



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
(SIRHOWY ROOM) ON THURSDAY, 16TH FEBRUARY 2017 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

A. Lewis – Vice Chair (Presiding)

Task Group Members:

L. Ackerman, Mrs Y. Bryant, C. Davies, Ms J. Gale, K. James, Mrs B. Jones, Mrs S. Jones, Ms A. Lewis, C. Mann, Mrs D. Moore, J. Moore and D.V. Poole.

Officers:

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), M. Lloyd (Deputy Head of Programmes), F. Wilkins (Public Sector Housing Manager), G. Taylor (Tenant Participation Officer), E. Bayliss, M. Betts (Tenant and Community Involvement Manager) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Miss E. Forehead (Chair).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs B. Jones and Tenant Representatives Mrs Y. Bryant, C. Davies, Mrs S. Jones, Ms A. Lewis, Mrs D. Moore and Mr J. Moore declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in all agenda items as Council Tenants.

3. MINUTES – 15TH DECEMBER 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15th December 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. RE-PROFILING OF WHQS PROGRAMME AND HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2017/2018.

The report was considered by Caerphilly Homes Task Group (CHTG) on the 16th February 2017 and sought views prior to its presentation to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

CHTG noted that there has continued to be progress and slippage with the WHQS delivery programme during 2016/17. As such it has been necessary to review and update the current delivery programme. The report sets out the proposed changes. The majority of the internal work changes have resulted in work being brought forward in the programme. In regard to the

external works programme the majority of the changes have resulted in works being moved to future years.

The Sheltered Housing Scheme approach has now altered with the works being delivered by the in-house teams. This work has now been built into the forward works programme.

The HRA Capital Programme budget allocates the necessary resources based on the Savills cost plan. Work is underway to amend this approach so that in future it will be based on actual costs being achieved for works undertaken which provides a more realistic projection in relation to the proposed budget expenditure. These figures will be continually reviewed and assessed to provide the most accurate forecast possible for budget planning.

The Task Group discussed the report at length and sought further information on tenant involvement in future contract recruitment, the DPS process and the risk of poor craftsman being allowed to retender. Officers explained that tenant involvement would come at a later stage in the process and were assured that any contractors that were removed from the process in the past or there are concerns for quality of work, unless they can demonstrate improvement, would not be invited to tender. The Task Group raised serious concerns over the continued use of the Savills Survey, on the basis that the surveys are ineffective and out of date. Officers reassured the Task Group that the Savills survey will shortly be replaced for internal works, as there is sufficient information available from the works conducted to provide estimates for future works. At present, there has not been enough completed external works to provide the same information, however, the Task Group were assured that Savills surveys will no longer be in use after 6 months, should sufficient data be collected.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report the Caerphilly Homes Task Group note the contents of the report prior to its consideration at Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

5. WHQS ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME

The report provided the Task Group with a detailed overview of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) environmental programme for their information.

It was noted that, following the ballot in February 2012, the Council agreed that it would deliver the promises made in its Offer Document to tenants and deliver the WHQS by March 2020. The Council also agreed that its capital investment in homes would deliver social outcomes to 'transform lives and communities'.

Part of the commitment to deliver the WHQS across all 10,865 homes also included a requirement to comply with Part 6, which aims to ensure that 'all dwellings should be located in an environment to which residents can relate and in which they can be proud to live'. As a result, £10.6m has been set aside in the business plan agreed with Welsh Government specifically for this purpose.

The Task Group noted that three Environmental Officers were recruited to work with the Area Housing teams and local members in order to initially identify environmental maintenance/repair issues. The issues were identified and collated into a single spreadsheet with each project being detailed in a proforma.

Over 300 projects have been identified across the county borough to date and colleagues across several departments have become involved in providing support and advice, with many projects requiring specialist input from Highways, Waste and Parks Services in order to

assess feasibility and options. The Task Group would be provided with a more detailed report in the Spring, following the completion of the consultations.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued. A Tenant Representative expressed their disappointment that the process was only in the research stage, as well as the low level of funding available for projects. Officers explained that additional work is underway to identify funding for projects across the borough, which includes Groundworks and National Lottery Funding.

