



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 18TH SEPTEMBER 2014

SUBJECT: HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP (HIP)

REPORT BY: INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the Caerphilly Homes Task Group (CHTG) with an updated information report following discussions with tenant representatives on the introduction of the Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP) – the ‘Caerphilly Homes approach to scrutiny’.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 As requested, the Tenant & Community Involvement Team has met with tenant members of the Task Group regarding the HIP project. A presentation on the project has also been provided to the Tenant Information Exchange (TIE).
- 2.2 This report outlines the issues raised by the CHTG tenant representatives and TIE members in relation to the HIP project, the discussions held and responses given.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 Tenant involvement most closely links with the current Local Housing Strategy aim of:-
- 3.2 *“providing good quality, well managed homes in communities where people want to live and offer people housing choices which meets their needs and aspirations”* Local Housing Strategy 2008-13, Aim 6:
- 3.3 The National Housing Strategy 2010 ‘Improving Lives and Communities’ emphasises the need to:
- 3.4 *“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 that deliver them”
- 3.5 In terms of the Local Tenant Participation Strategy, tenant scrutiny is identified as Key Objective 2:
- 3.6 *To develop tenant scrutiny to improve services.*
- 3.7 Corporately, the Housing Improvement Partnership and tenant involvement in general will also link to the Council’s Public Engagement Strategy, the Council’s Strategic Equality Objectives 3 and 4, and also to themes in “Caerphilly Delivers”, the Local Service Board single integrated plan.

4. THE REPORT

Background

4.1 The Local Tenant Participation Strategy (approved by CHTG in 2013) has 4 key objectives and the development of tenant scrutiny is identified in Objective 2. To deliver this commitment, a report was submitted to CHTG in March 2014 on the introduction and operation of the Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP) – the Caerphilly Homes approach to scrutiny.

4.2 At that meeting, a presentation was given by Central Consultancy on the introduction of the HIP. Whilst the Task Group accepted the principal of the HIP and noted the report, a number of issues were raised by tenant members of the CHTG on the proposal. As a result, it was agreed to hold a meeting with CHTG tenant representatives to further address the issues and provide a report back to CHTG on those discussions, along with any responses received from the Tenant Information Exchange.

Discussions with CHTG Tenant Representatives

4.3 The first meeting with tenant members of the CHTG took place on 30 April 2014. Five of the seven representatives attended the meeting. The concerns previously minuted at CHTG were listed and the meeting provided the opportunity to confirm whether these concerns still remained and to explore any further issues relating to the HIP project.

4.4 All issues raised at the meeting were recorded and copies sent to the tenant representatives to confirm accuracy. The main issues identified were:-

- HIP duplicating the work of the Caerphilly Service Improvement Monitors (CSIMs)
- Lack of consultation with tenants
- Tenant members of HIP to be independent of other tenant participation activities
- Reporting mechanism for HIP and whether preferences would be given to HIP findings
- Pilot timescale in relation to tenant training and HIP members being confident in their role
- Capturing the tenant experience with no direct interaction
- Officers accurately reflecting tenant requests (through transcribes) and HIP members ability to challenge (due to initial inexperience)
- Cost of project
- Independent facilitator required

4.5 Subsequently, a detailed written response paper was produced. It identified all the issues raised and views expressed by the CHTG tenant representatives, along with officer responses to each point raised. This paper was sent out to all CHTG tenant representatives and is attached as Appendix 1.

4.6 Following receipt of the written response, the CHTG chairperson requested a second meeting. This took place on 11th June and five tenant representatives attended. It provided an opportunity for additional clarification and explanation where needed and two additional points (to those answered previously) were raised. The additional points were:-

- Would tenants who have been involved with Caerphilly Homes and have detailed knowledge of the service be excluded from the HIP?
- Based on information given on the HIP, there was no need to involve tenants in the project as officers could undertake the work and implement changes based on findings.

4.7 Officer responses were:-

- Any tenant would be able to join the HIP as long as they were not involved in any other tenant participation activity.

- The HIP project had been designed to address a number of objectives in the LTPS. Caerphilly Homes is committed to working with tenants to improve services through a variety of tenant participation activities. The HIP will assist Caerphilly Homes by interpreting tenant requests from a tenant perspective and not from an officer viewpoint.

