



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN THE SIRHOWY ROOM, PENALLTA HOUSE, ON
TUESDAY, 20TH SEPTEMBER 2018 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor D. Price - Chair
Mr C. Davies - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

M. Davies, L. Harding, L. Phipps

Tenant Representatives:

Y. Bryant, S. Jones, D. Moore, R. Thompson

Officers:

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), F. Wilkins (Public Sector Housing Manager), Paul Smythe (Housing Technical Manager) and K. Houghton (Committee Services Officer)

Also present :

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B. Jones, A. Hussey and L.G. Whittle, and Tenant Representatives M. James and L. Pewtner,

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 4TH SEPTEMBER 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on the 4th September 2018 were deferred to the 1st November 2018 meeting for approval.

4. WELLBEING OBJECTIVE 5: INVESTMENT IN COUNCIL HOMES TO TRANSFORM LIVES AND COMMUNITIES – END OF YEAR REPORT (2017/18).

The Chief Housing Officer presented the report which sought the views of Members on

performance made throughout 2017/18 against Wellbeing Objective 5 and whether achievement against the Wellbeing Objective be deemed as "partially successful". 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.

Officers highlighted the achievements made towards meeting the Objective through the Council's investment in the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) programme, most notably the creation of jobs, apprenticeships and training opportunities, the progress made towards the realisation of 'whole home compliance', energy efficiency improvements, physical environmental improvements and the increased provision of accommodation adapted to meet tenants with specific housing needs.

Members were advised that the Council has proactively monitored tenant satisfaction levels since the start of the WHQS programme with data showing that tenants are generally happy with internal works (86%) and to a lesser extent for external works (70%). It was noted that the WHQS programme remains challenging however the Council is well placed to deliver the WHQS programme in full by the 2020 deadline, with the substantial investment made helping to transform lives and communities and therefore the report recommends that achievement against the Wellbeing Objective be deemed "partially successful".

Discussion took place regarding low tenant satisfaction levels in relation to external works. Members expressed concerns that the level of external works carried out had been inconsistent across the County Borough with some properties receiving full external improvements, partial or none at all. Questions were raised as to whether the level of detail provided by the tenant surveys was indicative of these concerns and the exact nature of tenant dissatisfaction with external works. Officers agreed that satisfaction levels were lower than anticipated and that further analysis of the data produced by the tenant surveys needed to be carried out and issues with external works identified and considered. In relation to external works a Member questioned the rate of improvements to gardens and paths. Officers clarified that these were secondary external works and many of our properties were unable to meet the standard for gardens due to the topography of our borough. Officers also advised that paths may be repaired if economically viable to do so, rather than being completely renewed.

Further discussion took place regarding improvements that could be made to the tenant survey process. It was suggested that not all tenants were receiving the surveys. Officers clarified that surveys were issued only to those tenants that had works carried out and consideration is being given to conducting telephone surveys as a means of increasing feedback with contact being made in a more timely and accurate manner.

Officers responded to a point of clarification in regards to the use of agency staff to fill newly created jobs within WHQS and not short-term contracts. It was explained that although agency staff was used, financially the difference between the use of agency staff compared to short-term contracts was minimal and this provides more flexibility as demand on resources is likely to change as the programme proceeds

Following consideration of the report, the Caerphilly Homes Task Group unanimously recommended to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee that achievement against Wellbeing Objective 5 – Investment in Council Homes to Transform Lives and Communities – End of Year Report (2017/18) be judged as "partially successful" 2017/18

RECOMMENDED to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee that:-

- (i) Members consider the content of the Wellbeing Objective 5 – Investment in Council Homes to Transform Lives and Communities – End of Year Report (2017/18) and, where appropriate, question and challenge the performance presented.

- (ii) Members determine if they agree that achievement against the Wellbeing Objective is deemed as “partially successful”.

5. WHQS – ACCEPTABLE FAILS UPDATE.

The Housing Technical Manager presented the report which sought the views of Members on the application and volume of Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) elements classified as “Acceptable Fails” and the process for managing incidences of No Access on the programme for the surveying of properties and the completion of works on site. It will subsequently be presented to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee as an information item on 2nd October 2018 and considered by the Audit Committee on 16th October 2018.

Officers provided Members with a definition of an ‘Acceptable Fail’ as set out in the Welsh Government’s WHQS revised guidance document (2008) which recognises that it may not be possible to bring all elements within a property up to the required standard offering one or a combination of the following criteria for an ‘Acceptable Fail’ – cost of remedy, timing of remedy, residents choice and physical constraints.

