



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 10TH DECEMBER 2015

SUBJECT: ROWAN PLACE – PROGRESS REPORT & SENSITIVE LETTINGS POLICY

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR – COMMUNITIES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on the progress made in relation to delivering a targeted regeneration programme in Rowan Place, Rhymney.
- 1.2 To consider the adoption of a sensitive lettings policy and introductory tenancies specifically in relation to Rowan Place.
- 1.3 The report is seeking the views of the Caerphilly Homes Task prior to its presentation to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and thereafter, Cabinet.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Following the ballot in February 2012, the Council agreed that it would deliver the promises made in its Offer document to tenants and deliver WHQS by 2019/2020. It also gave a commitment to delivering numerous additional benefits which were also outlined in the Offer Document, which would add value to the WHQS programme and help deliver the Council's ambition of using the £210 million WHQS investment as a catalyst to Transform Homes, Lives and Communities.
- 2.2 Rowan Place is located within the Twyn Carno ward and is part of the Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) known as Twyn Carno 1.
- 2.3 Rowan Place comprises 82 properties of which 6 are owner occupied and 4 are leasehold.
- 2.4 For many years the area of Rowan Place in which the flats are located has been regarded locally as a 'no go zone' and largely been home to transient single people and families with particular challenges including drug and alcohol issues, criminal records and anti social behaviour issues.
- 2.5 Following the identification of severe damp and external defects to the fabric of the properties in Rowan Place, the Council approved expenditure totalling £4.2m.
- 2.6 The Council also agreed to refurbish the existing void properties to a standard over and above the normal refurbishment of voids programme (to include decoration throughout, skirting boards, new internal doors and architraves etc) and to create a multi agency partnership comprising representatives from Communities First, GAVO, Gwent Police, Drug and Alcohol Services and the ABHB to foster greater collaboration to address the key issues which are prevalent within the area and to help tackle poverty.

- 2.7 The programme underway in Rowan Place has been enhanced by a further £720,000 from the Welsh Government as part of its Vibrant and Viable Places programme which will facilitate enhancements to the environment within Rowan Place.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) is intended to ensure that all local authority and housing association homes are improved and maintained to achieve specified standards.
- 3.2 The Council is committed to ensuring that the WHQS investment transforms not only homes but also lives and communities.
- 3.4 The Council's Local Housing Strategy "People, Property, and Places" has the following aim:
"To provide good quality, well managed houses in communities where people want to live, and offer people housing choices which meet their needs and aspirations."
- 3.5 The programme underway in Rowan Place is coterminous with the aims of the Council's Single Integrated Plan 2013-2017 which aims to 'improve standards of housing and communities, giving appropriate access to services across the county borough' and the recently approved, Caerphilly Poverty Strategy 2015.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 A report on Rowan Place was presented to the CHTG in October 2013 and May 2014. The reports drew attention to various social problems, low demand and long term voids in addition to severe damp and extensive defects to the external fabric of the properties in Rowan Place.
- 4.2 In May 2014 the CHTG agreed to bring forward external works programmed for 2016/17 in parallel with the internal works to commence in 2014/15.
- 4.3 CHTG and the Cabinet Sub Committee also agreed to accept the estimated additional cost associated with undertaking the comprehensive refurbishment of Council homes suffering from severe damp within Rowan Place and to establish a multi agency task group to tackle the social problems prevalent within the area.
- 4.4 In October 2014 tenants were visited following a survey and informed of the works that would be undertaken to their homes.
- 4.5 To date, internal works have been completed to 16 bungalows and 14 flats.
- 4.6 Internal works are ongoing in 9 others with 3 more planned throughout October and 8 due to start in November (completion anticipated in February 2016).
- 4.7 The 9 flats remaining are within blocks which include leaseholders. External surveys have been undertaken on leaseholder properties in order to determine the charge that will result. The leaseholder consultation undertaken by the leaseholder services officer has started with a view to commencing works to leaseholder properties in February 2016 through to May 2016.
- 4.8 Internal works to 7 houses are scheduled for surveying in November.
- 4.9 Surveys to owner occupied properties have been undertaken in order to determine the scope of external works. The cost of external works to owner occupied homes will be funded via the Welsh Government's Vibrant and Viable Places programme.

