



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
(SIRHOWY ROOM) ON THURSDAY, 15TH FEBRUARY 2018 AT 5.30 P.M.**

PRESENT:

C. Davies - Chair

Task Group Members:

Mrs Y. Bryant, M. Davies, L. Harding, A. Hussey, Mrs S. Jones, Mrs D. Moore, Mrs L. Phipps, Mrs R. Thompson and L. Whittle.

Officers:

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), M. Betts (Tenant and Community Involvement Manager), M. Lloyd (Acting Head of Engineering Services) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from E. Forehead, Ms M. James, Ms L. Pewtner, and Mrs D. Price.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Tenant Representatives Y. Bryant, C. Davies, Mrs S. Jones, Mrs D. Moore and R. Thompson declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in all agenda items as Council Tenants.

3. MINUTES – 14TH DECEMBER 2017

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14th December 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. RE-PROFILING OF WHQS PROGRAMME AND HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2018/19

The report provided the Caerphilly Homes Task Group with proposals for re-profiling the WHQS Programme with the aim of ensuring full compliance by 2020, prior to its consideration by Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

The report outlined that there has continued to be good progress with the WHQS delivery programme during 2017/18. However, it has been necessary to review the programme and take account of changing circumstances to ensure full compliance by 2020. The report sets out the reviewed programme.

Following the Wales Audit Office Review conducted in April 2017, a commitment has been made to complete 40% of the external works and 75% of the internal works by March 2018. At the end of December 2017, 33% of the external works have been completed and 70% of the internal works have been completed. A further commitment has been made to Welsh Government that 80% of external works and 94% internal works would be completed by March 2019.

A separate programme of works was established for the sheltered housing schemes with agreement that both internal and external works would be undertaken by the in-house workforce. This work is on programme for completion by 2020 and is therefore not required to be re-profiled at this time.

The HRA Capital Programme budget has been revised based on accurate recent actual costs projected forward to the end of the programme. This data now replaces the previous Savill's estimates and demonstrates that the housing business plan and the WHQS Programme remains financially viable.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group discussed the report at length and raised concerns in relation to the external works and assurances were sought that the programme of works would be completed by the 2020 deadline. Officers confirmed that there has been a need to re-profile due to slippage, however, these issues have now been resolved and the Task Group were assured that the works would be completed within the Welsh Government timescale.

Members raised concerns for consistency of works across housing estates, with particular reference made to cladding being provided for newer build houses and not on older properties, many of which are presenting issues of damp. Officers thanked Members for drawing to their attention and it was resolved that a meeting be conducted to consider these issues raised.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group were also asked to consider rolling forward the properties that were planned to be undertaken by an external contractor during 2018/19 to 2019/20, whereby the in-house workforce would have capacity to undertake the work. With a marginal number of properties programmed for the final year there can be confidence that the internal works can be completed by March 2020. In addition, Welsh Government has confirmed that the deadline for achievement of WHQS is December 2020 which provides additional flexibility.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons outlined in the Officers report and as discussed at the meeting, the Caerphilly Homes Task Group support the option in 4.17 of the report to roll forward the properties planned to be undertaken in 2018/19, in order that the works can be conducted by the in-house workforce, and recommend to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and thereafter Cabinet.

5. WHQS ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME

The report provided the Caerphilly Homes Task Group with a high level overview of the WHQS Programme for information.

It was noted that, 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'.

Part of the commitment to deliver the WHQS across all 10,865 homes also included 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'.

£10.6m has been set aside in the business plan agreed with Welsh Government specifically for this purpose.

It was noted that three Environmental Health 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.

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 Grounds Maintenance in order to assess feasibility and determine options.

Having identified a number of minor projects, the environmental officers have now focussed 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.

The Task Group noted the packages of projects, which have been identified across the borough, which include additional fencing and play facilities in Fochriw, extending the current skate park, parking and fencing in Penyrheol and new parking facilities in Gellideg and Penybryn. The work has been undertaken in consultation with partnership agencies including Keep Wales Tidy, Natural Resource Wales and the Council's Community Regeneration Team.

In addition, the Task Group noted that 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.

The Task Group were also provided with a selection of photographs of some of the works and projects undertaken across the borough.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

Discussions ensued around the communications across Communities in relation to the works planned. Officers explained that there are a number of communication methods, one of which is the production of leaflets, which are provided to the local residents and consultation undertaken with local ward members.

In noting that leaflets are provided, a Task Group Member requested that more detail of the works to be undertaken be provided within the correspondence in order to make tenants aware of all of the environmental changes planned.

Concern was also raised over the apparent delays in agreed works actually commencing within some communities. It was explained that agreement had been reached to utilise the services of in-house teams in the delivery of projects and therefore this needed to be incorporated into their existing core services. As larger projects were also now being identified, many of these require designing, planning and highway approval prior to proceeding which added to the delays.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and noted its content.

6. WHQS – ACCEPTABLE FAILS/PREVIOUSLY ACHIEVED UPDATE

The report provided Members with information on the application and volume of Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) elements classified as “Acceptable Fails” or “Previously Achieved”.

The WHQS intended to ensure that all local authority and housing association homes are improved and maintained to achieve specified standards.

The WHQS guidance document also recognises that it may not be possible to bring all elements within a property up to the required standard. Such elements can be recorded as “acceptable fails”.

Whilst the Council’s main WHQS programme commenced following the ballot on housing stock transfer in 2012, a number of properties benefitted from improvements prior to this date which met the standard. In addition, elements have also been renewed outside of the main WHQS programme by the Housing Repairs Operations team, either as a response repair or when a property became void. Any elements which met the standard separately to the main programme, therefore, are classed as “previously achieved”, and recorded as being completed.

The report provided members with clarification on the Council’s application of previously achieved and acceptable fail elements and the impact they are having on the programme.

The Task Group noted the criteria for an acceptable fail, which is applicable on individual elements, not the dwelling as a whole and includes cost of remedy, timing of remedy, residents choice and physical constraint. In addition, the Task Group were asked to note Appendix 2 of the report, which provided information on the numbers and types of work items which have been classed as “previously achieved”, which is based on properties surveyed to date and information currently recorded within the asset management database.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

A Task Group Member raised concern that some tenants had not been provided with the kitchens they were originally promised, which was not outlined within the addendum document. Officers explained that not every property would be provided with new bathrooms and kitchens etc, these would depend on the surveys undertaken at the properties and in line with the guidance provided by W.G. for the delivery of the WHQS programme. The Task Group were asked to note that where possible Caerphilly have gone above and beyond to meet expectations of tenants, where this has been possible.

Discussions took place around acceptable fails, with particular reference to tenants refusing work who have serious health issues. Officers clarified that, where ever possible every effort has been made to accommodate tenants, with additional support provisions put in place in order to support tenants through the works. However, where works have been refused, for example replacement windows offered during winter months or where a tenant had poor health at the original time of the works and later their health improved the Task Group were assured that revisits are being undertaken across the borough, with the aim of undertaking the work and reducing the number of refusals.

A Task Group Member sought further information on the works undertaken within the Complexes and the timescales for completion. Officers explained that this is currently under a feasibility study and a further report will be provided to the Task Group in May.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and noted its content.

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

The Task Group requested that the following reports be presented to the next meeting:

1. Community Fund
2. Programme House Building in Borough (Affordable)
3. Valleys Taskforce – Regional- Political

The meeting closed at 6:16 p.m.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 29th March 2018.

CHAIR