

CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Housing/WHQS JCC held on 19th March 2015
Cherry Tree House**

Present:

Phil Davy (PGD) – Head of Programmes (In the Chair)
Shaun Couzens (SC) – Chief Housing Officer
Marcus Lloyd (ML) – Deputy Head of Programmes (Present for part meeting only)
Sian Phillips (SP) – HR Manager
Richard James (RJ) – Principal HR Officer
Paul James (PJ) – Health and Safety Manager
Neil Funnell (NF) – GMB
Juan Roberts-Garcia (JRG) - Unison
Simon Brassine (SB) - UCATT

| | | Action/ Date |
|-----|--|-----------------|
| 1.0 | <u>Apologies for Absence</u> There were no apologies for absence | |
| 2.0 | <u>PDR Process</u> As ML had to leave the meeting early it was agreed that this issue be discussed at the commencement of the meeting rather than it be raised as AOB. RJ provided an overview of the work that had been undertaken to date within Housing/WHQS in relation to a pilot PDR process. Having received feedback it had been determined that a document that was more “fit for purpose” for the workforce group would be of assistance to both employees and supervisors. This was currently in development and would be circulated to the TU representatives for their comments before progressing. GE queried whether regular 1-2-1’s would remain in place as he considered this to be an important part of the review process. RJ agreed and outlined that the training event stresses that PDRs should not take the place of frequent 1-2-1 discussions with staff. | RJ |
| 3.0 | <u>WHQS Position Update</u> PGD provided an update on the progress made to date. Whilst the completion date remains unaltered there has been significant slippage to the work programme. There is no change to the end date for the programme, which means that the WHQS team face an extremely challenging and demanding period ahead. It was explained that a figure of 90 completions every week will be required across all contracts next year. Whilst the scale of the challenge is huge, PGD is of the view that the work programme is achievable. The work currently being undertaken at Rowen Place (Rhymney) has clearly had an impact on the team’s capacity and ability to deliver against the requirements of the in-house work force programme. To give a feel for the scale of the work required in this area the original £600k estimated budget has increased to £4.2 million due to the condition of the properties. | |

PGD outlined that the in house WHQS team has grown substantially since it was established. The number of operatives that were originally assigned to the in-house team was around the 100 mark. The figure is currently around 160 and this may need to increase to meet future demand. In connection with this an exercise to rebalance Agency/Permanent staff is underway, and there has been an increase in Apprentice opportunities created.

The recent growth in recruitment activity has had some impact on available office space, which has meant that opportunities to provide staff with a community base or hot-desking facilities are currently being explored.

PGD outlined that the WHQS team have started to encounter some issues around recruitment, particularly in specialist roles, and this is clearly having an impact on internal capacity to deliver the work programme. Attempts to fill these gaps via agency have proved unsuccessful, whilst it has become clear that the construction sector is generally experiencing skills shortages.

In order to meet the challenges of the programme PGD explained that the senior team will be looking at all opportunities, including the use of external consultancy support where appropriate. The senior team will also be looking at establishing sub programmes where other parties outside of the WHQS team can pick up packages of work.

PGD acknowledged that the operating environment is in stark contrast to the rest of the organisation as there is a ring-fenced account, only for Housing (HRA). However, he was keen to emphasise that the WHQS programme presents different demands and challenges. PGD was also keen to get the message out that the WHQS work is having no direct impact on the general fund, and that it was completely untrue that cuts in the general fund are being made to supplement the Councils efforts to improve its Housing stock to the required standard.

PGD was asked what type of jobs the WHQS team were struggling to recruit and why this was the case?

ML explained that the quality of submissions received for Clerk of Works vacancies were particularly poor, and no interest had been shown in the Quantity Surveyor roles.

PGD suggested that some of this is due to market rates. The service area has recently appointed 3 large contractors with a combined contract value of circa £50m who are also recruiting in the same pool. PGD gave an example where recent attempt to secure trade operatives via agency were thwarted by higher wage rates being offered by the same contractors we have commissioned.

SB queried how many contractors have been commissioned?

