



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
(SIRHOWY ROOM) ON THURSDAY, 2ND APRIL 2015 AT 5.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

C. Davies- Vice Chair (Presiding)

Task Group Members:

Ms L. Ackerman, R.T. Davies, K. James, Mrs B. Jones, G. Jones, Mrs S. Jones, Miss A. Lewis, M. McDermott, Mrs D. Moore and J. Moore.

S. Couzens (Chief Housing Officer), P. Davy (Head of Programmes), J. Roberts-Waite (Strategic Co-ordination Manager) and C. Evans (Democratic Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Miss G. Green, C. Mann and Mrs D. Price.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Miss A. Lewis, Mr C. Davies, Mrs B. Jones, Mrs S. Jones, Mr M. McDermott, Mrs D. Moore and Mr J. Moore as Council Tenants declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in all agenda items.

3. MINUTES – 19TH FEBRUARY 2015.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 19th February 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. WHQS AND SHELTERED HOUSING COMPLEXES.

The report sought the views of the Task Group on changes to the WHQS programme delivery relating to the sheltered housing complexes, prior to consideration by Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and presentation to Cabinet for decision.

Arising from a number of setbacks, the WHQS Programme is under severe pressure to complete by 2020. Additional measures are under active investigation to expand the capacity to cope with the volume of work. The report advocates an alternative approach to implement the WHQS programme in relation to the sheltered complexes. In summary the management and delivery of the WHQS works on the sheltered schemes could be out sourced to a suitable multi disciplinary consultancy leaving just the client role in house.

1. In view of the pressures on the WHQS programme the CHTG recommend to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet that the sheltered complexes are packaged into a separate programme and the management and delivery is outsourced to a suitable multi disciplinary consultancy, including the option of tenant liaison.
2. The 6 complexes identified in the report where future remodelling or redevelopment is under consideration be taken out for the WHQS Programme in the period to 2020 and dealt with once decisions have been made about the long term future of these properties.

The Task Group expressed their disappointment that such measures were seen to be essential. Concerns were raised for the high targets for completion and Members sought reassurance that the programme was realistic and achievable. Officers agreed with concerns, however, assured the Task Group that additional arrangements are being put in place to increase the capacity to deliver WHQS by 2020. Consultation would be conducted with the affected tenants where remodelling is a potential option.

Members sought clarification on the suggestion to outsource Tenant Liaison. Officers highlighted that due to the increased pressure on staff, it was suggested that outsourcing would relieve pressure on the existing teams; however, tenants were assured that, the Client role would remain with the Council.

Budget provision and the impact of outsourcing was discussed in detail, Officers explained that fees were estimated at 10-12% of the Capital cost. It was noted that there is a risk that the cost of completing WHQS could increase and spending may be in excess of budget provision.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in 9.1 of the report be supported. By a show of hands (and in noting that there was one abstention) this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the officer's report and in view of the pressures on the WHQS programme the CHTG recommend to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet that the sheltered complexes are packaged into a separate programme and the management and delivery is outsourced to a suitable multi disciplinary consultancy, including the option of tenant liaison.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in 9.2 of the report be supported. By a show of hands (and in noting that there were 4 in favour, 5 against and one abstention) this motion was lost.

RESOLVED that, the proposal that the 6 complexes identified in the report where future remodelling or redevelopment is under consideration be taken out for the WHQS Programme in the period to 2020 and dealt with once decisions have been made about the long term future of these properties, be not supported.

5. LOCAL EMPLOYMENT FUND – SUPPORTING LIFT.

The report, which was deferred at the last meeting, sought the approval of the Task Group to allocate the annual Local Employment Fund budget to Communities First in order to add value and enhance the Welsh Government's LIFT programme.

During Summer 2014 the Welsh Government announced the introduction of the Lift Programme designed to support its Tackling Poverty agenda through providing training and employment opportunities for people in workless households. The programme is aimed at supporting people who have spent more than 6 months out of work and who face the greatest barriers to becoming employable. For example:

- Young single parent households
- Households in which adults have few or no formal qualifications
- People with weak employment records
- Individuals with disabilities

Originally the Welsh Government advised that in Caerphilly County Borough the LIFT programme would only be piloted in the Caerphilly Basin Cluster (including Lansbury Park) however, they have recently approved an expansion of the project to the upper Rhymney Valley Cluster area (including the Twyn Carno ward) hence the request to allocate the funds to enhance and support the delivery of the recently announced wider programme.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the report and the Task Group noted the apologies for T. McMahon (Community Regeneration Manager) for the presentation of the report.

A Task Group Member sought further information on the targets set and whether the programme was specifically for Council Tenants. The Officer explained the scheme was not specifically aimed at tenants only and that the annual target was set at 60 people taking up the scheme, providing a variety of tailored training to meet the needs of individuals.

The Task Group discussed placement and sought further information on whether external organisations can use the funds to provide employment opportunities. Officers clarified that this could not be done for commercial organisations, only third sector and internal opportunities.

Having fully considered the information provided, the Caerphilly Homes Task Group supported the proposal outlined in the report in respect of the Local Employment Fund.

