



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
(SIRHOWY ROOM)
ON THURSDAY 18TH SEPTEMBER 2014 AT 5:00 PM**

PRESENT:

Mrs D. Price - Chair
C. Davies- Vice Chair

Task Group Members:

L. Ackerman, R.T. Davies, K. James. Mrs B. Jones, G. Jones, Mrs S. Jones, Ms A. Lewis,
Mrs G. Green, C.P. Mann, M. McDermott

L. Allen (Principal Accountant, Environment Finance Group), M. Betts (Tenant and Community Involvement Manager) J. Carter (Senior Housing Officer), S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), P. Davy (Head of Programmes), V. Parsons (Supported Housing Manager), G. Taylor (Tenant Participation Officer), and C. Evans (Democratic Services Officer),

1. TO APPOINT A CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

In accordance with the terms of reference for the Caerphilly Homes Task Group, that the role of Chair and Vice Chair alternate annually between Councillors and Tenants, Councillor Mrs D. Price was nominated and seconded as chair for the forthcoming year and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

Mr C. Davies was nominated and seconded as Vice Chair for the forthcoming year and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

In the absence of Councillor Mrs D. Price, the Chair, Mr C. Davies, Vice Chair presided over the meeting.

2. WELCOME TO THE NEW TENANT REPRESENTATIVES

The Chair welcomed the new Task Group Members, Mr Max McDermott and Ms Gemma Green to the meeting and introductions of the Task Group Members and Officers were conducted.

The group wished to pass on their thanks to Amanda McDonnell for her commitment and work for the Task Group and it was agreed that a letter of thanks would be sent.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Dianne Price, Mr J. Moore and Mrs D. Moore.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Ms. A. Lewis, Mr C. Davies, Ms G. Green, Mrs S. Jones, Mr M. McDermott and Councillor B. Jones as Council Tenants declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in all agenda items.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 3rd July 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6. HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP (HIP)

M. Betts, Tenant and Community Involvement Manager, provided the Caerphilly Homes Task Group (CHTG) with an updated information report, following discussions with tenant representatives on the introduction of the Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP) – the 'Caerphilly Homes approach to Scrutiny'.

It was noted that the Tenant and Community Involvement Team met with tenant members of the Task Group regarding the HIP project and a presentation was also provided to the Tenant Information Exchange (TIE). The CHTG tenant representatives and TIE members highlighted a number of issues and concerns in relation to the project.

Members noted that while some tenants still have concerns with the project, detailed discussions have taken place to clarify issues and alleviate concerns on the introduction of the HIP project as a pilot.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and added that the meeting was very productive, however, the views of the tenants had not changed.

The Task Group noted that the recruitment process had not yet begun. It was anticipated that recruitment would be concluded by Christmas, with training in January and February to April would be used to conduct reviews.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group noted the contents of the report.

7. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT OUTTURN REPORT 2013-14

L. Allen, Principal Accountant, provided the Caerphilly Homes Task Group (CHTG) with an overview of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) outturn for 2013/14.

Members were asked to note the distinction between the HRA, which is funded by rental income received from council tenants, and General Fund Housing and Private Housing, which fall under the General Fund and is funded via the Council taxpayer.

The outturn of the Housing Capital Programme is included on the WHQS Monitoring Report, which has been submitted separately to this Committee.

Members thanked the Officer for the report and debate ensued. A Member queried whether the under spent balances could be used to contribute towards the environmental works. Officers explained that various changes had occurred over the last few months. In particular the HRA will now fully fund the WHQS programme and the Council had recently approved a revised business plan and agreed a new borrowing limit for the HRA. Assurances were given that the environmental programme had been included within the revised business plan and that all the WHQS works are to be completed by 2020 in accordance with the commitments given to tenants. The balances are required to help fund the business plan and need to be utilised to meet the programme requirements. The Task Group will continue to receive regular monitoring reports.

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

8. COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS – CAERPHILLY HOMES.

M. Betts, Tenant and Community Involvement Manager, and Janet Carter, Senior Housing Officer provided an overview of the report, which informed the Task Group on contacts in relation to complaints and representations received by the Authority's Housing Customer Services Section from 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014.

