



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN THE SIRHOWY ROOM, PENALLTA HOUSE, ON
THURSDAY, 16TH JANUARY 2020 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Mr C. Davies – Chair

Task Group Members:

M. Davies, A. Hussey, S. Jones, D. Moore, Mrs R. Thompson, L. Pewtner, L. Phipps, and L.G. Whittle.

Officers:

J. Roberts-Waite (Strategic Coordination Manager), P. Smythe (Housing Technical Manager), L. Allen (Principal Group Accountant – Housing) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer)

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE CHAIR

Mr C. Davies, on behalf of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group extended their condolences to the family of Mrs Yvonne Bryant, Tenant Representative. It was noted that Mrs Bryant was a dedicated and committed Member of the group, and would make every effort, despite long-term illness to be in attendance and be an active participant in the Task Group meetings. Mrs Bryant was a valued member of the Task Group, and as a mark of respect, the Caerphilly Homes Task Group held a minute silence in her memory.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs B. Jones, L. Harding and Mrs D. Price and Ms M. James – Tenant Representative.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 31ST OCTOBER 2019

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the last meeting held on 31 October 2019 be approved as a correct record and by a show of hands was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2019 (minute no. 1-2) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. CAERPHILLY HOMES – BUILDING TOGETHER

The report, which was considered by Cabinet on 15th January 2020 and Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 26th November 2019 outlined the vision to build new homes and increase housing supply in the county borough following the completion of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard in 2020.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group (The Task Group) were advised that the Caerphilly Local Housing Market Assessment had identified a requirement of 282 units per annum over a period of 5 years in order to meet local demand. Members were advised that this is made up of 169 social housing rented units and 113 intermediate units. It was noted that there is a particular need for one bedroom accommodation.

It was noted that although there is currently a surplus of older person's accommodation throughout the county borough, the current provision does not meet the needs in terms of size, facilities and surrounding environment. This would need to be taken into account with any planned programme of development in order to ensure suitable accommodation is available for anticipated growth in demand for older persons.

The Task Group were informed of the research already undertaken in terms of the way forward by looking at what has already been done in other areas, discussions with industry experts on good quality and precision engineered homes and an ambition to produce zero carbon homes, in line with Welsh Government expectations. The report outlined plans for 400 new homes in the first instance which is considered a realistic target as these proposals will take time to develop.

The Task Group thanked the Officers for the report and discussion ensued.

The Task Group raised a number of concerns around the building of properties using a steel frame and explained that previous homes had been built in this fashion, which were later deemed to be unsafe and uninhabitable. Officers explained that whilst the previous issues are known, the steel frames are a new and innovative project; which will need thorough testing and would not be rolled out across the broader project. There is a similar scheme being undertaken in Bristol, however the scheme would be subject to rigorous testing. In addition, the Task Group were asked to note that there are some concerns with timber framed properties, in particular due to flammability, and the lifespan of the metal frames is approximately 60 years, which can also be recycled if needed.

A Task Group Member sought reassurance that brown field sites would be given priority for development. Officers confirmed that brown field sites would be given priority, however it was noted that this may not always be possible if the site is deemed not fit for purpose or has significant issues under the ground, and alternative sites would need to be sought. Brownfield sites under consideration include garage sites and a site adjacent to an Aneurin Bevan Health Board site, which is currently under investigation by United Welsh and a feasibility update should be provided at the next meeting.

Discussions took place around accommodation requirements and a Tenant Representative raised concerns for works underway at a Sheltered Accommodation site, in which some residents could lose their homes. Officers agreed to consider this and clarify queries with the tenant representative.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and noted its content.

5. WHQS FINAL STAGE PROGRESS REPORT/ POST 2020 ASSET MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME PROPOSALS

The report, which was considered by Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 26th November 2019 provided Members with an overview of the performance of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) Team to date and set out the anticipated projected performance up to December 2020. The report also included details of the current financial outturn to date for the 2019/20 WHQS works, and an overview of the many achievements that have been made as part of the wider commitments and benefits delivered by the WHQS programme. In addition, the report gave an overview of the Post 2020 Asset Management proposals which will commence following the successful completion of the WHQS programme.