4.8 Following the second meeting, and to further explain that the HIP did not duplicate the work of the CSIMs, a comparison grid was sent to the CHTG tenant representatives outlining the differences between the HIP and CSIMs. See Appendix 2 for copy of the grid.

Tenant Information Exchange

4.9 This was held on 24th June 2014 and 22 tenants attended. As part of the session, Gayna Jones - Central Consultancy, provided a presentation on the HIP.

4.10 Following the presentation, a question and answer session took place. The issues/questions raised were:

- How the HIP would receive information from other tenants if not face-to-face?
- How would sensitive information contained within letters etc be managed?
- Duplication of the role of the CSIMs and therefore be a waste of money
- Ability of new tenants to interpret information and/or question the validity of the information given to the HIP.

4.11 A summary of the responses provided to the TIE by Central Consultancy and Tenant and Community Involvement Manager were:-

- Access to information relating to real tenant service requests would be through a variety of ways – transcripts of telephone calls, letters and emails. An independent facilitator will work with the HIP and Caerphilly Homes to ensure the information was recorded in the right way for the project.
- All information would be anonymous – no tenant details will be available.
- The CSIMs role involved monitoring and evaluating existing agreed standards and at the end of a service process. The HIP will look at a service at the first point of contact - when a tenant requests a service. The HIP has been developed to enable tenants to work with Caerphilly Homes to identify what is important to tenants and 'test' existing standards to ensure the right standards and measures are in place. The HIP will not be involved in monitoring or evaluating. Therefore there was no duplication of roles.
- Officers would not be part of the HIP. It was proposed that an independent person would act as a 'critical friend' to the HIP. Trust was needed by all parties for any tenant participation activity to be successful.

4.12 There were other contributions to the discussion. One related to clarification on an element of the HIP process and the second was a discussion on Caerphilly Homes governance arrangements. The majority of the TIE did not raise concerns relating to the HIP and one tenant expressed an interest in joining the group.

Conclusion

4.13 Prior to submission of the HIP report in March, careful consideration had been given to the right approach to the HIP project in order to address the aims of the LTPS, avoid the creation of a rigid and complicated process and duplication of roles. The chosen approach identified in the initial CHTG report reflected the needs of Caerphilly Homes, our current position in relation to tenant participation and our service improvement activities.

4.14 Officers have explained the reasons for this approach to CHTG tenant representatives - that it is based on fundamental principles vital to the success of the project. If these were to be amended or diluted, it would have an impact on the outcomes generated by the project – ultimately affecting the project's ability to deliver service improvements and impacting on other aims that were agreed as part of the LTPS.

- 4.15 While some tenants still have concerns with the project, detailed discussions have taken place to clarify issues and alleviate concerns on the introduction of the HIP.
- 4.16 Officers have fully responded to all the issues raised and therefore propose no changes are made to the way in which the HIP project is piloted.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 A full Equality Impact Assessment has not been undertaken, however the National Housing Strategy 2010 (extract shown in 3.4) demonstrates the need to ensure that all tenants are allowed a voice and have their individual needs taken into account, regardless of their individual circumstances and backgrounds. Officers are committed to ensuring that this Housing Improvement Partnership will operate in accordance with these principles.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are one-off costs associated with the initial setting up the HIP and on going resourcing of its work (including consultancy costs for independent support) but this can be accommodated within the existing Tenant Participation budget.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no personnel implications. The HIP will be supported through the Tenant & Community Involvement Team.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 All views following consultation on the report have been incorporated.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 Members are asked to note contents of report.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To inform members of the current position.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Local Government and Housing Acts.

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Consultees: Councillor Gerald Jones, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing
Shaun Couzens, Chief Housing Officer
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Mandy Betts, Tenant & Community Involvement Manager
Gail Taylor, Tenant Participation Officer
David A. Thomas, Senior Policy Officer (Equalities and Welsh Language)

Gayna Jones, Central Consultancy
Kelsey Watkins, Communication & Tenant Engagement Officer

Background Papers:

Local Tenant Participation Strategy

Notes of second meeting with CHTG tenant representatives – 11 June 2014

Notes of Tenant Information Exchange – 24 June 2014

Presentation by Central Consultancy to TIE

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Written response to CHTG tenant representative concerns following first meeting –
30th April 2014

Appendix 2 Comparison Grid – HIP & CSIMs