



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
(SIRHOWY ROOM) ON THURSDAY, 3RD NOVEMBER 2016 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

E. Forehead – Chair
A. Lewis – Vice Chair

Task Group Members:

Mrs Y. Bryant, Mrs B. Jones, Mrs S. Jones, C. Mann, D. Moore, J. Moore and D.V. Poole.

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), M. Betts (Tenant and Community Involvement Manager), S. Isaacs (Rents Manager) F. Wilkins (Public Sector Housing Manager) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from L. Ackerman, C. Davies and K. James.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mrs Y. Bryant, Mrs B. Jones, Mrs S. Jones, Miss A. Lewis, Mrs D. Moore and Mr J. Moore as Council Tenants declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in all agenda items.

3. MINUTES – 7TH SEPTEMBER 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 7th September 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

MATTERS ARISING

Annual Review of the Tenancy Review Panel (Agenda Item 5)

Arising from the minute, a Tenant Representative raised concerns in relation to the number of tenants taken to court, for which evictions were actually upheld. It was noted that less than half of the tenants taken to court for eviction were evicted and therefore the criteria was questioned. Particular concerns were raised in relation to an eviction notice being served on a tenant for garden maintenance, which was not upheld.

In addition, discussions took place around rent arrears and concerns were raised around the sanctioning benefits and its impact on rent arrears.

4. HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP

Miss A. Lewis, Caerphilly Homes Task Group Member called the information item forward for discussion at the meeting.

The report informed the Caerphilly Homes Task Group (Task Group) of the work of the Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP) and the subsequent service improvements introduced as a result.

The Task Group were advised that 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 Caerphilly tenants.

It was noted that 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 tenants expect from each service area.

In addition, Officers provided details of the significant impact the HIP has had on the Rents Section, which included making improvements to Customer Service Satisfaction Surveys, notifying the tenant of which Member of staff would be visiting them and offering them a preference at point of booking of a male or female officer to visit,, providing the tenant with more information on the work of the TSO and their contact information and a follow up sheet detailing the actions agreed at each visit. It was also noted that the HIP is currently working with the Income Recovery Section the feedback of which is eagerly awaited.

The Task Group discussed the HIP and queried the length of time taken for the report to be presented to the Task Group. It was noted that, whilst the report was requested in March, the report needed to be fitted into the forward work programme and also as the reviews were not concluded, it was felt to be more appropriate for a report to be presented following the completion of a review and once the recommended improvements had been implemented.

A Tenants Representative sought further information on the Landlord Handbook, Tenant Measures and future reviews. Officers explained that the Handbook has been designed for staff and is based on "the perfect service" and what tenants could expect from such a service. The tenants measures are the guidelines by which the follow up tenant satisfaction surveys are conducted. In addition, it was noted that there is currently no review scheduled following the completion of the Income Recovery Section, and it was explained that Managers and the HIP would work together to identify the next service area.

Upon further discussion, it was queried whether tenants within the HIP were ready to lead to reviews. It was noted that when the HIP was originally established, an independent facilitator was sourced to assist with the first reviews. For the current review, it was noted that the HIP felt more confident to utilise staff from within the Community Involvement Teams, where necessary.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group thanked the Officers for the report and noted its content.

5. COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS – CAERPHILLY HOMES

Ms A. Lewis, Caerphilly Homes Task Group Member called the information item forward for discussion at the meeting.

The report was considered by the Caerphilly Homes Task Group (CHTG) on 3rd November 2016 and provided details of contacts, in relation to complaints and representations received by the Authority's Housing Customer Services Section, from 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016.

The Task Group were advised that 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. The corporate complaints procedure places an emphasis on learning from complaints. There have been examples of complaints which have led to changes in policies and procedures and these are explained in the report.

It was noted that in addition to recording Stage 1, Stage 2 and Ombudsman complaints, Caerphilly Homes Customer Services Section also records any service requests received directly by the Customer Services Section and any housing related correspondence received by the Chief Executive. Between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016 the Customer Services Section of Caerphilly Homes recorded a total of 559 contacts from the public and/or their representative. This is in comparison with 520 between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015.

CHTG noted that records are also kept of any praise or thanks received by Caerphilly Homes. In 2015/16 there were 78 recorded. This is in comparison with 44 for 2014/15.

The Task Group discussed the report and it was felt that the complaints process was too long. Officers explained that complaints are dealt with within timescales, which are outlined within the Corporate Complaints Policy. In the case of service requests, these are dealt with initially by the service.

CHTG, in noting the increase in complaints between 2014/2015 and 2015/2016, sought further information on the increase. Officers highlighted that there have been no significant trends identified which could pin-point the reason for the increase, however, work has been conducted to make tenants more aware of the Complaints Procedure, which could be the reason for the increase.

The number of complaints made by advocates were discussed and the complexity of the Complaints process, and the Task Group sought clarification on the reason for the number of complaints made by advocates. Officers highlighted that there is no clear reason, and it would depend on the type of advocate, many tenants may prefer to contact their local Councillor or MP in order to place the complaint on their behalf as the first point of contact.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that report be noted and forwarded to Policy and Resources Scrutiny for their consideration.

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

The following requests were received:-

1. A. Lewis requested an update report on the implementation, impact and progress of the Common Allocations Register. Officers agreed that a report would be provided on the first quarter, allowing for bedding-in issues etc.
2. In addition, the Task Group highlighted that there has not been a request for representation at Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee in some time, Officers agreed to look into this and provide the Task Group with details.

The meeting closed at 5.47pm

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 15th December 2016.

CHAIR