



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN THE SIRHOWY ROOM, PENALLTA HOUSE, ON
TUESDAY, 10TH SEPTEMBER 2019 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Mr C. Davies – Chair
Mr L. Harding – Vice Chair

Task Group Members:

Mrs D. Moore, Ms M. James, Ms R. Thompson, Mrs Y Bryant, M. Davies, Mrs B.A. Jones, Ms S. Jones, L. Phipps and L.G. Whittle.

Officers:

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), M. Betts (Tenant and Community Involvement Manager), G. Hoare (Housing Officer (Customer Services)) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer)

1. TO APPOINT A CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR FOR THE ENSUING YEAR

It was moved and seconded that Mr C. Davies be appointed as Chair of Caerphilly Homes Task Group for the ensuing year and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that Mr C. Davies be appointed Chair of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group for the ensuing year.

It was moved and seconded that Councillor L. Harding be appointed as Vice Chair of Caerphilly Homes Task Group for the ensuing year and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that Councillor L. Harding be appointed Vice Chair of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group for the ensuing year.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. Hussey and Mrs D. Price.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Tenant Representatives C. Davies, M. James, S. Jones, D. Moore, L. Pewtner, R. Thompson, Y. Bryant and Councillor B.A. Jones declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in all

agenda items as they are Council Tenants.

4. MINUTES – 27TH JUNE 2019

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the meeting held on the 27th June 2019 be agreed as a correct record and by a show of hands was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27th June 2019 (minute no. 1-7) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. COMPLAINTS, REPRESENTATIONS AND COMPLIMENTS – CAERPHILLY HOMES

The report provided the Caerphilly Homes Task Group (the Task Group) with information on the contacts in relation to representations received by the Authority's Housing Customer Services Section, from 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019.

The Officer explained that the monitoring of complaints and representations is carried out to provide information on the level of satisfaction with the service provided by Caerphilly Homes. The results enable Managers to focus on areas of concern and positive feedback, with the aim of improving services and monitoring performance and ensuring that where issues are identified similar problems are avoided in the future. The corporate complaints procedure places an emphasis on learning from complaints. There have been examples of complaints which have led to changes in policies and procedures, which were highlighted within the report.

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

In noting the number of complaints received at Stage 2 within different areas of Housing, a Member sought clarification on what is covered under Housing Management. Officers explained that this covers a number of areas, and the complaints refer to a damaged fence, communication issues in respect of tenancies and assistance with temporary moves. The Task Group noted that the majority of complaints in respect of WHQS are around the works programme and external contractors.

A Member sought clarification on the table at 5.2.3 of the report and complaints to the Chief Executive and Service Requests. It was noted that often the Chief Executive Office will take complaints from a variety of services for all areas within the Council, and are provided with a reference number. More often than not, complaints are passed on from residents via their MP's or AM's. Service Requests are received by the relevant Housing Department. Further queries were raised in relation to the Chief Executive contacts and whether these contacts were due to a lack of response from the Housing Department. The Task Group Member was reassured that often the Chief Executive Office is the first port of call.

Task Group Members were pleased to note the number of Praise given as outlined within the report. It was noted that only written praise is recorded, in the form of emails, letters or cards, however, verbal praise is not recorded but also received.

A Task Group Member sought further information on the process should a complaint be upheld by the Ombudsman. Officers explained that it would depend on the recommendation of the Ombudsman, the Council could be asked to apologise to the complainant, or apologise and offer monetary compensation, depending on the complaint, or it could result in additional training being required. It was noted that these recommendations are implemented as soon as possible, unless training is required, in which case implementation could take a little more time to arrange.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group noted the report.

6. WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 2 AND 3 – YEAR END PERFORMANCE REPORT 2018/2019.

The report, which was presented to the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 23rd July 2019, provided an annual progress update against Well-being Objective 2 (Enabling Employment) and Well-being Objective 3 (address the availability, condition and sustainability of homes throughout the country borough and to provide advice, assistance or support to help improve people's well-being).

The Task Group were referred to the outcomes for Well-being Objective 2 and 3 as set out in Sections 5.1 and 5.2 of the report, and were advised that following review, both were judged to be progressing well after the first year of the 5-year plan. The report identified areas that have performed well over the past year and also highlighted areas for improvement and the steps that are being implemented to take these actions forward. A progress update in respect of each Well-being Objective was appended to the report, together with details of case studies in relation to the Well-being Objective 3 for Housing. Members were asked to scrutinise the report and satisfy themselves that this progress is being made, prior to publication of the outcomes in the overall Council Annual Performance Report for the year 2018/19.

The Task Group were asked to note that within Wellbeing Objective 2, there are limited sections which are within the remit of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group to Scrutinise, which include 5.1.4 which refers to the use of investment in the housing stock to increase the number of skilled, qualified workers and tackle worklessness by providing apprenticeship, training and work placements with our in-house workforce and building contractors and the "What has gone well" and "What has not gone so well?" sections referring to Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS) on pages 21 and 23 of the report.

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

A Task Group Member sought further information around the properties purchased under Wellbeing Objective 3 and "What has gone well". It was noted that the properties were vacant for a long period of time and purchased by the authority to increase housing stock using the Affordable Housing Grant. The Task Group noted that some of the properties purchased are in high demand areas, and will provide suitable housing for families in need and some in the vicinity of Caerphilly.

Discussions took place around Arrears and the impacts of Universal Credit and a Task Group Member queried the use of Discretionary Housing Payments and the periods for which they are available, and whether these can be extended, due to underspends in previous years. Officers explained that Discretionary Housing Payment is provided on a time limited basis and is aimed to provide temporary support to people during periods of difficulty. There is scope for extensions, which are decided on a case by case basis. The Task Group were asked to note that Discretionary Housing Grants are not administered by Caerphilly Homes, but the Benefits Department, and it was agreed that Officers be contacted to provide a presentation to the Task Group on this matter.

The Task Group discussed the Local Housing Strategy and sought further information on the delays for producing the document. Officers explained that the delay is as a result of staff shortages and as such, an external Consultant is in the process of being commissioned to complete the Strategy. The Task Group were assured that various other policies have been developed which will underpin the strategy. Further concerns were raised around the additional financial implications of commissioning a Consultant, and staff knowledge within the department. Officers explained that whilst this is a concern, officers will continue to contribute towards the process of developing the strategy and there are significant budget pressures being placed on all departments within the Council, as a result of the ongoing Austerity measures and as such it has not been possible to replace expertise when staff leave.

However, a restructure will shortly be undertaken which aims to look at smarter ways of working, and encourage staff to have more general knowledge, thus reducing similar issues in the future.

Discussions took place around the successful employment programme, as outlined within Wellbeing Objective 2 and a Task Group Member sought further information on the number of tenants employed through apprenticeships and works within the WHQS Programmes. Officers explained that this information could prove difficult to obtain, as it would depend on the records of contractors within the scheme, however any information available will be forwarded to the Task Group member when available.

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 items be presented to the next meeting:

1. A Report on the Post 2020 Maintenance Services was requested. Officers highlighted that a Progress Update Report is due in coming meetings, and will include the Maintenance Services as part of the report.
2. A Presentation on Discretionary Housing Payments and how it works.
3. A report was requested on progress of WHQS Programme in the Penyrheol ward.
4. Report was requested on Pollution in the borough. It was noted that this is not the remit of the Committee, however, it was agreed that Officers would determine the relevant Committee and feedback.

The meeting closed at 6:03pm.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 31st October 2019.

CHAIR