Members were advised that in addition to the ‘Acceptable Fail’ criteria there are properties which may have elements categorised ‘Previously Achieved’ where improvements were undertaken prior to the commencement of WHQS which were to the WHQS standard, and ‘No Access’ where every attempt is made to gain access to the property if the tenant opts out of the improvement programme. It was explained to Members that the ‘opt out’ option is not available when the upgrade was an electrical installation improvement on the basis of health and safety and an Electrical No Access procedure is followed in those cases.

Officer’s highlighted to Members that the total expenditure on the WHQS capital programme for 2017/18 was £42m, of which £18m related to internal works and £17.5m related to external works. The remainder of the spend was in relation to fees, large scale voids, adaptations and garages and to date there had not been any borrowing for WHQS.

Members sought clarification from Officers on the difference between the ‘Acceptable Fail’ criteria ‘cost and timing of remedy’, in circumstances where the cost effectiveness of some works such as undertaking structural changes to a property may result in a delay, with the criteria ‘physical constraint’ where the age, layout or location of some properties means the standard cannot be met due to physical constraints. Officers explained that the criteria are very similar in that there are some circumstances where the ‘Acceptable Fail’ could be a combination of both and in most cases it would be classed as a ‘physical constraint’.

Discussion took place regarding circumstances when access is refused by a tenant on the grounds of ill health and the rescheduling of works. Concerns were raised that other than in circumstances where the work is of an immediate electrical nature, those unable to allow for work to be done during the usual schedule of works would be missed out. Officers explained that it is a challenge to reschedule missed works. However new Housing Repair Response Teams are in the process of being established and a ‘mop-up’ programme formed for these teams to go into individual properties to carry out elements of the WHQS improvements.

Members asked whether data was collected on the reasons for refusing access on external works, particularly when refusing specific improvements. Following this, a lengthy discussion took place in regards to replacement fencing types. Members raised issues with the installation of chain link fencing to replace deteriorated fencing over the installation of bow-top fencing. Officers explained that although data on the reasons for refusing external works was not held, they had received complaints both in regards to chain link fencing and bow-top fencing. Officers clarified that the replacement fencing used, was according to the street scene and the type of fencing used would be replaced ‘like for like’. It was felt by a Member that tenants should be given a choice as to the fencing type used.

Following consideration of the report and in noting the details of the WHQS – Acceptable Fails Update, Caerphilly Homes Task Group unanimously recommended to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee note its contents.

RECOMMENDED to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee that the contents of the report be noted.

6. YEAR END PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR CAERPHILLY HOMES.

The Chief Housing Officer presented the report which sought the views of Members on the performance of the services provided by Caerphilly Homes during 2017/18. It set out the key service priorities for the period 2018 to 2023 and highlighted any potential challenges that may affect the successful delivery of these priorities. 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.

Officers highlighted that the performance of Caerphilly Homes for 2017/18 was considered overall to be good and continues to build on performance from previous years. Priorities for the period 2018 to 2023 will aim to deliver further service improvements and will ensure that Caerphilly Homes is able to respond proactively to the needs and aspirations of those who use these services.

Officers drew Members' attention to the performance of each of the following sections – housing repair operation, private sector housing, public sector housing and WHQS. Attention was also drawn to the list of key priorities for 2018 to 2023, details of which were set up in section 4 of Appendix 1 of the report.

Members queried the length of the 25-day response time to non-emergency repairs. Officers clarified that the average response time was 8 days however the 25 days response time given is set as such due to some priority 3 repairs such as glazing taking longer to complete as the double glazed unit needs to be measured at the property and then manufactured in addition to making an appointment with the tenant to install glass.

Members raised concerns regarding the improvement of other areas of a property not covered under the WHQS programme such as landings and hallways, and in particular whether the issue of damp in properties was being addressed. If issues were apparent during the WHQS work which could potentially impact on the planned scope of work, then this would be addressed at the time. Officers explained that in some cases when improvements were made, further issues were not apparent and that tenants experiencing issues could report these to the housing repair team as usual.

A member also asked officers why Caerphilly Homes was not delivering on the promises made in the offer document and felt that the scope of work had been reduced. Officers advised that the offer document included examples of the type and scale of work that was intended to be undertaken if the housing stock was retained by CCBC and that based on the current position the scope of work has increased in some areas and may have reduced in others.

The Task Group praised Caerphilly Homes for the excellent performance of the Housing Repair Operations in particular during 2017/18 and reported that tenants were generally happy with the service they receive.

Following consideration of the report and in noting the details of the Year End Performance Report for Caerphilly Homes, the Caerphilly Homes Task Group unanimously recommended to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee that its contents be noted.

RECOMMENDED to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee that Members consider the contents of the report and, where appropriate, question and challenge the performance presented.

7. INFORMATION ITEMS

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

- (1) Complaints and Representations – Caerphilly Homes

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

No requests were received for an item to be included on the next available agenda.

The meeting closed at 18.13pm.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 1st November 2018.

CHAIR