Clarification was sought on the criteria for the projects and it was noted that the funding has been set aside for areas that fall outside of WHQS scoping, such as car parks, fencing, knee rails etc. It was asked to note that schemes are under consideration for which there would be little to no ongoing maintenance, therefore playgrounds would not meet the criteria.

The Task Group raised their concerns for the lack of consultation with tenants at this point, especially as the projects are aimed to improve the aesthetics of the environment, however, the Task Group were asked to note that the report was for information, however, a more detailed report would be brought to the Task Group for consideration, at a later meeting.

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

6. LEASEHOLDER CHARGES

The report, which was in response to a Member's request for further information on leaseholder legislation, process and good practice, was considered by the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 17th January 2017.

It was noted that there are currently 417 flats within the Council's housing stock now owned by leaseholders, following their sale under the Right to Buy (RTB) scheme. The Council has continuing responsibilities to maintain the external structure and communal areas of the blocks of flats. The leaseholder procedures in respect of these properties are in line with legislation and national guidance, and are currently being reviewed by Legal Services.

This report covered leaseholder legislation, associated processes including consultation and procurement financial obligations of leaseholders, including charges and payment options, and good practice guidance.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and discussed at length. Further detail was sought on the make up of the Leaseholder Tribunal. It was noted that this is a Public/ external body and is made up of experts in the field from external organisations, and is completely independent of the Council.

Discussions took place around a Leaseholder Forum. It was noted that there isn't one at present, due to limited interest in the past, however it is something that could be reintroduced and would possibly have more success. There is a number of correspondence being sent out, but an informal setting may be more beneficial.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group noted the report.

7. ROWAN PLACE, RHYMNEY – PROPOSED DEMOLITION OF FLATS – BLOCK 65-68.

The report, which was considered by Cabinet on 18th January 2017, sought Cabinet approval to demolish an additional block of flats in Rowan Place, Rhymney in conjunction with the improvement of the physical condition of the estate.

The Task Group noted that following the identification of severe damp and external defects to the external fabric of the properties in Rowan Place, a major investment programme is currently being undertaken to bring the properties up to the WHQS. Following the demolition of one block of four flats of the remaining 68 Council owned stock, 44 of the properties are 2 bedroom flats comprising 11 blocks. This is a large concentration in a very small area.

It was noted that, following Cabinet approval to demolish one block of flats to reduce the density of the estate, and in recognition that there remain a large number of two bedroom flats, further approval was granted to demolish an additional block due to ongoing low demand in the area, to enhance the environmental aspect of this estate and to achieve financial savings.

The Task Group were informed that whilst Cabinet had endorsed the report, queries were raised regarding the void issues in Rowan Place and it was noted that there has been extensive work undertaken to improve the overall aesthetics of the estate, and a number of events held, such as fun days, open days and barbeques to raise the profile and encourage further lettings, to no avail.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued. A Task Group Member queried the level of advertising in Rhymney and it was noted that there has been one advert posted within the town. Officers highlighted that a number of leaflets and posters have been sent to Local Businesses, as well as the Post Office and Library, however, Officers will look into this.

A Task Group Member sought further information on the lessons learnt as a result of the extensive work conducted within Rowan Place and the difficulties leasing the premises. Officers explained that the estate originally attracted a lot of single people, due to the high density of flats and as a result, there were high levels of crime. Extensive works have been conducted to improve the environment and homes within the estate, with the aim to attract families, as well as single people and provide a more desirable place to live. In addition, the works required were as a result of surveys highlighting damp issues and it is hoped that tenants would be more inclined to report any issues.

Further information was sought on the Leaseholders living within the proposed block, Officers explained that they have agreed to move to an alternative premises within the state.

The Task Group were asked to move that the Welsh Government have also now approved the application to demolish the block of flats.

The Caerphilly Homes Task Group noted the report.

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

1. An update report was requested on the Community Fund and options for going forward.
2. A report was requested on the number of Acceptable Fails and an update on the progress and status?
3. A report was requested on the number of partial works undertaken and number of full works???
4. A Report was sought on the financial- rents/ arrears?
5. An update was requested on the Handheld devices.
6. Training was requested on the Wellbeing and Future Generations Act and how this impacts on Housing.

The meeting closed at 6.44 p.m.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 30th March 2017.

CHAIR