



## **CABINET – 8TH MARCH 2023**

**SUBJECT: FUTURE OF CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 For Cabinet 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, and also submit this report to Council on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2023. The report was considered by the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 2023; comments from the Committee are included in Section 10 of the report.

### **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 Cabinet note the comments of the Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.2 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 That Cabinet commend the CHTG for the contribution it has made towards achieving the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.
- 3.3 Cabinet 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. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 An EIA 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 EIA 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.
- 10.2 The report was presented to the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 2023.
- 10.3 The Scrutiny Committee noted the plans for current and future ways to engage with tenants and contract holders and CHTG was made up of both Tenants and Councillors, the committee asked how the future plans will involve Councillors.
- 10.4 Members were advised that the CHTG was set up for a specific purpose with an equal number of Tenants and Councillors and now the WHQS is complete. It should also be noted that the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee was also established after the CHTG and provides Members with a forum for consultation. Members asked if there is any intention to offer a co-opted position on the scrutiny committee to a tenant representative. The committee were advised that this is not something that has been proposed.
- 10.5 Members were advised that although the report focusses on future engagement with contract holders there will be engagement with Councillors as we go forward. There will be significant consultation for example on WHQS 2023 where Councillors will be involved. There will also be a tenant exchange group where tenants will have a direct link to the Head of Housing and the Cabinet Member for Housing and then back to this committee.
- 10.6 The Scrutiny Committee sought assurance that the Communication Strategy will allow for consultation with tenants who do not have internet access or social media. Will there be contact through tenant support officers actually visiting properties to gather information on what tenants think of our services and what they need.
- 10.7 Members were advised that the council uses all sorts of communication methods to contact tenants, such as newsletters and surveys, and do not to rely solely on email – although that is the most efficient.
- 10.8 Further detail was requested on the new methods of consulting highlighted in the report and whether the Cabinet Member was comfortable with the activities and noted that CHTG has not met since COVID.
- 10.9 Members were advised that the key feature will be the WHQS 2023 and how the consultation strategy will need to work around that. However, until Welsh Government announce their plans it is difficult to say how it will work. It was confirmed that CHTG had met in July to thank them for the work they had done but going forward the aim is to have a greater breadth and depth of those engaged and seek a wider range of opinions. The Cabinet Member stated that all Councillors regularly speak with tenants on housing issues and feed back to the housing department, the tenant exchange group referenced in the report will provide a mechanism for him to listen to tenants on any issues they may have.
- 10.10 The scrutiny committee sought clarification on the impact of the new contracts where contract holders are causing a nuisance and the Authority wishes to pursue an eviction. Members were reminded that the new Contracts came about from the Renting Homes Wales Act 2016 and came into effect in December 2022. The terminology has changed from Tenant to Contract holder. In respect of antisocial behaviour there are different ways of looking at it in terms of who is the perpetrator and whether it is the actual contract holder and as yet there have not been any cases to consider. The Act provides the rent

payer more rights and more protection for all types of rented accommodation, not just social landlords.

- 10.11 Members sought information on the outstanding WHQS works to sheltered accommodation complexes and referenced Britannia Complex which is currently having works undertaken. The committee asked what other outstanding works are required and why the report states that the WHQS is completed. Members were advised that under the WHQS there was an term 'Acceptable Fails' this applied to works that were over and above the WHQS criteria, and this applied to five sheltered housing complexes which needed longer term programs of work. Therefore, the Authority was permitted to exclude these from the WHQS completion numbers and are in the planned maintenance program. However, with reference to a previous question it should be noted they do have an impact on void figures and have to be excluded from true voids to get an accurate figure.
- 10.12 Members asked in respect of WHQS 2023 if there is a plan to set up another tenants group and if there is, why are we disbanding the CHTG. The committee were advised that there are no plans to have a similar task group and the consultation process will be outlined and specified by Welsh Government. This has been outlined within their preliminary advice on WHQS 2023 and they want a comprehensive consultation strategy for all residents and tenants. This will need to be robust transparent and enable all views and opinions to be brought in.
- 10.13 The Scrutiny Committee asked if there is any indication on the timescales for WHQS 2023. Members were advised that originally Welsh Government planned to announce last month but it is understood to be imminent. The original plan was a ten year program and our consultation response was that this is an ambitious time frame to achieve net zero across all stock, which will have an impact on the Business Plan, as this is not affordable currently.
- 10.14 The recommendations were moved and seconded and supported by the majority present.

## 11. STATUTORY POWER

### 11.1 Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000.

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Consultees:

Cllr Sean Morgan	- Leader of Council
Cllr Patricia Cook	- Vice Chair Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Shayne Cook	- Cabinet Member for Housing
Christina Harray	- Chief Executive
Dave Street	- Corporate Director for Social Services and Housing
Mark S Williams	- Corporate Director for Economy and Environment
Richard (Ed) Edmunds	- Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services
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