PGD explained that whilst there were 3 core contractors assigned to deliver the internal works programme; subcontract arrangements would mean that the number of contractors working on the programme is likely to be higher. There are also a number of 'small lots' contracts which comprise largely of Caerphilly based providers.

In terms of the external works contract there are currently two lots established with different contract values and we currently have around a dozen contractors listed against each lot.

A series of mini competitions will also be going out to tender shortly. In addition, the DLO subcontract framework is in place to support a range of activities.

PGD felt that it was important to note the unseen side of the programme dealing with tenants. Clearly there are lots of individual issues that Tenant Liaison Officers are contending with e.g. mental health issues, drug abuse, etc. There have also been isolated threats of physical violence, which in one case ended up in an injunction being put in place to prevent a tenant from being in the home when works are being undertaken.

The recent work in Rowan Place (a traditionally low demand area, with a high number of void properties) has underlined the fact that the service doesn't have full visibility of all the issues that may be encountered on each patch. The whole work programme has effectively been based around a Savills stock condition survey undertaken in 2008, which gathered data from only 15% of the council's stock. During more extensive surveys of Rowan Place it became clear that there was a significant damp problem the main cause being defects to the fabric of the buildings. PGD explained that an options paper was presented to Council asking them whether they wanted to reduce the stock in this location or invest in the properties to WHQS standard. The Council chose to retain all the Housing stock in Rowan Place and therefore in-house resources were redirected to undertake the necessary improvements.

SC mentioned that feedback from tenants has been very positive to date and that it is important to remember that a lot of local jobs have been created as a result of the WHQS programme. In addition, a number of businesses have benefitted directly from the considerable investment being made at a local level.

SB stated that he has personally worked in a number of the recently upgraded homes and has had some very positive feedback from tenants around the levels of workmanship/customer care provided. However, some concerns were raised by tenants he had encountered around the performance of subcontractors.

PGD acknowledged that the new contract arrangements have not come without issues, however, a lot of good work is being done through the TLO's and Project Managers to improve operational practice. It is still relatively early days in terms of the contract management arrangements, and that he was expecting to see significant improvement in this area going forward.

SB asked managers how they felt Robert Price was performing, as he has been made aware of a number of issues since the partnership arrangements have been put in place.

PGD underlined that this is a two way process. RP are dependant on us for reliable and timely information, and that some teething problems had been experienced. Nevertheless, PGD considered that this was largely due to the fact that established procedures were not in place from the onset. A lot of work has since been undertaken to put the necessary procedures in place and noticeable improvements have been made. PGD was of the view that more can be achieved, particularly in terms of "just in time" stock control.

SC supported this view and acknowledged that Response Maintenance would also need to work particularly hard in this area given the impending closure of the Tir-y-berth stores. In terms of staffing issues there are currently 2 permanent members of staff in the stores, however, we have been mindful that the changes would be taking place for some time and have put measures in place to minimise the impact from a HR perspective.

SB suggested that a change in mind-set will be required in the future in order to gain further efficiencies through the supply chain process.

| | | |
|-----|--|--|
| 4.0 | <p><u>Closure of Pontllanfraith House – Impact on Housing.</u></p> <p>SC provided attendees with copies of a report submitted to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group dated 02nd April 2015. A copy of which is attached to the minutes of this meeting.</p> <p>SC outlined some of the key impacts and issues associated with the expected closure of Ty Pontllanfraith. Namely;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That Tredomen Business Centre is the proposed location for the vast majority of Housing staff who are currently based at Ty Pontllanfraith, subject to confirmation of available work space. • A possible merger with Blaenau Gwent is currently being considered for the Authorities Care and Repair team. • The Eastern Valley Housing Office will continue to have a staffed presence (around 14 staff) within Blackwood Town Centre <p>SC mentioned that an officers working group to consult on the issues has been established.</p> | |
| 5.0 | <p><u>Any Other Business</u></p> <p>SC mentioned that transitional funding of around £300k (over 3 years) had been secured for the services of the Homelessness team.</p> | |
| 6.0 | <p><u>Date of Next Meeting</u></p> <p>It was agreed that meetings would be arranged on a quarterly basis.</p> | |