- 4.10 The majority of external works to the bungalows have been completed. External wall insulation has been completed in 5 blocks of flats and groundworks are on-going to 3. Roof work has started on 6 of the houses.
- 4.11 The site is scheduled for completion by October 2016.
- 4.12 Bats were found nesting within the site hence a bat license was applied for during August 2014 and approved in November 2014. The license permits roofing works to take place only between October and March hence any further work will need to be programmed carefully in order to take account of the license requirements.
- 4.13 7 existing tenants have been permanently transferred from homes awaiting refurbishment to newly refurbished flats.
- 4.14 There are currently 22 voids within the site. This is due to the fact that the Council has chosen not to let properties within Rowan Place until a formal sensitive lettings policy has been adopted.
- 4.15 In previous years, Rowan Place has been plagued by high levels of anti social behaviour, crime and drug and alcohol abuse. As a consequence and for the benefit of existing tenants, the Council proposes to introduce introductory tenancies for new allocations within Rowan Place.
- 4.16 Research has shown that introductory tenancies are most effective when used as part of a range of initiatives rather than as a policy 'tool'. When used as part of an integrated, multi agency approach to support tenants they have helped improve community safety and quality of life by reducing crime, nuisance behaviour and fear of crime'.
- 4.17 Introductory tenancies would give all new tenants a 12 month trial period before they would be eligible to be awarded a secure tenancy. The tenancy could be brought to an end during the introductory period if the tenant fails to adhere to the requirements contained within the appendix attached. They can be brought to an end within the trial period if a Court issues a possession order. This will ensure that anyone behaving inappropriately can be removed from the tenancy quickly.
- 4.18 In practice, the policy will only apply to a limited number of properties. Existing tenants will not be affected and will carry on with their secure tenancy.
- 4.19 Appendix 1 attached will apply only to the two bedroom flats in Rowan Place. The Appendix outlines the circumstances in which a tenancy may or may not be offered.
- 4.20 Caerphilly Homes Allocations Scheme allows for the allocation of families with 1 or 2 children and childless couples. Due to the size of the second bedroom only families with 1 child, or families with access will be considered and to reduce excessive child density in the area, childless couples may take precedence over families with one child.
- 4.21 Any applicant that meets one of the following criteria will be refused a tenancy:
- Is known to have been involved in anti-social behaviour in the last 2 years
 - Is unable to demonstrate an ability to sustain a tenancy for a minimum period of the last 12 months. References may/will be taken up which will include from private landlords/hostels.
 - Has an unspent criminal conviction
 - Has convictions for drug dealing
 - Has been convicted of, or has been held responsible for criminal damage or arson within the last 12 months
 - Has a history of chaotic behaviour
 - Has drug or alcohol related support needs unless on a rehabilitation programme – continuing on the programme will be an additional condition of tenancy

- Has high support needs that may affect their ability to sustain a tenancy, and is not engaging with support. If there are high support needs but support is in place, fully engaging with the support will be an additional condition of tenancy.
- Applicants or members of the household who were former tenants of the council and who have excessive outstanding rent arrears and/or recharges that makes the repayments together with current rent and other charges unaffordable.

- 4.22 To ensure that prospective tenants are not financially disadvantaged they will be required to satisfy an income/expenditure assessment of their affordability of the tenancy.
- 4.23 Where two or more applicants have equal priority, preference will be given to applicants who are working or in training.
- 4.24 The tenancy will become secure after 12 months if there are no breaches.
- 4.25 The eviction procedure will mirror that of the procedure for termination of a demoted tenancy and therefore there will be opportunities for decisions to be reviewed prior to eviction.
- 4.26 The Sensitive Lettings Policy will be reviewed after 12 months and a process developed to underpin delivery. Depending on demand for these properties, there is a potential for increased void periods due to the proposal for sensitive lettings.
- 4.27 An on-going dialogue between the Council, tenants and residents is underway in Rowan Place. Tenants and residents have indicated on numerous occasions that they do not wish to see a return to the situation that prevailed prior to the Council's investment programme in the area whereby anti social behaviour and crime was a common occurrence.
- 4.28 The work underway within Rowan Place and the events that have taken place at the show flat has generated some interest from new and existing tenants located in Rhymney and elsewhere within the county borough. The area housing team have been unable to allocate newly refurbished homes until the sensitive letting policy attached as Appendix 1 is approved.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed in accordance with the Council's Strategic Equality Plan and is attached as Appendix 2 for Information.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications resulting from the report.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

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

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 The views of consultees listed are incorporated within the report.
- 8.2 Informal consultation has been undertaken with tenants and residents within the area who have strongly indicated that they do not wish to see a return to the situation in the area that prevailed before the start of the investment programme.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 The Caerphilly Homes Task Group recommend to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet the adoption of the sensitive lettings policy including introductory tenancies for new tenants in Rowan Place as set out in the Appendix to the report.

10. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 **To help deliver the Council's ambition of using the WHQS programme as a catalyst to transform homes, lives and communities.**

11. STATUTORY POWER

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

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Appendices:
Appendix 1: Rowan Place - Draft Sensitive Lettings Policy
Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment