



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN THE SIRHOWY ROOM, PENALLTA HOUSE, ON
THURSDAY, 17TH MAY 2018 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillors:

M. Davies, L. Harding, A. Hussey, Mrs B. Jones, Mrs L. Phipps

Tenant Representatives:

Ms M. James, Mrs S. Jones, Mrs D. Moore, Ms L. Pewtner, Ms R. Thompson

Officers:

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), F. Wilkins (Public Sector Housing Manager) and
R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

Also present (observing):

G. Jones and M. Bruschetti (Wales Audit Office)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs D. Price (Vice-Chair),
L.G. Whittle, and Tenant Representatives C. Davies (Chair) and Mrs Y. Bryant.

In the absence of Mr C. Davies and Councillor Mrs D. Price, Mrs S. Jones (Tenant
Representative) was moved to the Chair.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Tenant Representatives Ms M. James, Mrs S. Jones, Mrs D. Moore, Ms L. Pewtner,
Ms R. Thompson and Councillor Mrs B. Jones declared a personal but not prejudicial
interest in all agenda items as Council Tenants.

3. MINUTES – 29TH MARCH 2018

Subject to it being noted that Ms M. James and Ms L. Pewtner had been recorded as being
both in attendance and having given apologies (when they were both present at the meeting)
it was

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29th March 2018 be approved
as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. **FLAT ACCOMMODATION AT RIVER ROAD, PONTLOTTYN AND THE GROVE, FOCHRIW**

Fiona Wilkins (Public Sector Housing Manager) presented the report, which sought the views of Members on proposals to demolish the block of flats known as 1 to 9, River Road, Pontlottyn and to take 3 to 6, The Grove, Fochriw, out of the Housing stock with a view to demolition of the block in future years. It was noted that following consideration by the Task Group, the report would be presented to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee as an item for discussion, prior to its referral to Cabinet for a decision on the recommendations contained therein.

Officers explained that issues associated with lack of demand are being experienced by all partner landlords with housing stock in the Upper Rhymney Valley. Whilst there is unmet need for single person accommodation throughout the county borough, demand for two and three bed flats in the Upper Rhymney Valley is low with waiting lists regularly exhausted.

Members were advised that 1 to 9 River Road comprises a mix of 1, 2 and 3 bed flats, and 1 to 6, The Grove comprises two active shop units at ground floor, trading as a single business, with two 2 bed flats located on each of the upper floors. Both blocks have been affected by high levels of antisocial behaviour, crime and substance misuse. In addition, the flats are very hard to let due to their location and property mix, in recent years have largely been home to transient households, and are not conducive to community cohesion. Both blocks are currently vacant and have been secured, and surveys have identified that significant investment is required due to the external and internal fabric and boundaries in order to bring them up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.

The report therefore recommended the demolition of both blocks, but that in recognition of the presence of a successful business operating out of The Grove, the demolition of that block be deferred until such time as the current lease expires or other arrangements transpire. It was noted that consultation had been carried out with the local and neighbouring ward Members and police, who had actively supported the proposal.

Discussion took place regarding the general store operating from The Grove and Members expressed the need to protect its occupants and maintain local amenities and services in the village. Officers confirmed that the leaseholders are supportive of proposals to identify suitable alternative accommodation for their business in Fochriw to allow for demolition, and it was noted that there are approximately 22 years left to run on the lease. It was explained that the Council recognises the value of the store to the community and are seeking to provide alternative accommodation for the occupants, although there are limited funding options for commercial premises. Officers also provided clarification on the Council's ownership of Flat 1, River Road.

Members of the Task Group expressed their support for the proposals but suggested that the Housing Revenue Account should not be used to meet the costs of providing a replacement shop facility. Officers confirmed that they are looking at alternative funding sources in this regard, but the store did support the local community which was predominantly council owned properties and that the income received from the commercial lease was retained within the HRA. A Member also suggested that it would be useful for a map/photograph of the relevant area to be incorporated into any similar reports in the future.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the following recommendations be referred to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee for consideration (and thereafter Cabinet for approval). By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RECOMMENDED to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee that:-

- (i) the block known as 1 to 9 River Road be demolished;

- (ii) the principle to proceed with demolition be agreed in respect of 1 to 6, The Grove, Fochriw, but that the demolition be deferred until the current lease of 1 and 2, The Grove expires, a suitable alternative premises is identified for the business currently operating out of the block or the ongoing liability incurred by the Council in maintaining the mothballed building is no longer considered financially viable.

5. INFORMATION ITEMS

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group received and noted the following information items:-

- (1) Wales Audit Office Review of the WHQS Delivery Programme;
- (2) WHQS – Contractor Community Fund;
- (3) Affordable Homes in New Developments.

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

Reference was made to a previous report request in respect of Affordable Homes and it was confirmed that arrangements are being made to schedule this for a future meeting of the Task Group.

Officers also highlighted several forthcoming reports being prepared for future agendas, including an update on Wellbeing Objective WO5 (Investment in Council Homes), the Caerphilly Homes Asset Management Strategy, Remodelling and Reclassification of Older Persons Accommodation, and Proposals For Increasing Council Housing Supply (New Build).

The meeting closed at 5.29 p.m.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 4th September 2018.

CHAIR