



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
(SIRHOWY ROOM) ON THURSDAY, 15TH DECEMBER 2016 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Ms J. Gale, Mrs B. Jones, C.P. Mann, D.V. Poole

Tenant Representatives:

Mr C. Davies, Mrs S. Jones, Mrs D. Moore, Mr J. Moore

Officers:

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), M. Lloyd (Deputy Head of Programmes), A. Hiscox (Older Persons Housing Manager), R. Lewis (Systems and Performance Manager), F. Wilkins (Public Sector Housing Manager) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L. Ackerman, Miss E. Forehead (Chair), K. James, and Tenant Representatives Mrs Y. Bryant and Ms A. Lewis (Vice-Chair).

In the absence of Councillor E. Forehead and Ms A. Lewis, Councillor J. Gale was moved to the Chair.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs B. Jones and Tenant Representatives Mrs S. Jones, Mrs D. Moore and Mr J. Moore declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in all agenda items as Council Tenants.

3. MINUTES - 3RD NOVEMBER 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd November 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. MATTERS ARISING

A Tenant Representative referred to discussions at the previous Task Group meeting, where it had been noted that there had not been a request for representation at the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee for some time. Officers confirmed that the matter had been

raised with the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee and that representatives from the Task Group would be invited to attend such meetings when there is a relevant item on the agenda.

5. SHELTERED HOUSING COMMUNICATIONS

Although not present, it was noted that Miss A. Lewis (Caerphilly Homes Task Group Member) had requested the information item be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

The report updated the Task Group on the progress to date in communicating to residents the Council's plans to complete the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) investment programme in the sheltered housing schemes.

Members were reminded that WHQS works are planned for 28 schemes over the next three years. A further 6 schemes have been identified for possible remodelling and will be considered separately. 3 out of the 11 schemes in the first year of the programme have already had their internal works completed and will be progressed separately by the WHQS Team for the remaining external and environmental works. The tenants will be contacted directly by the WHQS Team for updates and consultation. For the remaining 8 schemes, surveys commenced in October 2016, which are currently in advance of their proposed dates, and a more accurate work profile will be established for each scheme, prior to the intended commencement of works in April 2017.

A local press release to raise general awareness amongst tenants of this intended work has been circulated, and all sheltered housing tenants have been updated by letter (examples appended to the report) to confirm the current proposals for their scheme. The WHQS and management team have met tenants at those schemes, where surveys are imminent and where work is planned to start in 2017/18, to introduce themselves and advise on what works are being considered in their homes. Tenants also have the opportunity to raise any related questions at these meetings, with a list of frequently asked questions appended to the report. 5 scheme meetings have already been completed with the remaining 3 meetings scheduled to take place within the next 3 months. There will be further opportunities for residents to consider the programme and any concerns they may have as the work programme progresses.

For those schemes being considered in 2018/19 and 2019/20, tenants are being updated through the quarterly tenant scheme meetings they currently have with members of the Older Persons Housing Team. It is considered too early in the process to provide detailed updates or introductions to staff for tenants at these stages.

Discussion took place regarding the remaining WHQS/Housing Management scheme meeting dates, and the future of the 6 sheltered housing schemes identified for possible remodelling. Officers confirmed that the remaining meeting dates for 2016/17 have been placed on the Caerphilly Homes noticeboard in each relevant sheltered housing scheme and reminders will be sent to tenants nearer the date. It was also explained that feasibility studies will be undertaken regarding the 6 schemes identified for possible remodelling and that tenants will be kept informed as developments move forward. A mixture of views regarding potential works have been received to date. These are likely to take place post-2020 if the remodelling works are approved.

In response to a Tenant Representative query, Officers confirmed that although communal areas do not fall under the remit of the WHQS programme (as they are public and not domestic areas), subject to survey outcomes, some work may be carried out on these areas as part of the programme of works. Officers also explained that each sheltered housing scheme would be examined on an individual basis to determine if facilities such as storage sheds, mobility scooter storage and car parking can be provided or improved, and that further discussion will take place with residents regarding works to communal areas.

Concerns were raised regarding the costs of undertaking WHQS to all schemes, and the impact if the survey outcomes indicate that a significant increased expenditure is required. It was explained that the Council has borrowing contingencies in place for such an eventuality.

A query was received regarding the length of time taken to progress the WHQS programme across sheltered housing schemes and it was suggested that there was a lack of tenant confidence regarding the works. It was explained that a Cabinet decision to progress the matter had only recently been taken, with alternatives being examined prior to that time. The Task Group were also advised of the complexities involved in applying the WHQS to sheltered housing schemes, given the split between standard WHQS investment works and possible remodelling options. It was stressed to the Task Group that consideration of the schemes identified for possible remodelling is at a very early stage and that all factors need to be examined before a decision is made on their future.

It was suggested by a Tenant Representative that an Older Persons Group could be set up, consisting of a representative from each sheltered housing complex and allowing an independent tenant voice to be fed into other engagement groups. Officers reminded the Task Group that engagement and consultation with tenants is already being carried out on a scheme by scheme basis. It was agreed that Officers would discuss the specifics of this suggestion with the Tenant Representative following the meeting.

A Member referred to the list of frequently asked questions appended to the report and Officers explained that they were currently compiling a list of responses, which would be published in a future edition of the Caerphilly Homes newsletter.

Having fully considered and discussed the report, the Caerphilly Homes Task Group noted its contents.

6. WHQS PROGRESS REPORT APRIL 2016-SEPTEMBER 2016 (HALF YEAR)

Although not present, it was noted that Miss A. Lewis (Caerphilly Homes Task Group Member) had requested the information item be brought forward for discussion at the meeting.

