



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18TH JULY 2017

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF HOUSING SERVICE CHARGES

**REPORT BY: ACTING DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES AND SECTION 151
OFFICER**

- 1.1 The report, which was provided to Caerphilly Homes Task Group (The Task Group) on 6th July 2017, sought the view of the Task Group on the review of how service charges are collected within Sheltered Housing and the need to review service charges for General Needs accommodation, prior to its presentation to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.
- 1.2 The Task Group noted that the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 imposed a new duty for local authorities to comply with standards for housing quality, rents and service charges. Local Authorities are required to review the way in which charges for services are claimed to ensure that tenants are only charged for services that they receive. Detailed guidance has not been provided but it is required that service charges fairly reflect costs incurred and be transparent with a detailed breakdown provided to tenants so they can see what they are paying for.
- 1.3 The Authority currently recovers its costs for services it provides to tenants in sheltered housing schemes by smoothing the cost of these services between all tenants within all of the schemes. This is contrary to Welsh Government Policy. It is proposed that, in future, the Authority recovers from tenants the actual cost of providing services in their individual scheme, based on the calculated cost of providing the services in the previous financial year.
- 1.4 Most general needs service charges are not currently de-pooled and will not be considered in detail within this report, however, in order to comply with Welsh Government policy, a further report proposing the de-pooling of service charges for general needs tenants will be required.
- 1.5 The Task Group thanked the Officers for the report and raised queries in relation to the impact on tenants within Sheltered Housing Schemes and support for tenants. Officers explained that there may be a financial impact on some tenants, dependent on the services provided within that particular complex; however a cap would be applied for a 2 year period, which would be subject to review. Meetings have been conducted with tenants at all sheltered schemes to consult on the process, and further consultation and support would be provided, for example through various communications and Income Maximisation assessments, should tenants find affordability an issue. Officers re-iterated that, with the introduction of Universal Credits and the proposal to change funding mechanisms for supported accommodation, the proposal to provide a detailed breakdown of service charges will also enable the Authority to provide detailed evidence on actual costs of services received, thus assisting tenants to make successful claims for financial support.
- 1.6 Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report: -

- (i) the proposal to charge tenants of sheltered housing schemes the actual costs of providing them with services per scheme be approved;
- (ii) the proposal to introduce transitional arrangements for two years, prior to review, and to cap service charges in line with the rent policy during the transitional period be approved.

1.7 The Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider the report and comments from the CHTG Prior to consideration by Cabinet.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Report to Caerphilly Homes Task Group – 6th July 2017