



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 3RD NOVEMBER 2016

SUBJECT: HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR - COMMUNITIES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide information to Caerphilly Homes Task Group (CHTG) on the work of the Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP) and the subsequent service improvements introduced as a result.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The HIP is a partnership between tenants and Caerphilly Homes working together to improve the effectiveness of housing services. The HIP's methodology is to use real tenant experiences to understand what matters to our tenants when they use our services.
- 2.2 Over the last year, the HIP has undertaken two service reviews covering the Landlord Consent Service and the Tenant Support Service. Two Staff Service handbooks have been produced by the HIP, which sets out the key outcomes that our tenants expect from each service area.
- 2.3 The CHTG requested an update report on the HIP on 31 March 2016. This report provides CHTG with information on the changes that have been introduced to the Landlord Consent Service and the Tenant Support Service as a result of the work of the HIP.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, list 7 goals that provide a shared vision for public bodies to work towards. The goal that most closely links with Tenant Participation is "*A Wales of cohesive communities - attractive, viable, safe and well connected communities*".
- 3.2 Tenant Involvement also links with the current Local Housing Strategy Aim 6:
"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 2010 'Improving Lives and Communities' emphasises the need to:
"Give tenants a clear voice in decisions that affect them" and that "services should reflect the needs of those who use them, not the needs of the organisations who deliver them"
- 3.4 The Tenant Participation Strategy Purpose is "To have tenant driven and continually improving services" and Objective 1 states "*we will understand the needs of our current and future tenants*".

4. THE REPORT

• What is the HIP and what does it do?

4.1 The Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP) was established in late 2014 and currently has 11 tenant members. The aim of the HIP is to work with Caerphilly Homes to improve housing services and take an independent view of service delivery from the tenant/leaseholder perspective.

4.2 The work of the HIP is focussed on the real experiences of actual tenants/leaseholders who request and receive services from Caerphilly Homes. In partnership with Caerphilly Homes, the HIP identifies a service area for review. In order to facilitate the work of the HIP staff gather evidence of actual service requests. This can include letters, emails, telephone calls or face to face requests. All information is anonymised and transcribed before being presented to the HIP. The HIP also receives evidence of how Caerphilly Homes responded to service requests and how the service was delivered. This approach provides the HIP with access to the experiences of the wider tenant population, which enables the HIP to base its work and outcomes on a wide range of evidence and not their own experience of accessing our services.

4.3 The HIP members review the evidence available to them and seek to understand what really matters to tenants/leaseholders at each point of service delivery. The aim is to provide an outcome that Caerphilly Homes can use to improve the way services are delivered. The work of the HIP aims to provide valuable information that can help Officers make our services more efficient and effective by understanding what matters to tenants. This enables Officers to focus their work on:

- what needs to be done to deliver what tenants want and value from a service and;
- how we can design the way we work to deliver that service and cut down on unnecessary and inefficient costs, for example; repeat telephone calls.

• What does the HIP produce as a result of its work?

4.4 The outputs generated by the HIP are Staff Service Handbooks identifying key areas of the service that are of importance to tenants. A Handbook is produced for each service area reviewed by the HIP and these Handbooks (the HIP reports) are used as a service improvement tool for Service Managers. Each Handbook identifies examples of excellent customer service and its structure identifies the:

- Purpose of the Service
- Outcomes tenants expect from the Service
- Experience tenants expect to receive and;
- Measures that are important to tenants

• What has the HIP done so far?

4.5 Since commencing its work in April 2015, the HIP has undertaken two service reviews. The first service review was a pilot to 'test' the HIP methodology and covered the Landlord Consent Service. Landlord Consent is the process whereby Caerphilly Homes responds to requests by tenants, leaseholders or former tenants (who have purchased their home through the Right-to-Buy), who wish to make improvements to their homes. On completion of the pilot, a review was carried out to understand how successful it had been and this information was presented to Senior Managers Briefing (SMB) in September 2015.

4.6 Following the presentation to SMB, the Rents Manager requested the help of the HIP to work with the Tenancy Support Team to help them understand what tenants want and value from this service. The Tenancy Support Service works with our tenants to help them sustain their tenancies by ensuring they maximize the income they are entitled to and provide advice and

signposting to other support agencies. They also provide assistance in accessing other services, such as completion of Discretionary Assistance Fund applications (DAF), for white goods. It is understood that the HIP can assist to improve the effectiveness of already successful services through its approach of using real evidence from actual tenants. The HIP provides a 'fresh pair of eyes' and the insight it provides can empower our service delivery teams in their quest for continuous improvement. The review of the Tenancy Support Service was completed in April 2016. The HIP is now on its third service review covering Income Recovery and this is due to be completed by the end of November 2016.