6. HRA GARAGES UPDATE.

The report, which was requested by the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, was presented to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group for consideration and consultation.

A major review of the stock of HRA garages was considered by the Caerphilly Homes Task Group and the Cabinet Sub Committee in December 2012. A strategy was agreed to rationalize the portfolio, reduce the size of the stock through selective demolition of poor condition garages on low demand sites, repair and improve the stock, and to market the garages as part of the HRA assets. Specific proposals were made for every HRA garage block in the County Borough and all relevant ward Members were consulted. A budget of £1.5m was agreed as part of the WHQS Programme to implement the proposals. Since that time, commitments have been made within the Eastern Valleys, which was agreed as the priority area and contracts are at various stages. In due course, the programme will be extended to implement the approved strategy for the garages in the Upper Rhymney Valley and the Lower Rhymney Valley.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and sought further information on the impact the improvements to the Garages have made to vacancies and whether the demolition has resulted in a reduction of Anti-Social Behaviour. Officers highlighted that the improved garages have made a positive impact on the aesthetics, however, there is low demand for the garages in some areas and further work is required to advertise their availability. As the work has recently been conducted, it is too early to determine any trends, but the Task Group were assured that information would be provided when available.

Having fully considered the information provided, the Caerphilly Homes Task Group noted the report.

7. PONTLLANFRAITH HOUSE

The report, which was considered by the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on the 8th December and 20th January 2015 and approved by Full Council on 25th February 2015, provided information on the closure of Ty Pontllanfraith, the associated financial implications, impact on Council services, employment issues and equality implications.

The Task Group noted that, in relation to Housing Services, staff currently based at Ty Pontllanfraith, with the exception of the Eastern Valley Housing Office, are to be re-located to Tredomen Business Park, subject to confirmation of availability of sufficient office space. The accommodation being considered is fit for purpose, accessible for the public with good transport links, is DDA compliant and will provide an improved working environment for staff.

Alternative premises are currently being considered to accommodate the Eastern Valley Housing Office, with the intention to retain this service within the Blackwood Town Centre. This again would improve access and maintain a presence in the area for which the service is responsible.

Whilst the financial implications are highlighted within the reports, there is likely to be an additional cost for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), but this is affordable within the Business Plan. The HRA would have also been liable for a proportion of the costs for rectifying the defects at Ty Pontllanfraith House if approval had not been given for its closure.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and sought further information on the relocation of the Eastern Valley Housing Office, expressing concerns for accessibility. Officers highlighted that consideration has been given to the area office being located within the former Customer First Base in Blackwood.

Concerns were raised around the cost of moving all staff from Ty Pontllanfraith and further information was sought on the impact to jobs. Officers clarified that there are considerable expenses associated with the maintenance of Ty Pontllanfraith, which are considerably higher than relocating staff. Further reassurance was provided to the Task Group that there would be no job losses as a result of the relocation of staff.

Having considered the reports, the Caerphilly Homes Task Group noted the report.

8. IMPACT OF CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP.

The report, which was requested at a previous meeting of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group (CHTG), highlighted the effectiveness and impact, background information to the establishment of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group and activity undertaken.

The CHTG was established with seven Councillors and seven tenants, to focus on the WHQS Programme and the public sector housing service, with the overall objective to be involved in the transformation of the Council's housing estates. Within the terms of the Council's Constitution it was recognised that the CHTG could not be a decision making body and originally recommendations were made to a Cabinet Sub-Committee.

Since the CHTG was formed in September 2012 it has met on 20 separate occasions. Consideration has been given to 69 information reports. The CHTG has debated 39 reports with recommendations, where Cabinet decisions have been required and has been able to offer opinions and amendments to the recommendations. This has included some major issues such as the investment strategy for the WHQS Programme, the Sheltered Housing Service Review, the Tenant Participation Strategy, the Charter for Trust, the Repairs Policy, Rowan Place, and the HRA Garages. In addition, there have been a number of presentations made at the CHTG.

The Task Group thanked the Officer for the report and discussed the split between information and recommendatory items. It was noted that the reports brought to the Committee are often on request for information or with recommendations for consideration under officer delegation or consideration at Scrutiny or Cabinet. The Task Group is established as a consultative group.

The Task Group discussed the impact they have had on decisions and monitoring the programme. A number of suggestions were discussed and debated it was noted that there is no formal process for monitoring the impact of the Task Group itself. Officers suggested that it was for the members of the task group to determine whether they consider the CHTG is effective in the role and an Away Day was agreed in order to consider Performance and Effectiveness of the Group and a Forward Work Programme.

Having fully considered the report, the Task Group unanimously noted the report.

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

The following requests were received:-

1. Miss A. Lewis requested a report on the support provided by CCBC to Council tenants on the changes in universal credits
2. Miss L. Ackerman requested a report on the progress with the WHQS Programme.
3. Miss L. Ackerman requested a report on the current IT packages in use to support WHQS, effectiveness and whether they are fit for purpose.

The meeting closed at 6.59 p.m.

Approved as a correct record subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 21st May 2015.

CHAIRMAN