



HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 27TH FEBRUARY 2023

SUBJECT: FUTURE OF CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 For Members to consider and agree the future of Caerphilly Homes Task Group (CHTG) due to the completion of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) Programme and future work of Caerphilly Homes, prior to presentation at Cabinet on the 8th March 2023 and thereafter Council on the 23rd May 2023.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The report provides background to the establishment of the CHTG and changes made to the Council's constitution. The report also considers the terms of reference for the CHTG which predominantly focused on the strategic direction and performance relating to the WHQS Programme.
- 2.2 With the WHQS Programme now completed in December 2021, following unavoidable delays necessitated by the Covid pandemic restrictions, it is considered appropriate to review the purpose and future of the group and to consider alternative methods of tenants/contract holder engagement, with specific reference to the imminent commencement of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard 2023 programme.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Members recommend that Cabinet approve the discontinuation of CHTG, for the reasons stated within the report. A special meeting was held in July 22 with the Repairs & Improvement Group and tenant members of CHTG following the completion of the WHQS programme to review the achievements and challenges, whilst also celebrating its successful conclusion.
- 3.2 Members recommend that Cabinet commend the CHTG for the contribution it has made towards achieving the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.
- 3.3 Members acknowledge and approve the various existing and potential new methods to be explored by Caerphilly Homes for engagement with tenant/contract holders now and in the future. The proposals for effective and meaningful engagement will enable more tenants/contract holders to have an opportunity to express views and be consulted on the future direction of Caerphilly Homes.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The CHTG has delivered on its Terms of Reference and contributed to the successful delivery of the largest project ever delivered by Caerphilly County Borough Council, which resulted in a total programme investment of approximately £270M.
- 4.2 There now needs to be more varied and impactful ways of engaging with contract holders to contribute to the way services are delivered across Caerphilly Homes.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 Following the outcome of the ballot on housing stock transfer in February 2012, which resulted in the Council retaining its housing stock, the Council considered the mechanisms required to oversee the management and delivery of the WHQS Programme. This included housing service improvements that had been promised in the Offer Document/Addendum for the stock transfer, where there was a commitment to engage more effectively with tenants. To give effect to this the Council, at the meeting held on 29 February 2012, agreed to establish an all-party Housing Task Group with tenant representatives. Over time this group became the CHTG with the group operating more in a consultative role with its views on housing reports being sought and passed on to the relevant scrutiny committees for their consideration.
- 5.2 CHTG had not met since the start of the Covid pandemic, which impacted on face-to-face meetings, and the introduction of virtual meetings at that stage would have necessitated the issuing of new IT equipment and provision of training to CHTG members.
- 5.3 Since the establishment of CHTG, members of the group have been presented with 216 reports and various presentations over a total of 55 meetings.
- 5.4 Attendance at meetings has varied over the years and been disappointing on occasions. Whilst membership of the group has changed over time, many members have been attending since its inception and their continued contribution and commitment has been very much appreciated. However, future engagement by a wider cohort would be beneficial to ensure a broader range of tenants' views and opinions are considered.
- 5.5 With the WHQS Programme completed, and the Regeneration and Housing Scrutiny Committee now part of the corporate governance arrangements, it is proposed that CHTG be discontinued. A final meeting was held with all tenant CHTG members and members of the Repairs and Improvement Group in July 22 to review the achievement of WHQS and thank all tenants for their involvement and significant contributions.
- 5.6 From an officer's perspective the CHTG has delivered on its Terms of Reference and contributed to the successful delivery of the largest project ever delivered by CCBC, which resulted in a total programme investment of approximately £270m.

Future Tenant/Contract Holder Engagement

- 5.7 Caerphilly Homes recognises the importance of listening to and acting on tenant/contract holder's views and remains committed to involving them in developing the strategic direction. The process of tenant/contract holder engagement and involvement in debating what services are required and delivered is under constant review. This results in new mechanisms and initiatives with a focus, not

only on tenant/contract holder consultation, but also providing opportunities for tenant/contract holders to have a meaningful, positive impact on the delivery of services, thereby achieving measurable outcomes and improvements.

