officers and shared responsibility for tackling the challenges; CHTG will function best where there is openness and transparency and respect shown for the views of all members of the group;
- The focus needs to be on joint ownership of 'problems and solutions' and further work to build the CHTG team should be considered;
- CHTG needs to feel ownership and commitment for the housing service and the WHQS Programme. The common aims of all sides to deliver the programme to time and to high standards with tenants at the heart of the process should be reinforced and communicated widely within the authority and to all tenants;

- There is a common recognition that the aim is to deliver all the housing improvements by 2020 but where problems arise these should be jointly shared and resolved to mitigate the impact on the programme;
- The CHTG terms of reference should immediately be reviewed based on the specific comments that emerged from the workshops;
- CHTG should consider developing a strategy to engage with the wider body of tenants including groups that currently don't participate;
- CHTG should clarify the process for dealing with individual property/tenant issues outside of meetings;
- There is room for improvement with communications and more timely feedback on issues raised enabling tenants to better understand the rationale behind decisions;
- There should be a process of learning from mistakes and;
- CHTG needs to maintain a focus on the wider regeneration opportunities of the WHQS programme (social and economic) and more needs to be done to capture the impact of the programme in changing lives.