



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 14 FEBRUARY 2019

SUBJECT: WHQS ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME

REPORT BY: INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide members with a high level update on progress regarding the delivery of the WHQS Environmental Programme.

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 10,777 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 300 minor projects were initially identified across the county borough as part of the first phase of the programme. The majority were progressed, some were repackaged into larger schemes

2.6 The second phase of the programme commenced in 2017 and has involved the environmental officers 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.

2.7 In addition, project proposals need to demonstrate that they will predominantly benefit tenants as the HRA is being used to fund the environmental programme.

2.8 This report provides an update on the position with regard to the programme as reported to the CHTG on Thursday 1st November 2018.

2.9 A copy of the updated programme and projects identified to date is attached as appendix 1.

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 delivery of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) 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 5 “Ways of Working”. The 7 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.

3.4 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. It is a Welsh Government requirement that the WHQS is achieved by 2020. The WHQS identifies 7 specific aims in the Welsh Assembly Government’s Revised Guidance for Social Landlords – July 2008. This report relates specifically to Part 6: All dwellings should be located in an environment to which residents can relate and in which they can be proud to live.

3.5 Caerphilly County Borough Council’s Well-being Objectives for 2018/19 include: WBO3 – Address the availability, condition and sustainability of homes throughout the county borough and provide advice, assistance and support to help improve peoples’ wellbeing and WBO5 – Creating a County Borough that supports a Healthy Lifestyle in accordance with the sustainable development principle within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

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 in 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 tenants/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 The decision was taken by the Project Board to split the programme into two phases; the first concentrating on low level environmental requirements and routine improvements to housing estates that would have been previously raised by tenants, officers or members or highlighted by the area housing managers. The second phase concentrates on areas in need of

maintenance and investment to address health and safety issues, anti-social behaviour as well as making general improvements to improve the overall aspect of our estates.

- 4.5 Over 300 minor schemes were identified as a result of this process of which circa 90% have been delivered. The remaining schemes have been re-packaged into larger schemes that will be progressed during phase 2, forwarded to an alternative department or declined as they did not fit the programme criteria.
- 4.6 During phase 2, officers have concentrated on undertaking an extensive engagement exercise throughout the borough and in individual communities in order to identify improvements and amenities that communities identify as important to them and value.
- 4.7 In order to be considered, projects need to predominantly benefit Council tenants
- 4.8 A copy of the matrix which highlights the progress made and the projects identified during phase 2 and the most current engagement timetable is attached as appendix 1 (copy to be circulated at the meeting).
- 4.9 Officers have identified 82 communities throughout Caerphilly county borough (83 were reported in the previous report but Trapwell and Rudry have now been combined).
- 4.10 To date, engagement and consultation efforts have been completed in 44 communities and are ongoing in 22 thereby leaving 16 communities to engage with during 2019/20.
- 4.11 Whilst the original budget was set at £10.6m, the actual projects to be completed are based on the consultation exercises and feedback from local tenants/residents to ensure that we can evidence a need, that these in the main satisfy the criteria of meeting WHQS and predominantly benefit our tenants. The current projected programme expenditure to 2020 is now estimated to be £8.5m.
- 4.12 In 2017 the Project Board mandated a requirement to ensure that the programme delivered 'synergistic opportunities' for departments and teams throughout the Council and a conscious effort has been made to ensure that as much work as possible is undertaken in house. This has helped strengthen teams, brought greater integration, pooled budgets and enhanced learning between teams.
- 4.13 Members will be aware of the commitment made at the outset of embarking on this major investment programme, that this would be used to not only transform tenants homes, but also their lives and the communities in which they live. The environmental programme aims to deliver on this commitment and in doing so some of the projects being identified fall outside of the stated WHQS criteria and therefore will not be considered as part of our overall compliance.
- 4.14 It is therefore anticipated that whilst all 82 communities will have been engaged with by March 2020, it may take a further 9-12 months for all schemes identified via the engagement exercise to be delivered. The priority however, will be to deliver those projects that directly link to our WHQS compliance to ensure full achievement by the 2020 deadline, with any other projects being progressed and completed as soon as possible thereafter.
- 4.15 This is due to the capacity of departments to deliver substantial capital projects within what is essentially a short timeframe and takes into consideration their obligations to deliver statutory services and potential inclement weather. Highways / Engineering have also taken on some responsibility for WHQS external improvements which have to be factored into their resourcing programme.
- 4.16 In order to address capacity issues and expedite the work issued, the WHQS Project Board have agreed to finance a WHQS Landscape Architect who will be primarily responsible for working alongside the Environmental Officers to offer advice and suggestions but also to work closely with colleagues in Procurement to package works accordingly and issue tenders in a

timely manner. The officer will also project manage and oversee the delivery of Parks related projects through to completion (including relevant CDM compliance).

