



## **CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH  
(SIRHOWY ROOM) ON THURSDAY 3RD JULY 2014 AT 5:00 PM**

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PRESENT:

Ms. A. Lewis - Chair  
Mrs D. Price - Vice Chair

### **Task Group Members:**

C. Davies, G. Henderson, K. James, G. Jones, Mrs S. Jones, Ms. A. Lewis,  
Mrs A. McConnell, C.P. Mann and J. Moore

Officers: N. Scammel (Acting Corporate Director and Section 151 Officer), P. Davy (Head of Programmes), S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), L. Allen (Principal Accountant, Environment Finance Group), R. Lewis (Systems and Performance Manager) and C. Evans (Democratic Services Officer), M. Betts (Community Participation Officer), D. Bishop (Area Housing Manager), P. Smythe (Housing Repair Operation Manager)

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Miss L. Ackerman and Mrs B. Jones.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Ms. A. Lewis, Mr C. Davies, Mrs G. Henderson, Mrs S. Jones, Mrs A. McConnell and Mr J. Moore as Council Tenants declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in all agenda items.

### **3. MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd May 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **4. REVISED BUSINESS PLAN FOR THE DELIVERY OF THE WHQS (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD) BY 2019/20.**

The report advised Members of a revised Business Plan in respect of the delivery of the WHQS programme, which required Council approval for the HRA (Housing Revenue Account) to prudentially borrow up to £55 m.

Members noted that on 11th October 2011, Council approved the Council's retention Business Plan that required £61.3m prudential borrowing to achieve the WHQS by 2019/20. This borrowing comprised £22 m relating to General Fund and £39.3 m to the HRA. The Plan was submitted to Welsh Government (WG) and endorsed.

This report outlined the need to change the profile of this borrowing requirement to ensure that the WHQS programme can still be funded and delivered by 2019/20. Council approval of the Business Plan and revised borrowing requirement will allow WG to release the Authority's Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) which totals circa £7.3 m per annum.

The Chair thanked the Officers for the report and a detailed discussion ensued.

Further information was sought on the repayment plan in place. Officers highlighted that, although borrowing over short-term period had benefits of a lower interest rate, a 50-year repayment plan was preferable due to the reduced risk.

Members noted that the change in the profile of the borrowing would not have an impact on the external environmental works, which are scheduled to be completed by 2019/2020.

Members endorsed the officers' recommendations and referred the report to Cabinet.

## **5. DISPOSAL OF HRA LAND ADJACENT TO FORMER GREENHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL**

S. Couzens presented a report, which sought the views of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group, prior to seeking a Cabinet decision, on proposals to declare a parcel of land adjoining the former Greenhill Primary School site surplus to operational requirements, so it can be utilised to support the Council's Local Development Plan for the provision of new housing.

Members noted that the parcel of HRA land adjoins the former Greenhill Primary School site, which had been offered to United Welsh Housing Association for the purpose of developing new housing. The Planning Department had advised on the benefits of incorporating this parcel land into the development.

Members thanked the Officer for the report and sought further information on the types of housing anticipated on the development. It was highlighted that the Council intended to have an input into the project; 1 and 2 bedroom properties would be incorporated into the plans and nomination rights would remain with the Local Authority.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group reported the officer recommendations that: -

1. That the site is declared surplus to requirements of the HRA;
2. That the Head of Performance and Property determine the terms of disposal pursuant to the approved protocol;
3. The report is submitted to Cabinet for approval.

## **6. RE-LET STANDARD**

The report provided information regarding the Re-let Standard for all Council properties. The Re-let standard aims to ensure that all council properties are let to a good quality and consistent standard.

Members noted that the Re-let standard was last reviewed in January 2010. It resulted in a checklist being provided to all new tenants which set the property condition standard applied to all empty properties across the County Borough. This was developed in consultation with

the then Tenants and Residents Forum. This latest standard was agreed with Tenant Representatives in March 2014 following a series of Repairs and Improvement meetings and including site visits to view some voids before and following works of improvement.

The new standard now incorporates a number of changes that were proposed by Tenant Representatives and Officers. The main changes were to give an improved description of the works that will be undertaken when a property is void, but there were a few additions. Members noted that the standard would be reviewed bi-annually or sooner if circumstances require, and further reports will be submitted to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group when necessary.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the report and Members questions were welcomed.

Members expressed their gratitude that their views were taken into consideration when developing the new Standard, in particular that any improvements made to properties by tenants, such as new flooring, could remain at the property.

A Member requested clarification on the policy for the replacement of internal doors. The Officer explained that, if replacing over 50% of the internal doors per floor in a property, then all the doors on that floor should be replaced to the new specification type.

The Task Group commented on the high quality of improvements made to void properties and were happy to note the report and Standards.