The Task Group were advised that current and projected performance has demonstrated that full WHQS compliance is achievable prior to the December 2020 deadline. Due to recent concerns regarding the performance and quality of work by some contractors within the final stages of the programme, the remaining contracts have been allocated to the In-House workforce, which has resulted in a revised target completion date from March 2020 to June 2020 to allow for these additional 150 properties to be absorbed, but which is still ahead of the December 2020 deadline.

The Task Group noted details of the energy efficiency schemes and environmental projects delivered as part of the programme, together with the community benefits being achieved via the provision of training opportunities, placements and permanent jobs created through the in-house service and its partners. The Task Group were advised that customer satisfaction levels in respect of WHQS works are generally high, although it is accepted that customer satisfaction for external works continues to be less than those received for internal works. As a result, the WHQS Team has reviewed current practice and has now introduced telephone surveys in the first instance. The report also provided an analysis of the reasons for dissatisfaction for both internal and external works.

The Task Group noted the current and projected financial position of the programme as set out within the report, and it was explained that borrowing will be required for the second time since the programme commencement. In addition, it has also been confirmed that the housing business plan remains financially viable throughout the programme and to deliver the post-2020 strategy.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and discussions ensued.

In regards to the surveys, a Task Group Member queried the process and noted that a survey was conducted in the Argoed area during spring 2019, but the works are not scheduled until 2020. Officers explained that the original surveys were undertaken too early, and as a result were often not accurate when it came to undertaking the works. Therefore, the surveys are now being undertaken shortly before the works commence, in order to provide a more accurate picture of requirements.

A Task Group Member sought further information on the future of the number of apprentices that were undertaken as part of the WHQS scheme. Officers explained that for the remainder of the scheme, works will be undertaken by the in-house workforce, there will be a requirement to conduct maintenance, further projects are planned post 2020 and, as the workforce is aging, investments into the apprenticeship scheme enables continuity and future proofing of the service.

A query was raised around procurement and the issues identified with some of the contractors and whether this has had an impact on the standard of works and completion dates of the scheme. Officers explained that this has had a significant impact on the scheme, and initial indications from Welsh Government suggested that the scheme would not be completed by

2020, however whilst there have been a number of successful relationships with the external workforce, it has been seen as prudent to minimise risk to the completion of the scheme and continue works with the in-house workforce, to ensure a timely and high quality completion of WHQS, whilst also ensuring tenant satisfaction.

Further queries were raised around delays to completion, however the Task Group were assured that whilst there could be some issues with completion due to inclement weather, it is anticipated that the works will be completed in June 2020, which still offers an additional 6 months before required completion is to take place for any snags.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and noted its content.

6. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET MONITORING – PERIOD 4 -2019/20

The report, which was considered by Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 15th October 2019 informed the Caerphilly Homes Task Group (The Task Group) of projected revenue expenditure for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2019/20 financial year, and detailed the HRA capital programme which is predominantly funded by the HRA.

The report highlighted the distinction between the HRA, which is funded by rental income received from council tenants, and General Fund Housing activities, which fall under the General Fund and are funded by the Council taxpayer. Although there is a clear separation of these funds, the majority of council tenants rent is funded from housing benefits which are derived from the tax payers purse and therefore value for money must always be sought. The report outlined the projected outturn for the HRA based upon the expenditure and income for the first four months of the year.

The Task Group noted the HRA budget for 2018/19 of £51.7m with its main components consisting of £11m of salaries (net of WHQS funding), £935m of capital financing charges, £9.3m of response repairs, and £17m of revenue contributions to fund the WHQS programme. The spend on the HRA is self-financed mainly by the rental income collected from Council Tenants, of which around 71% is funded by Housing Benefits. The underspend at period 4 is projected to be £2.3m, with the reasons for this underspend set out at Sections 5.2 to 5.7 of the Officers Report.

Having considered and discussed the report, the Caerphilly Homes Task Group noted its contents.

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 was requested on Allocations – number of new applications and movements on the Housing Allocations Register.

The meeting closed at 6.19pm.

CHAIR