- 4.7 Two Staff Service Handbooks have been produced by the HIP setting out the key outcomes that our tenants expect from both service areas reviewed. Both Handbooks have been positively received by Managers and the staff responsible for the delivery of these two services on a day to day basis (See Appendix 1 for copies of the Handbooks).
- 4.8 The Service Managers responsible for providing Landlords Consent and Tenancy Support service attended a HIP feedback session in September 2016 to update HIP members on what changes have been introduced to our processes as a result of the Handbooks. A workshop session was also held in September 2016 at the Tenant Information Exchange to highlight the work of the HIP and the changes to services that have been introduced as a result. In order to advise all tenants on the changes to the services and highlight the work of the HIP, an article will be included in the next tenant newsletter.

- **How has Caerphilly Homes used the Handbooks to improve services?**

- 4.9 Managers and staff responsible for the day to day delivery of both services have considered the Handbooks. Listed below are the changes that have been made to procedures as a result of the HIP's work and the benefit they will bring to tenants and staff:

Landlord Consent Service:

- 4.10 Previously tenants, leaseholders and former tenants were only able to make a request for Landlord consent in writing. As a result of the evidence presented to the HIP requests can now be made through the communication channel of their choice - letter, email, telephone or face to face. A pro-forma has been designed (for staff use) in order to record and facilitate a verbal request. When the request is made by telephone or visit to a Housing office, the Officer responsible for processing Landlord Consent will record the details on the pro forma and the appropriate survey questions (that were previously sent out in the post) are asked over the telephone or direct to the tenant (at the first point of contact). When a request is made face to face on site, the details will be taken by the visiting Officer. On return to the office the details will be passed to the responsible Officer who will ensure the tenant is contacted (by telephone if possible) in order for the survey questions to be asked. Email requests are now also responded to via the same method with the relevant information and survey questions attached (previously a letter would have been sent in response to an email request). These changes will reduce the timescales involved in the process which will allow a decision to be reached and notification given much earlier.
- 4.11 If a verbal request is made for landlord consent and the Officer identifies a pre inspection is required before consent can be granted, an appointment will now be made there and then for a Surveyor to visit. If no inspection is required, a confirmation letter or email will be sent providing the details of the request and the conditions with which the tenant, leaseholder or former tenant has to comply.
- 4.12 Overall, the introduction of verbal requests will make it easier for tenants, leaseholders and former tenants to access the Landlord consent service, especially for those who may not be able (for whatever reason) to make a request in writing. Also as the process is now easier, it is likely that those who may have been 'put off' submitting a request in writing will no longer carry out unauthorised changes to their home. Verbal requests will also facilitate the recording of accurate information and provide the opportunity for staff to ask additional questions at the first point of contact (rather than send a letter out if the submitted forms were incomplete or more information was required).

- 4.13 Timescales have now been introduced to advise tenants of the length of time it will take for a decision to be reached. The HIP evidence showed that Officers were being contacted to find out when to expect a visit from a Surveyor or to know when their request would be answered. Confirmation of timescales and offering appointment times (when a Surveyor is needed) will provide tenants, leaseholders and former tenants with the information they want to know at the first point of contact. It is expected that this will now reduce the number of calls taken by Housing staff asking 'when someone would call' or 'when will I hear about my request?'.
- 4.14 For those who submit requests in writing, all standard letters have been updated to provide information on the new timescales and advise 'what happens next'.
- 4.15 Previously there was no way to measure satisfaction levels on the Landlord Consent service. A satisfaction survey is currently being designed and the Tenant Measures identified by the HIP will be included. This will provide more information to empower the teams to make further improvements to the service.
- 4.16 The work of the HIP on the Landlords Consent Service is a good example of the partnership between tenants and staff working together to improve the customer experience.

Tenancy Support Service:

- 4.17 Working together the following seven service improvements have been implemented:
- 4.18 The HIP evidence showed that tenants wanted reassurance and information on what the Tenant Support Officer's (TSO) visit was all about and how it would help them. In order to reassure and prepare tenants for the TSO visit, the Officer booking the TSO appointment now clearly explains to the tenant, what the TSO can help with and provide information on what the tenant can do to prepare for the visit eg; paperwork in relation to any outstanding debts, energy bills etc. If the Tenancy Support Team is unable to contact the tenant by telephone a letter is sent out with the appointment date. As a result of information from the HIP, these letters have been amended to also include the same information to ensure that as much reassurance and preparation can be given to tenants in advance of the visit.
- 4.19 Appointment reminders of the TSO visit are now provided by text, letter or via telephone conversations. Previously if the Team was unable to speak to the tenant directly, answerphone messages were left on mobile phones. The evidence presented to the HIP identified that some tenants did not access the messages as some providers charge to retrieve messages. This new practice has already cut down on the number of missed visits. This means we are able to help the tenant sooner and the TSO is not wasting time on no access calls.
- 4.20 When the appointment is booked, the name of the TSO is now given. In the case of tenants who had accessed the service previously, the HIP identified that tenants valued the assurance provided by knowing a familiar face would be visiting them and that the person calling already had understanding and information on their circumstances. Also it became apparent that tenants valued knowing whether the TSO visiting would be male or female. Tenants are now asked if they have a preference over who visits.
- 4.21 The evidence identified that tenants valued achievable appointment times (specific or a timeframe). Due to the nature of the TSO's work, it is impossible to know how long each visit will take so specific appointment times are difficult to achieve. However, the Manager and staff involved in delivering the service have introduced appointment 'slots' for visits and an Officer will ring the tenant to advise them when the TSO is on their way.
- 4.22 An Action sheet with useful telephone numbers is now left with the tenant. The HIP identified that tenants valued a summary of what was discussed during the visit and information on what will happen next. Often the tenant discusses numerous issues with the TSO, this acts a reminder for the tenant if they need to attend for example, a CAB appointment or need to

contact the DWP. It also clarifies what actions the TSO has taken or will take as a result of the visit.

- 4.23 The HIP identified tenants valued knowing that they could contact the TSO at anytime in the future. A contact card is already left after each visit with the TSO contact details and this practice will continue.
- 4.24 A tenant satisfaction survey was already in place in relation to the Tenancy Support Service. The service Manager on receiving the Handbook said it *“turned their original survey questions upside down”*. The Satisfaction survey has been completely re-written to measure satisfaction based on what the HIP has identified as what tenants want & value. This will provide more information to empower the Team to make further improvements to the service in the future.
- 4.25 Officers of the TSO Team have valued the evidence provided by the HIP which has helped them identify and implement these service improvements.

- **The Next Steps**

- 4.26 The HIP will continue to work with Caerphilly Homes to identify other service areas where its approach can be applied and is currently progressing a review of the Income Recovery Service. The HIP has played a role in helping Caerphilly Homes make already good services better.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This is an information report only. As a result there are no equalities implications and no requirements to complete an Equalities Impact Assessment.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 As with other tenant participation initiatives, any activities associated with the HIP are accommodated within the existing Tenant Participation budget.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct personnel implications. The HIP will be supported through the Tenant & Community Involvement Team and when required other existing staff resources (to gather evidence).

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 The views of consultees listed have been incorporated/reflected within the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 This report is for information only.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To keep members of the CHTG updated on tenant participation activities.

Author: Elizabeth Bayliss - Tenant Participation Officer
Consultees: Councillor David Poole - Cabinet Member for Housing
Christina Harray - Corporate Director Communities
Shaun Couzens - Chief Housing Officer
Marcus Lloyd - Deputy Head of Programmes
Fiona Wilkins - Public Sector Housing Manager
Mandy Betts - Tenant & Community Involvement Manager
Gail Taylor - Tenant Participation Officer
Debbie Bishop - Area Housing Manager (Upper Rhymney Valley)
Sandra Isaacs - Rents Manager
Kelsey Watkins - Communications & Tenant Engagement Officer

Background Papers:

CHTG Reports - March 2014 & September 2014 on the introduction of the HIP

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Landlord Consent & Tenancy Support service handbooks

Landlord Consent Handbook

The purpose of the Landlord Consent service is:-



“to enable a tenant or leaseholder to gain approval to make certain changes to their home”

This handbook has been developed by the Housing Improvement Partnership and informed by the evidence of real service requests received by Caerphilly Homes

Outcomes

“The outcomes we expect from the landlord consent service”

Request

- I want you to understand what I am asking for
- I want to be treated as an individual

Confirm

- I want to be told what will happen next and how long it will take

Deliver

- I want a clear answer from you about your decision and the reasons for your decision
- I want to know what the next steps are

After Care

- I want to know how to appeal your decision if I am not happy with the outcome & I want to know what conditions I must comply with if you approve my request
- I want any works inspected and signed off promptly

Experience

“The experience we expect from the landlord consent service”

Request

- I want to be able to make my request through the communication channel of my choice (by phone, email, letter, face to face)
- I want you to listen to my request
- I want to be spoken to in a polite and professional manner
- I want the person I contact to provide their name
- I need to feel that the Council understands my individual circumstances
- I need to feel that my request has been understood and will be acted upon
- Throughout the whole process I want you to use language I understand
- I want you to listen to my concerns