- 4.17 It is anticipated that the WHQS Landscape Architect will be in post by February 2019.
- 4.18 In Highways / Engineering, site assessments for the WHQS environmental programme are continuing and work programmes and packages are established for all agreed works. These current programmes are being delivered through both internal resources and existing framework contracts.
- 4.19 It is recognised that as community engagements progress the work packages and programmes will continue to increase. To address this additional resources are being put in place in Highways / Engineering as follows:-
- One Technician will be recruited to assist with site assessment and appraisal
 - A Professional Services contract is being established to find a Partner consultant who can assist in delivery of detailed designs for new schemes
 - A new flexible contract framework is being set up (DPS) to deal with additional construction workloads.
- 4.20 It is anticipated that the Technician will be in place by Feb 2019 and the new frameworks will be in place by April 2019.
- 4.21 A range of projects have been identified including new parking infrastructure, new / renewal of play facilities, skate parks, the installation of green gyms, new lighting, renewal / widening of footpaths, improved signage and installation of knee rails to protect and enhance green spaces.
- 4.22 Officers advise that some of the best projects delivered in relation to impact have been those that are relatively small but have made the most difference to the local community such as a bus shelter in Phillipstown where residents were having to wait for the bus in the rain; planters in Graig Y Rhacca which have brightened up the area and stimulated community involvement in respect of their ongoing maintenance and picnic benches for elderly residents at older persons schemes to allow residents to socialise during the warmer months.
- 4.23 Efforts are being made to extend the lifecycle of existing community infrastructure and futureproof our communities through the renewal or repair of existing assets and amenities as well as in some cases providing new, thereby reducing future maintenance requirements i.e. renewal of park equipment, skate parks etc
- 4.24 Where possible, the relevant service area will be responsible for the ongoing maintenance liabilities associated with the provision of new facilities. The projects that are Parks related frequently involve the renewal of existing amenities thereby resulting in an opportunity for Parks to conserve their maintenance budgets for spend on alternative priorities.
- 4.25 Copies of the work programmes provided by Parks and Highways / Engineering are contained in Appendix 2.

5. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 5.1 The delivery of the WHQS improvement programme is coterminous with the aims of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) act 2015, in particular the 5 ways of working:-
- **Long Term:** the report includes continued investment and performance to achieve WHQS by 2020. This investment provides long term improvements to homes, communities and to tenants' health and well being.
 - **Integration:** The programme looks to integrate physical and environmental improvements that will benefit and transform lives and communities throughout the county borough. It

further brings together a variety of stakeholders to deliver long term sustainable benefits for lives and communities.

- **Involvement:** Tenants and local residents are being consulted on the proposed property improvements and environmental works along with various initiatives that are part of the WHQS programme delivery.
- **Collaboration:** The programme delivery is focused on internal collaboration, wider partnership arrangements with suppliers and contractors, joint working with the community and various other groups. The delivery of community benefits and tenant engagement by all involved with the WHQS programme is a key focus and is clearly demonstrable within its delivery.
- **Prevention:** The works to improve lives and communities will help tackle local unemployment, tackle fuel poverty and promote greater well being. It will further improve the look and feel of the environment and help prevent anti-social behaviour.

6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment is not required as the report is for information.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 £10.6m has been identified within the WHQS business plan to support the delivery of the environmental programme.
- 7.2 On an annual basis, £350,000 is allocated from within the main budget to the Area Housing Offices (£100,000) and Neighbourhood Housing Offices (£75,000) to address maintenance and repair issues as the original housing maintenance budget was incorporated into the Environmental Programme in 2012.
- 7.3 Appendix 1 contains a spreadsheet illustrating the overall programme and projects that have been identified to date together with the estimated cost of those projects (£8.5m). The programme is operating within the budget allocated and any underspend on the budget will be protected and reinvested back into the housing stock
- 7.4 The costs incurred to date (since 2017 when the programme started) amount to £2,273,630.57 (including the garage enhancements) however, the majority of the projects identified are in the process of being undertaken with many others at the feasibility, design or procurement stage. The greatest spend is expected to occur in 2019/20 as capacity is increased to deliver the projects approved.
- 7.5 Appendix 3 illustrates the budget actuals incurred against the programme to date.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

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

9. CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 All responses from consultations have been incorporated into the report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the report.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 To advise Members of the progress made in relation to the delivery of the WHQS Environmental Programme.

12. STATUTORY POWER

- 12.1 Housing Acts 1985, 1996, 2004, Local Government Measures 2009 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

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Consultees:

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Dave Street	- Director of Social Services and Housing
Shaun Couzens	- Chief Housing Officer
Fiona Wilkins	- Public Sector Housing Manager
Mandy Betts	- Tenant and Community Involvement Manager

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Environmental Programme Matrix – **to be circulated at meeting**
Appendix 2 – Parks & Highways / Engineering Work Programmes
Appendix 3 – Budget Actuals