



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 15TH FEBRUARY 2018

SUBJECT: WHQS ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME – UPDATE

REPORT BY: INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide a high level overview of the WHQS environmental programme for information.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Following the ballot in February 2012, the Council agreed that it would deliver the promises made in its Offer Document to tenants and deliver the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by March 2020. The Council also agreed that its capital investment in homes would deliver social outcomes to ‘transform lives and communities’.
- 2.2 Part of the commitment to deliver the WHQS across all 10,865 homes also includes a requirement to comply with Part 6 which aims to ensure that ‘all dwellings should be located in an environment to which residents can relate and in which they can be proud to live’.
- 2.3 £10.6m has been set aside in the business plan agreed with Welsh Government specifically for this purpose.
- 2.4 Three Environmental Officers were recruited to work with the Area Housing teams and local members in order to initially identify environmental maintenance / repair issues. The issues were identified and collated into a single spreadsheet with each project being detailed using a proforma.
- 2.5 Over 200 minor projects have been identified across the county borough to date and colleagues across the directorate have become involved in offering specialist support and advice. Many have required specialist input from Highways and Engineering, Waste and Parks in order to assess feasibility and determine options.
- 2.6 Having identified a number of minor projects, the environmental officers have now focused their efforts on undertaking an extensive engagement programme throughout the County Borough which is intended to 1) engage local communities in discussions regarding the quality and safety of their local environment 2) identify solutions to some of the challenges and constraints within communities that could be overcome via the WHQS environmental programme and 3) to work with partners to help develop more cohesive and resilient communities through joint working and the pooling of resources.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

3.1 The Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) is intended to ensure that all local authority and housing association homes are improved and maintained to specified standards.

- 3.2 The Council is committed to ensuring that the WHQS investment transforms not only homes but also lives and communities.
- 3.3 The Council's Local Housing Strategy "People, Property, and Places" has the following aim:
"To provide good quality, well managed houses in communities where people want to live, and offer people housing choices which meet their needs and aspirations."
- 3.4 The delivery of the WHQS environmental programme is coterminous with the aims of the Council's Single Integrated Plan 2013-2017 which aims to 'improve standards of housing and communities, giving appropriate access to services across the county borough' and the recently approved, Caerphilly Poverty Strategy 2015.
- 3.5 The delivery of the WHQS environmental programme is coterminous with the aims of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which requires public bodies to work towards a shared vision comprising 7 goals and adopt the 5 "Ways of Working". The goals and the 5 Ways of Working will underpin the delivery of the programme and include planning and acting for the long term, integration, involvement, collaboration and prevention.
- 3.6 Delivery of the WHQS environmental programme links directly with the goal identified in the Future Generations Act to create a more prosperous Wales through helping to indirectly create new employment opportunities in the environmental sector as a result of the improvements undertaken via the programme.
- 3.7 The proposal relates directly to the ambition to create a resilient Wales and will create and enhance the natural environment thereby creating and enhancing new habitats and ecosystems which support the social, economic and ecological resilience of the local area.
- 3.8 The proposal is coterminous with the goal to create healthier communities through improving the immediate environment within communities, creating safer communities, increasing accessibility to the environment and through projects that promote the relationship between the outdoors and positive mental health and wellbeing.
- 3.9 It will directly assist in the development of cohesive communities through the delivery of environmental improvements that increase the attractiveness, viability, connectivity and safety of communities. It will support the ongoing creation of a vibrant Welsh culture through promoting and protecting heritage and the unique Welsh environment; it will contribute towards the development of a globally responsive Wales through protecting and enhancing the environment, creating new habitats, protecting indigenous flora and fauna and through creating new opportunities for employment and enjoyment within an environmental context.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 In February 2012 tenants voted overwhelmingly for the Council to retain its housing stock as opposed to transferring its homes to a registered social landlord. As a result the Council made an ambitious commitment to utilise its £200m capital investment not only to transform homes but also lives and communities. It also committed to utilising £10.6m of the total investment to deliver an environmental programme that would ensure that all homes 'are located in an environment to which residents can relate and which they can be proud to live' (Welsh Housing Quality Standard, Part 6).
- 4.2 Part 6 specifies that 'all opportunities should be taken to make improvements to the immediate environment (within the property boundary) and to the general environment' and that consultation with residents and external audits can be used to inform the process.
- 4.3 Welsh Government has suggested that the following key elements must be taken into consideration by organisations seeking to deliver the standard:

- Attractive environments
- Safe environments
- Environments that people can relate to
- Environments that people can feel proud of.

- 4.4 To date, the three Environmental Officers employed to deliver the environmental programme have concentrated on identifying low level environmental requirements. This is largely due to a decision that was taken by the WHQS Project Board to focus initially on routine improvements to housing estates that would have been previously raised by tenants, officers or members or highlighted by the area housing managers. Some areas are in need of maintenance and investment to address health and safety issues, anti-social behaviour, security, as well as making general improvements to improve the overall aspect of our estates.
- 4.5 In the last 18 months over 200 minor projects (i.e. less than £75k) have been identified by the officers. On balance, approximately 50% are maintenance related and 50% are new projects such as additional car parking, street lighting, paving etc.
- 4.6 Due to the number of minor projects identified, a decision was made by the WHQS Project Board to allocate the following funding to Area and Neighbourhood Housing Offices in a bid to ensure that Managers were able to access resources to address local maintenance and repair issues.
- Lansbury Park Neighbourhood Housing Office - £75,000
 - Graig Y Rhacca Neighbourhood Housing Office - £75,000
 - Eastern Valley Housing Office - £100,000
 - Upper Rhymney Valley Housing Office - £100,000.
- 4.7 Appendix 1, outlines the expenditure to date from each neighbourhood / area housing office. The allocations awarded to each housing office will be reviewed at the end of the financial year.
- 4.8 Of the projects identified, a significant number of projects relate to car parking provision, works adjacent to the highway, street lighting and speed ramps and therefore must be considered by colleagues in Highways / Engineering for feasibility, options and design work. In some cases it has also been necessary to seek advice from colleagues in planning to determine whether planning permission is required. It has invariably taken longer for these projects to come to fruition.
- 4.9 The future maintenance of projects has also been a key consideration as there is no budget from which to fund future additional maintenance costs that may arise from new proposals. This has therefore meant that any ongoing maintenance implications have had to be considered within the wider context of reducing Council budgets.
- 4.10 In some cases it has been necessary to package works together in order to ensure that they deliver improved value for money.
- 4.11 Projects have been identified across the county borough and in all communities.
- 4.12 Moving forward, the Environmental Officers will focus less on minor projects and more on identifying larger projects that generate greater benefits and impact for our communities. Officers have already started to undertake an extensive programme of community engagement in order to identify projects. To date the following have been approved:
- A suite of projects in Greensway, Abertysswg relating to the installation of handrails, new fencing and the removal of existing posts costing circa £40,000. Proposals relating to new parking arrangements are currently being explored.

- A package of projects for Fochriw including additional fencing throughout the area, extra play facilities, a green gym and the installation of two additional lighting columns at Cae Glas Newydd. In identifying the projects, the Environmental Officer responsible has undertaken extensive consultation in partnership with agencies including Keep Wales Tidy, Natural Resources Wales, Caerphilly Parents Network and the Council's Community Regeneration Team. The partnership approach adopted has resulted in wider community engagement and ownership of the projects. The ongoing maintenance of the site will be incorporated into Parks Services routine maintenance programme. Proposals are estimated to cost circa £58,000.
- In Penyrheol, an indicative contribution of £260,000 from the WHQS Environmental Programme will be made towards the costs associated with an extension to the existing skate park, renewing existing facilities, parking and fencing together with the installation of an outdoor gym. Monetary contributions have also been forthcoming from Penyrheol, Trecenydd and Energlyn Community Council of £15,000 together with £2,225 from the Area Forum Budget to contribute towards the costs associated with the Skate Park. The project aims to tackle antisocial behaviour issues and provide a focal point to promote health and community wellbeing. The ongoing maintenance of both facilities will be undertaken by Parks Services within their current maintenance programme. New parking facilities will also be provided for residents in Gellideg and Penybryn. Detailed discussions are also ongoing with regard to exploring improved parking options in Heol Tir Gibbon.
- In Churchill Park approval has been given to relay 7 of the existing roundabouts (there are 14 streets within Churchill Park and eight have roundabouts at the end of them). Currently individuals drive over or park on the roundabouts and they are not serving the purpose for which they were installed. In addition, lorries and the Council's refuse vehicles find it difficult to manoeuvre around them. Residents and local members have been consulted together with specialists from the Council's Highways department and the decision has been taken to raise all 7 and to cover 5 of the 7 with asphalt and 2 with a toptint colour. This will clearly define the roundabouts and make it more difficult for individuals to park on the roundabouts. The work is estimated to cost around £46,000 and proposals will also include a general tidy up of the area and improvements to stop individuals climbing on garages.

- 4.13 Appendix 2 contains an overview of the consultation and engagement programme that has been developed by the Environmental Officers. The table highlights the timescale for engagement with each community and not the delivery of projects.
- 4.14 It should be noted that a budget of £500,000 has been indicatively set aside to support the delivery of a holistic transformation programme in Lansbury Park and to provide match funding towards a potential bid to the Welsh Government's Targeted Regeneration Investment Programme during 2018/19.
- 4.15 A contribution of £249,350 has also been made from the WHQS environmental programme towards ensuring the completion of Rowan Place, Rhymney. This is in addition to the grant claimed from Welsh Government (£704,009.64) of as part of their Vibrant and Viable Places Tackling Poverty Programme.
- 4.16 An indicative allocation of £1.5m has been made towards the upgrading of un-adopted footpaths, steps, car parks and highways to upgrade them to adoptable standard. Once upgraded the future maintenance of those assets will transfer to Engineering Services.

5. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 5.1 The WHQS environmental programme contributes to the Well-being Goals as set out in Links to Strategy above. It is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act as outlined in section 3.

6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 This is an information report; therefore there are no potential equality implications and no requirement to complete a full Equalities Impact Assessment.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 £10.6m has been identified within the WHQS business plan to support the delivery of the environmental programme. The majority of the projects identified are in the process of being undertaken with many others at the feasibility and design stage so expenditure information at this stage is limited.
- 7.2 Appendix 1 contains a spreadsheet illustrating current expenditure however, it should be noted that many of the commitments have not yet been invoiced hence a more detailed report regarding the finances will be presented in the new financial year.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no direct personnel implications arising from the report.

9. CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 Responses from consultees have been incorporated within this report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 The report is for information only. Members are asked to note the contents.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 To advise members of the current position in respect of the delivery of Part 6 of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.

12. STATUTORY POWER

- 12.1 Housing Acts 1985, 1996, 2004, 2014 and Local Government Act 2000.

Author: Jane Roberts-Waite, Strategic Coordination Manager
(Tel: 01443 864340, Email: roberj2@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Consultees: Cllr Lisa Phipps, Cabinet Member for Homes and Places
Christina Harray, Interim Chief Executive
Shaun Couzens, Chief Housing Officer
Fiona Wilkins, Public Sector Housing Manager
Marcus Lloyd, WHQS and Infrastructure Strategy Manager
Lesley Allen, Principal Accountant
Gerwyn Barry, Assistant Accountant
Mandy Betts, Tenant and Community Involvement Manager

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Current Expenditure

Appendix 2 – Consultation Overview and Engagement Timeframe