- 5.8 While the scope of WHQS 2023 is not yet finalised, the current draft standard and guidance sets out expectations for how social landlords should involve tenants/contract holders. Currently Welsh Government's aspiration is that within three years of the publication of the standard, social landlords need to have consulted with their tenants/contract holders on the draft programme. Caerphilly Homes will work with tenants/contract holders before then to develop a consultation policy. This will need to show how tenant/contract holders are involved in the important decisions that will need to be made to achieve the new standard. The standard has real challenges in terms of energy efficiency and decarbonisation, and tenant/contract holder views on how it is approached and then communicated will be key to its success. A decision will need to be made as to how tenants/contract holders are involved in WHQS23 following its launch and the publication of the consultation policy.
- 5.9 Caerphilly Homes continues to learn from tenant/contract holder engagement methods used to date and will utilise feedback from the recent tenant satisfaction survey on how tenant/contract holders want to engage. This has reinforced that listening to resident's views and acting on them is a key driver of satisfaction overall. There are also many other areas where tenant/contract holder input is needed.
- 5.10 Overall the future emphasis is that we will listen and engage with tenants/contract holders in a variety of ways. The range of activities/ mechanisms would develop through monitoring and regular review of what has worked, what hasn't, the outcomes of the activities and the impact on service delivery/improvement.
- 5.11 CHTG relied on a small number of voices and consequently only represented opinions of a few tenants. Officers have explored and developed new, diverse, effective and meaningful ways to engage. Moving forward there will need to be a variety of ways that tenants/contract holders can get involved, based on their interests and availability. This includes opportunities that would enable more tenants to express views, hopefully resulting in wider feedback. It is encouraging to note that a third of respondents to the latest tenant satisfaction survey indicated that they would be interested in having a say about the services we provide, with digital forms of consultation particularly popular amongst younger tenants.
- 5.12 The following ways of engaging with our tenants /contract holders are currently in place or will be next financial year and shows a significant level of involvement with more to come as plans for WHQS 2023 are developed.
- 5.13 Tenant Information Exchange (TIE)
TIE meets every 6 weeks, now meeting in person again but there is also the option to offer the meeting online. Proposal is to focus twice yearly on new ideas, initiatives, and current concerns, open to all tenants and supplemented with an online poll. Information will also be given on current consultations and other engagement activities.
- 5.14 Have Your Say Conversation Sessions
These structured conversations are an extension of the TIE and conducted through and at TIE meetings. Future outcomes of the conversation and any related supplementary activities to be fed back in a report to Head of Housing/Cabinet

Member. Actions to be developed from the conversations. Head of Housing/Cabinet Member to attend future conversation sessions to give feedback.

5.15 Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP)

The Group hasn't met since Covid but is now in a position to relaunch and is open to new participants. The HIP is an independent group of tenants not involved in any other groups. The HIP uses customer journey mapping principles to look at the experience tenants have when using Caerphilly Homes services.

5.16 The aim is for the Group to look at 2 areas of the service each year over 6-8 sessions using evidence such as letters, emails, transcription of telephone conversations and when available, call recording will also be utilised. Reports from this Group are sent to the appropriate service manager in Caerphilly Homes for consideration and if appropriate implementation of their recommendations to improve service delivery. This group has in the past looked at landlord's consent, income recovery, tenancy support service, floating support service, tenancy enforcement and mutual exchanges.

5.17 Tenant Participation Strategy

The current strategy is out of date (2019) and needs to be updated so there will be consultation on the current objectives and whether they are still fit for purpose or need to change next financial year.

5.18 WHQS 2023

Tenant representation will be sought in any discussion on the new consultation framework that will need to be developed for WHQS 2023. This will start later next financial year as Welsh Government announce plans. By definition and context this will be a comprehensive survey of all tenant /contract holder views on the refurbishment and upgrades of all properties in Caerphilly Homes ownership focusing on affordable warmth and decarbonisation.