## **7. HANDY PERSON SCHEME**

The report provided information and sought support for the introduction of a Handy Person Pilot Scheme, which would provide chargeable maintenance/ DIY services to qualifying tenants.

The report outlined the proposal to introduce a Handy Person scheme on a pilot basis initially, by utilising the in-house workforce, in order to gauge the level of demand for such a service. The service would be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis to establish the volume and type of work being requested and to ensure that a satisfactory service is actually being delivered.

The service aims to provide support to qualifying tenants to carry out maintenance and DIY works, which are not covered within the tenancy agreement and therefore are not the Council's direct responsibility to undertake. It is accepted however that many tenants may not be physically able to carry out such works themselves and therefore this service will assist them to continue to live safely and independently within their own home.

The Task Group welcomed the report and scheme but raised concerns about the cost for the service. Officers explained that costs were considered and researched amongst local companies providing similar services and other local authorities and pricing is competitive. Members were assured that the scheme and pricing would be reviewed annually to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the service users, remains affordable and value for money. Members also noted that Officers are considering all funding avenues, such as Supporting People and Social Services to look to reduce the fees.

A Member queried whether there would be any scope to expand the services provided within the scheme to include Garden Clearance and decorating services, and whether the service could be offered to other vulnerable groups in the future. Members noted that the Gardening and Decorating would be considered under a separate scheme and would be reported back to the Task Group when further information has been obtained.

The Task Group were happy that a Handy Person Scheme would be introduced and look forward to further information in the future about it's progress and developments.

## **8. LOCAL TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY**

M. Betts presented an overview of the report updating Members of the Task Group on the general progress made in implementing the Local Tenant Participation Strategy (LRPS), and also provided the requested information on the training provided to tenants and the expenditure of the participation budget in 2013/2014.

Members noted that there are two budget allocations for participation activities, a general budget for direct participation support and the additional resource of £150,000 identified in the Offer document to support increased and improved participation arrangements.

The report highlighted that within the projects budget approximately £30,000 had been earmarked for mainstreaming initiatives and £15,000 for development of the HIP neither of which has progressed sufficiently to incur the anticipated expenditure. Going forward to 2014/15 additional projects, which would require funding from this allocation are the CHTG elections, leaseholder information sessions, re-printing of the leaseholder handbook, three local area based events, mainstreaming and if agreed, the HIP project. Major projects under consideration, which will require funding, include a general tenant satisfaction survey and tenant profiling exercise to link in with the requirements of self-assessment. In addition, there is the possibility of progressing a time-banking initiative with Communities First and provision of more activity based training activities to encourage wider participation.

Members thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

Upon consideration of the report and General Participation Budget at Appendix 1, a Member queried whether there would be an under-spend at the end of the financial year. The Officer confirmed that an under-spend is anticipated, however, it has been greatly reduced with the allocation of funds to major projects, as highlighted in the report.

Members of the Task Group discussed the under-spend and suggested that Officers consider the implementation of Community Fun Days. Officers noted the suggestion and highlighted that collaborative work is underway with the Community First Team and the Community First mobile unit.

## **9. WHQS MONITORING REPORT 2013-2014 (END OF YEAR)**

The report provided members of the Task Group with an overview of the performance of the WHQS team during the financial year 2013/14, details of the 2013-2016 Outcome Agreement and narrative on the expected progress to WHQS compliance.

Members noted that the original WHQS internal works programme for 2013-14 included 642 properties. The in-house workforce undertook work on those properties, supported by specialist sub-contractors. An additional 203 properties were added to the 2013-14 internal works programme in order to ensure that the in-house workforce had a sufficient throughput of work. At May 2014 657 of these 845 properties are compliant in respect of their internal elements.

The Task Group noted that a Tenant Satisfaction Survey had been introduced in order to gauge the level of satisfaction with the internal works being carried out. The survey indicated that the current level of overall satisfaction is 92%, which is above our target of 80%. The survey also identified that 85% of the service standards are being met, which is below the target of 90%.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the detailed report and performance data and Members questions were welcomed.

A Member raised concerns about the length of time taken to complete the internal works and as a result queried the 92% survey satisfaction rates, expecting more feedback on this aspect. The Officer explained that the Satisfaction Form is under review, however, where specific comments have been provided, these will be investigated and responses provided to the tenants where possible.

Members were pleased to note that meetings have been arranged between the Caerphilly Service Improvement Monitors and WHQS Project Managers to provide feedback on the issues raised by tenants on the survey forms.

Having fully considered its content the Caerphilly Homes Task Group noted the report.

**10. TO RECEIVE ANY REQUEST FOR AN ITEM TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AVAILABLE AGENDA**

There were no requests received for reports to be included on the next available agenda.

The meeting closed at 18:22 pm.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 18th September 2014.

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CHAIRMAN