The report provided an overview of the performance of the WHQS Team from April 2016-September 2016 and details of the capital expenditure programme for 2016-17 for WHQS works. Officers summarised the arrangements that have been put in place to monitor and manage the performance of the WHQS programme for 2016/17, which is carried out via monthly formal WHQS Delivery Team Management Group meetings, the Caerphilly Homes Project Board, and is overseen by the Repairs and Improvements Working Group.

The Task Group noted a significant increase in the internal works survey completion rate during 2016/17 (89.9%) compared to the previous year (70.1%). The internal works survey completion rate is now approaching 60 properties per week, which is well above the rate of works completions.

The current completion rate for internal WHQS works is approaching 40 properties per week, and it is likely that at least 75.5% of the 2016-17 internal works programme will be completed by the end of the financial year based on a straight line projection. The WHQS Team also completed a significant number of internal works against the previous year's programme (2015/16). It was explained that this has resulted in slippage for the current year (currently 125 properties), and so the weekly completions rate will need to increase in order to erode this backlog.

Officers tabled further information which detailed the 2016/17 programme weekly completion rates and annual targets for internal and external works against each area and contractor. This information also included the forward programme targets that have been set for each contractor for the years 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20.

Discussion took place regarding the achievability of the internal works programme by 2020, with it explained that targets have not been set for outside contractors for 2019/20 as it is anticipated that they will complete all internal works before that time. Officers outlined the measures that are in place to deal with underperforming contractors, including being made accountable to the Caerphilly Homes Project Board and the monitoring of their work output against stringent performance targets over a set period. The Task Group were also advised of the procurement provisions that are in place to deal with underperforming contractors, and were reminded of the relatively small percentage of complaints received in respect of the standard of works, given the scale of the WHQS programme across the county borough.

Officers explained that a spike in weekly survey completions in June 2016 had occurred via a combination of staff training and progression of a backlog of survey works. It was noted that the WHQS Team have surveyed 23.8% of the 2017/18 programme and will possibly begin to examine the 2018/19 programme in January/February 2017. Discussion took place regarding the completion targets for each internal works component (such as kitchens and bathrooms) and Officers explained that these are set at a reasonable and realistic level in line with WG guidelines.

The Task Group were also updated on progress in respect of the WHQS external works programme for 2016/17. This includes work on 2,218 properties which will be carried out by outside contractors and represents a 25% increase on last year's programme (1,780 properties). Surveying of the WHQS external works programme for 2016/17 is currently 80.3% complete and 18.5% of the properties within the 2017/18 external works programme have also been surveyed. The WHQS Team has therefore made significant progress to increase the external works survey completion rate. It was explained that the external works programme presents more of a challenge in meeting the 2020 target as some contracts have yet to be implemented, although contingencies are in place to meet this target.

The surveys now allow for an analysis of the nature of the works being undertaken in the 2016/17 programme (10 property elements in total). Details of these were included in the report, together with the percentage of works undertaken, acceptable fails under the WHQS, and works achieved previously (i.e. already compliant with the WHQS). The survey process was discussed by the Task Group, and a Tenant Representative queried the criteria for external works that had been applied to some elements of their home, with it agreed that they would discuss the matter with Officers following the meeting.

The Task Group were updated on tenant satisfaction levels for the internal works programme and compliance with service standards for internal works contracts. Returned surveys to date reveal that the overall satisfaction level for internal works is 93% and that the Council is achieving 88% of the standards measured within the Charter for Trust document. Both key measures have improved on last year's results (86% satisfaction and 83% standards met). An external works satisfaction survey has been prepared but not yet implemented.

Officers also summarised details of the capital expenditure programme for 2016-17 for WHQS works. The WHQS budget for 2016/17 was set at £38.6m and the total expenditure on the WHQS capital programme for the first 6 months of 2016/17 was £12.5m (32% of the total budget). Full details of expenditure against each category of works were outlined within the report.

Officers explained that work is ongoing to establish an indicative average cost/rate per property for internal works which will assist with budget monitoring and financial forecasts. As full works on all 4 key components in a typical property are not required on all remaining properties within the programme, it has been necessary to reduce the average rate to reflect

this and to allow for an element of partial works, previously achieved and acceptable fails. This exercise has been carried out for the Lower Rhymney Valley external contractors (internal works) and has resulted in £1m in reduced commitments for 2016/17 contracts. The Task Group were advised that this saving will remain in the Housing Revenue Account balances to cover existing commitments and funding contingencies moving forward.

The Council's Business Plan currently incorporates the Savills costings for the remainder of the programme to 2019/20, but now needs to be replaced with revised averages to give a more accurate financial position and to confirm the level of funding required, ensuring that the borrowing cap is not breached. A revised programme is also necessary to incorporate any changes necessary to ensure the WHQS completion date is met. Funding for the 2016/17 programme will be met from the Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) and revenue contributions from the HRA. No borrowing has been required to fund the WHQS spend to date. Borrowing is expected to take place in 2017/18 which will be confirmed when the slippage has been identified from 2016/17 and the Business Plan is updated with the revised average costs. The programme will also need to be re-profiled to account for any work that will now be carried out after 2019/20 (such as remodelling).

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group noted the contents of the report.

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

There were no requests received at the meeting.

Discussion took place regarding the feasibility of moving the start time of future meetings to 5.30 p.m. Officers confirmed that arrangements would be made to progress this request accordingly.

Members placed on record their appreciation to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group and Officers for their efforts during 2016, and wished everyone the compliments of the season.

The meeting closed at 6.32 p.m.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 16th February 2017.

CHAIR