5.19 Review Groups

Where issues are raised by tenants/contract holders or staff there may need to be a review of an aspect of service in a different way to that undertaken by the HIP. These groups would be open to tenants/contract holders with recent experience of that aspect of the service under review, facilitated by Tenant and Community Involvement Team (TACI) and led by appropriate managers.

5.20 Tenant Satisfaction Survey Action Plan

Headlines of the findings of 2021 tenant satisfaction survey have been shared with tenants/contract holders. Later this calendar year the action plan to address some of these findings that need improvement will be published by Caerphilly Homes.

5.21 New Tenant Satisfaction Survey

There is a requirement to update the 2021 comprehensive survey, for submission to WG by March 2024. The new comprehensive survey is likely to be needed for distribution in the autumn of 2023. The results of this will help us shape our offer further to provide meaningful activities/consultation that is designed around how our tenants/contract holders want to be engaged. A leaflet sharing feedback on the last survey has been sent to all tenants.

5.22 Neighbourhood Days/Surgeries

Targeted opportunities for different sections of Caerphilly Homes to attend Neighbourhood Days/Surgeries and be open to all tenants/contract holders to give their views on relevant consultations and to feedback on general issues. Makes the whole service more visible and relevant to tenants.

5.23 Social Media and online surveys

Caerphilly Homes are already making more use of social media to share timely and relevant information with tenants/contract holders. The EGov bulletin email service currently has around 2,000 tenants/contract holders registered for feedback. Use of social media to feed into any HIP sessions or review groups can be used to test whether issues that come out at the 'Have Your Say' conversation sessions are of relevance to all tenants/contract holders.

5.24 Tenant Portal

As part of the change to the new Caerphilly Homes IT system there is a tenant portal facility. The basic tenant portal has been built and will be tested with tenants/contract holders shortly. Full functionality won't be available until the full system has been migrated but it is planned to launch the basic version of the portal later this year. There will be opportunities for tenants/contract holders to view their own information e.g. rent statements and recent communications from Caerphilly Homes and also to send in queries or report certain issues. There will also be an option to let us know if they want to be involved in engagement activities.

5.25 Rent and Affordability Consultation

Since 2020 there have been annual surveys around rent and affordability. These have been supplemented by focus groups both online and in person. As well as the information from the surveys, outcomes have included tenant input into how the JRF Living Rent model is applied in the Borough and annual production of a leaflet to all tenants/contract holders showing how their rent money is spent was a direct result of what tenants/contract holders told us they wanted. A How your Rent is Spent leaflet has already been distributed to all tenants/contact holders.

5.26 As a result of the last survey in October 2022, 150 tenants said that they are happy to be contacted again in 2023 to discuss rent and affordability.

5.27 Engagement mechanisms/activities will be reviewed regularly to ensure they are still fit for purpose.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

6.1 There are no assumptions made with regard to this report.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 An IIA screening has been completed in accordance with the Council's Strategic Equality Plan and supplementary guidance. No potential unlawful discrimination and/or low level or minor negative impact has been identified. Therefore, a full IIA has not been carried out.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There have clearly been costs associated with the resourcing, implementation, running and management of the CHTG, therefore the proposed disbanding of the group will result in a cost saving, but these will be offset by alternative methods of tenant engagement.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no personnel implications arising from the report.

10. CONSULTATIONS

10.1 Comments received have been taken into consideration within the report.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000.

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Consultees:	Cllr Patricia Cook	- Vice Chair Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee
	Cllr Shayne Cook	- Cabinet Member for Housing
	Christina Harrhy	- Chief Executive
	Dave Street	- Corporate Director Social Services and Housing
	Robert Tranter	- Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
	Stephen R Harris	- Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer
	Fiona Wilkins	- Housing Services Manager
	Jane Roberts-Waite	- Strategic Co-ordination Manager
	Lesley Allen	- Principal Accountant (Housing)
	Alan Edmunds	- Housing Technical Manager
	Mandy Betts	- Tenant and Community Involvement Team