In April 2013 the Council implemented a new two-stage corporate complaints policy for complainants to follow. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint it can be progressed to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. This policy was based on guidance issued by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and replaced the previous 3 stage policy.

Members thanked the Officers for the report and sought further information on the complaints process, in particular around the reporting of complaints. Officers explained the Complaints process, the stages and that many are resolved as Service requests. It was highlighted that complaints can be reported by any means available to the complainant, although it is preferred for the complaint to be in writing, it is not essential. Members noted however that Ombudsman complaints are required in writing, however, support would be available to the complainant if there as a need.

A Member queried signposting and advertising the complaints process. Officers clarified that the process is clearly explained to each contact, the process followed would be dependent on the type of complaint and how a complainant wishes to proceed. Complainants are able to make direct complaints to the Ombudsman, in which case the Chief Executive would get notification. The process is clearly specified, along with contact details on the website and on leaflets provided to tenants and Members noted that a "learning from complaints" group has been corporately devised in order to identify any trends and look to manage the process more effectively.

It was noted 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 to improve services and monitor performance and ensure that similar problems are avoided in the future.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group thanked the Officers for the detailed report and noted its contents and Complaints data.

9. OLDER PERSONS HOUSING – PROGRESS REPORT

V. Parsons, Supported Housing Manager, provided the Task Group with an update on the progress made by the Older Persons Housing Team through the implementation of the new service model. The report highlighted the positive changes made in relation to the development of the service area.

The Task Group noted that an options report was presented to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group in September 2013, which identified a new model of service delivery, to ensure that older persons' needs were met through tenure neutral, needs assessed services. Significant changes have been made to the former sheltered housing service to encompass the housing related support needs of older people within Caerphilly Homes.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group thanked the Officer for the detailed report and discussion ensued, in which the levels of support to tenants, floating support and care packages were discussed.

The Task Group discussed the Hardwire Alarm systems within the Sheltered Housing Schemes. Officers confirmed that the hardwired alarm system within Sheltered Schemes has been retained although a decommissioning exercise has been completed e.g. Group Schemes and the systems have been replaced with a dispersed alarm system within all schemes across the County Borough, for those tenants wanting an alarm. In order to support the alarms, tenants are required to have a landline; members queried whether alternative "mobile" systems could be used, however, Officers stated that a similar system is available, using a Simcard, but this can be prone to signal difficulties and therefore were not a viable option in the Schemes.

A Member sought further information on the Sheltered Housing Utilities Charges. It was noted that a report was supported by the CHTG on 4th April 2014, which proposed new arrangements for the gas and electricity charges, as part of the sheltered housing review process. Officers confirmed that individual accounts have now been set up for tenants within the schemes, initially with one supplier, however tenants are able to change their suppliers as they wish. It was also noted that as all tenants continue to contribute towards the cost of electricity and gas consumption in communal areas within their service charge, savings are being made, as tenants are more conscious of their energy use.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group noted the positive progress made to date in the development of Older Persons Services within Caerphilly Homes following the robust and comprehensive review of the service area.

The Task Group also wanted to pass on their gratitude to Val Parsons for all the hard work and support and wish her all the best in her retirement.

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

The following requests were received:-

- (i) Anna Lewis requested a report on what Housing Policies are in place to prevent offences against women.
- (ii) Anna Lewis requested a report on the Code of Conduct
- (iii) Councillor Lyn Ackerman requested a report highlighting the Vacant Posts within the department, the position and the department.
- (iv) Clive Davies requested that Robert Price be invited to an available meeting to provide an update on the showrooms promised to Tenants for the WHQS works.

Prior to the meeting closing, the Housing Task Group wanted to express their gratitude and congratulations to Kelsey Watkins and staff on the excellent and entertaining presentation evening. It was felt that the evening was well run and a huge success and hope to have another in the future.

The meeting closed at 18:22 pm.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 30th October 2014.

CHAIRMAN