



## **CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN THE SIRHOWY ROOM, PENALLTA HOUSE, ON  
TUESDAY, 14TH FEBRUARY 2019 AT 5.00 P.M.**

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PRESENT:

Mr C. Davies - Vice-Chair

Councillors:

M. Davies, L. Harding, B. Jones, L.G. Whittle

Tenant Representatives:

M. James, S. Jones, L. Pewtner, R. Thompson

Officers:

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), P. Smythe (Technical Housing Manager), J. Roberts-Waite (Strategic Co-ordination Manager), P. Griffiths (Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager), M. Lloyd (Head of Infrastructure) and K. Houghton (Committee Services Officer)

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor L. Phipps, D. Price, A. Hussey and Tenant Representatives Y. Bryant and D. Moore.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

### **3. MINUTES – 6TH DECEMBER 2018**

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on the 6th December 2018 be agreed as a correct record and by a show of hands was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 6th December 2018 (minute no, 1-7) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **4. REPROFILING OF WHQS PROGRAMME AND HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2019/2020**

The Technical Housing Manager introduced the report which provided Members with proposals for re-profiling the final stages of the WHQS programme with the aim of ensuring compliance by 2020, prior to the report being considered by Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and thereafter Cabinet for approval.

The Technical Housing Manager referred Members to the details of the report and drew particular attention to paragraph 5.20 of the report which concluded that the re-profiled programme had been developed to inform Members and stakeholders on the anticipated timescales for bringing the Council's housing stock up to the WHQS. In addition the programme aims to demonstrate that full compliance will be achieved by the December 2020 deadline as set by WG.

In relation to the projected increased investment totalling £250m, a Member enquired as to why there had been an increased investment. The Technical Housing Manager explained that this increase was based on actual property survey results and an understanding that work would be increased to finish all the properties rather than omit them from the programme. The Chief Housing Officer added that the increase does not take the rate of borrowing beyond what was agreed by full Council and Cabinet and so is affordable.

A Member sought clarification on the changing circumstances in addition to the loss of the second contractor, as referred to in the report, which have affected the Programme and the need to re-profile. The Officers responded that there had been various additional works which had created delays such as unanticipated ecological considerations effecting work on roofs and also performance issues with contractors. The Technical Housing Manager stated that with a contract of this magnitude there would be some slippage and so re-profiling was necessary however the completion date of March is still achievable and is significantly earlier than the WG deadline of December 2020 and for additional reassurance the Welsh Audit Office (WAO) are satisfied with the timescales for completion.

Members discussed targets for completing external and internal works given the timescales and funding support and whether any increase in targets could be accommodated. The Technical Housing Manager informed Members that both external and internal works are validated weekly and there had been an increase in weekly targets. The increased weekly targets were being supported by the creation of additional teams including the procurement of more contractors through the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS).

A Member enquired as to how energy efficiency was being increased within properties and how properties in need of energy efficiency improvements were identified. The Chief Housing Officer outlined that energy efficiencies are gained through internal work by installing new boilers, installing loft insulation, double glazing and additional wall insulation. He told Members that the whole housing stock is surveyed and assessed for energy efficiency.

A discussion was had regarding issues with communication between the Housing Service and Tenants particularly with Tenant Liaison Officers in regards to informing Tenants when both external and internal works are planned on their properties. The Chief Housing Officer informed Members that there were processes in place for communicating planned works to Tenants and that he would look into the issues experienced.

Members asked for further information on the rate of slippage in the Programme and whether it was a realistic expectation that works would catch up. The Technical Housing Manager advised Members that slippage for internal works was 700 properties however catch up is achievable in the last year of the programme and for external works slippage was 900 but again catch up was achievable based on current performance. The Chief Housing Officer added that despite delays the Programme is deliverable and projects a target for completion by March 2020 and the WAO are satisfied with the timeframes set out by the Programme. He acknowledged that there will potentially be slippage due to unforeseen delays however the

March 2020 deadline is nine months prior to the WG December 2020 deadline and therefore contingency for these slippages has been built into the timeframes.