Confirm

- I want you to make me feel you understand my request
- I want you to tell me what you are going to do next (clear explanation)
- I want you to reassure me that you will take my individual circumstances into account
- I want you to provide me with any information I need to make the process run smoothly
- Tell me how long I will have to wait before I hear from you (timescales)
- I want you to be flexible
- I want you to keep me informed if there is a delay
- I want to respond in the communication channel of my choice
- I want you to allow me to provide information in the media of my choice

Deliver

- I want you to inform me of your decision promptly
- I want to be given a clear explanation of the reasons for your decision
- I want to be given a clear explanation of any conditions I must comply with
- I want you to respond in the communication channel of my choice
- I want to understand what I can do if I am not happy with your decision

After Care

- I want you to advise me what I can do to appeal the decision if I am not happy
- If you are sending a surveyor, I want you to tell me when they are coming to inspect the work done to my home – at a time that suits me (and be punctual)
- I want the Council to learn from my experience by asking me how well you did

Tenant Measures

“The measures that are important to us”

Request

- Was it easy to contact Caerphilly Homes to make your request?

Confirm

- Are you happy with the information you were given (did the first contact count)?

Deliver


- Did we provide you with the reason/explanation at the time we said we would?
- Did we clearly explain to you the reason for our decision?

After Care

- How happy are you with the overall experience?

Tenant Support Service Handbook

The purpose of the Tenant Support service is:-



**“to provide practical support,
advice and guidance to help people
sustain their tenancies”**

This handbook has been developed by the Housing Improvement Partnership and informed by the evidence of real service requests received by Caerphilly Homes

Outcomes

“The outcomes we expect from the tenant support service”

Request

- I want to be confident that you understand my specific & wider circumstances
- I want to be treated as an individual
- I want to know who to contact if I need help

Confirm

- I want to know who is visiting me, when they are visiting and have their contact details
- I want to know how I can prepare for the visit
- I want to be reassured that you can help me
- I want you to outline what help I need

Deliver

- I want to be given the advice and support I need (e.g; forms completed)
- I want to be feel more secure as a result of your visit (reassured)
- I want to know what is going to happen after your visit
- I want you to help me apply for any additional income/assistance to which I am entitled

After Care

- I want you to follow up/act on any outcomes from the visit (keep me updated)
- I want the TSO to refer or signpost me (to others who can help me)
- I want you to tell me how I get help or guidance from other people/organisations
- I want to know who to contact if I need further help or support
- I want you to maintain an ongoing relationship with me as required

Experience

“The experience we expect from the tenant support service”

Request

When I contact you:

- I want the person I contact to provide their name
- I need to feel that the Council understands my individual and wider circumstances
- I need to feel that my request has been understood and will be acted upon
- Throughout the whole process I want you to use language I understand
- I want you to tell me how you maybe able to help (reassure me)
- I want you to explain what will happen next (prepare me)
- I want you to confirm your contact details
- I want you to be sensitive to my circumstances

When you contact me:

- I want the person who contacts me to provide their name, tell me where you are from and why you are calling
- I need to feel that the Council understands my individual and wider circumstances
- I need to feel that my request has been understood and will be acted upon
- Throughout the whole process I want you to use language I understand
- I want you to tell me how you maybe able to help (reassure me)
- I want you to explain what will happen next (prepare me)
- I want you to confirm your contact details
- I want you to be sensitive to my circumstances

Confirm

- I want you to offer me a choice of achievable appointment times (specific or a timeframe)
- I want you to tell me who is visiting me
- I want you to listen to me if I have a preference over who visits
- I want you to provide me with the information I need to prepare for your visit
- I want you to confirm the visit (appointment) through the communication channel of my choice (by phone, email, letter, face to face - not an answerphone message)
- I want you to keep me informed if there is a delay
- I want you to reassure me

<p>Deliver</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I need to feel that the Council understands my individual and wider circumstances (not just the reason for your visit) ▪ I want you to be sensitive to my circumstances ▪ I want you to tell me how you maybe able to help me and summarise what will happen next ▪ I want you prioritise what needs to be done during your visit (if more than one issue to address) ▪ I want you to help me with difficult paperwork ▪ I want you to leave your contact details (reassure me)
<p>After Care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I want you to keep me updated of progress on what occurred during the meeting ▪ I want to know you are there if I need you again at anytime (for any reason)

Tenant Measures

“The measures that are important to us”

<p>Request</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How easy was it to contact the Tenant Support Service? ▪ Was it clear why the Council contacted you?
<p>Confirm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did you know what was going to happen, how to prepare for your visit and timescales?
<p>Deliver</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did we respond well you your needs? Eg: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Understanding your circumstances/needs ○ Prioritising ○ Providing solutions ▪ Did we help?
<p>After Care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How happy are you with the overall experience of the service? ▪ Was it easy to engage with the Tenant Support Service?