Following consideration and in noting the details of the report, the Caerphilly Homes Task Group unanimously recommended to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee that the comments of the Group be noted when considering the reprofiling of the WHQS Programme and HRA Capital programme.

RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted and the CHTG recommend to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee that the comments of the Group be noted.
- (ii) the Group has considered the revised WHQS programme and projected increased investment totalling £250m
- (iii) the borrowing requirement necessary to complete the programme (currently £43m) with the proviso that the borrowing amount remains affordable within the Business Plan and the HRA, be noted.

## **5. WHQS ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRESS**

The Strategic Co-ordination Manager introduced the report which provided Members with a high level update on progress regarding the delivery of the WHQS Environmental Programme.

She referred Members to the details of Section 4 of the report and highlighted the project had been split into two phases; minor environmental works and areas in need of maintenance and investment to address health and safety issues, anti-social behaviour as well as general improvements to the overall aspect of estates. The second phase had led to an extensive consultation process with the tenants which are still ongoing. She advised Members 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. To mitigate the resourcing pressures experienced a number of initiatives have been supported by the project such as a Landscape Architect and a Highways Technician. Officers are working hard to deliver meaningful and effective projects.

The Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager updated Members on the work Countryside Services are contributing to the WHQS Environmental Programme. There have been issues with recruiting a Landscape Architect; however the role has been re-advertised through an agency. There is however currently capacity within the existing team and an Officer is working 50% of the time on the Programme. The team have been focusing on improving and introducing physical infrastructure in the form of skate parks, MUGAs and children's play areas. This is progressing well and the work is currently out for tender with the expectation that children's play area works will begin after February half term and skate park work in June.

The Head of Infrastructure informed Members that Highways have a number of ongoing works related to the Programme. There has been some resourcing pressures however this has been eased by the employment of a specialist technician and dedicating an Officer in the Design Team to the Programme. The use of a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) which is being introduced will also help expediting work.

The Chief Housing Officer added that it has been difficult to plan the resources required to complete the Programme whilst the consultation process is continuing. He highlighted to Members that the County Borough are delivering their Environmental Programme differently from other local authorities in that works are being undertaken beyond the curtilage of properties and time is being taken to deliver quality outcomes.

Members discussed the 9-12 month delay in delivering the Programme and the status of the engagement process. They sought reassurance that this Programme could be delivered within the new deadlines. The Chief Housing Officer explained to Members that the delay was as a result of changing priorities within the Council and increased resource pressures however once the consultation process has been completed, which will be completed on time, then the service will have a better idea of the work that is needed and therefore the timeframe in which this work will be completed. The 9-12 month extension takes this into account. A Member enquired as to when the consultation process will finish. The Strategic Co-ordination Manager advised Members that there were 16 communities still to consult with, 22 which were still ongoing but nearing completion and the expected completion for the entire consultation process is the 30th March 2020.

A Member raised concerns that the focus for the Programme was predominately on the larger housing areas and the smaller areas would not benefit as much or as quickly from the various projects. The Strategic Co-ordination Manager clarified to Members that the Programme budget was based on £1000 per HRA property and so those areas with less HRA properties would have a lower budget but there are some works taking place in smaller areas.

Members enquired about the length of the tendering, procurement and construction process for skate parks and children's play areas. The Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager advised Members that the design stage was in-house, the tendering and procurement stage was estimated to take 4-6 weeks to include procurement, tendering and analysis of tenders and in terms of the construction, there are 8 sites identified for either a new skate park or children's play area and it is expected that the appointed contractor would work on these sites concurrently.

A brief discussion took place regarding land in need of improvement that lie outside of the HRA land and therefore not eligible for inclusion in the Environmental Programme. The Strategic Co-ordination Manager informed Members that the Regeneration team were looking at particular areas of the County Borough where improvements were needed as part a of wider set of plans for regeneration.

Following consideration of the report the Caerphilly Homes Task Group noted its contents.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

## **6. INFORMATION ITEMS**

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

- (1) Wales Audit Office WHQS Review
- (2) Well-being Objective 3 Mid-Year Update (April-October 2018)

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

There were no requests for items made at the meeting.

The meeting closed at 18:21pm.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 28th March 2019.

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CHAIR