

Caerphilly

Homes

Winter Issue 9

Regenerating Rowan Place



Cllr David Poole (Deputy Leader of the council & Cabinet Member for Housing) with ward member Cllr Carl Cuss and Cuddy Demolition

Our regeneration programme in Rowan Place, Rhymney is continuing to see the area transformed. Recent developments include the demolition of one block of flats and garages. Environmental improvements, based on feedback from local residents, will shortly begin on this area.

The Rowan Place programme was enhanced with an additional £1 million provided by Welsh Government's Vibrant and Viable Places Tackling Poverty fund. Part of this funding was also used to refurbish the Hafod Deg Resource Centre on Rhymney High Street; creating a 'hub' for local people to access a variety of services.

The approach we've taken to the regeneration of Rowan Place saw us shortlisted in the Collaboration category at the Welsh Housing Awards 2016, organised by CIH Cymru. The shortlist recognised our efforts in working in partnership with other agencies



to ensure the investment being made into Rowan Place helps to transform the lives of local people, as well as improving their physical environment.

We also welcomed some of the first new tenants into the refurbished flats. Linda Williams has moved, with her partner, into the very same flat which her dad lived in. Linda said "My sister lives in Rowan Place so I've seen the improvement work progressing whenever I've visited. I'm really pleased with my new flat and started to make friends with the neighbours already. We're really happy here and enjoying putting the finishing touches to our new home."

There are still a number of council homes available to rent in Rowan Place. Homes available to rent are a mix of ground and first floor two bedroom flats; they have all been fully refurbished and each flat has its own private garden. There are some specific eligibility criteria for these properties; please contact our Upper Rhymney Valley Housing Office for more information on 01443 873535 or by emailing urvaho@caerphilly.gov.uk



Cllr David Poole and Cllr Carl Cuss visit Linda Williams in her new home

Caerphilly Homes
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You said, we did.....

The Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP) is a group of tenants working with us to improve housing services. The HIP focusses on real experiences of tenants and leaseholders who request and receive services from Caerphilly Homes. It offers a 'fresh pair of eyes' and provides valuable information to help officers improve services, by understanding what matters to tenants.

Since April last year, the HIP has reviewed two services: the Landlord Consent Service – where tenants or leaseholders wish to make improvements to their homes; and the Tenancy Support Service – where officers work with tenants to help manage their tenancies, provide advice and support. Some of the changes made as a result of the HIP's work are:



Landlord consent

You said....."I want to make my request using the communication channel of my choice"

Now you can speak to your Housing Officer (when they visit you), call into your local Housing Office, telephone, write or email your request for Landlord Consent.

You said....."I want to know how long it will take before I have a decision"

We have introduced timescales to let you know the length of time it will take before a decision is made.

You said....."If you need to send a Surveyor, I want you to tell me when they are coming"

We now offer appointment times if a Surveyor needs to visit you.

You said....."I want the council to learn from my experience by asking me how well you did"

We have designed a short satisfaction survey so that we can find out what you thought about the service we provided.

Tenancy Support Service

You said....."Before you visit me I want you to tell me how you may be able to help and explain what will happen next"

When booking a visit with you, we will clearly explain what the Tenancy Support Officer (TSO) can help you with and provide information on how you can prepare for the visit.

You said....."I want you to confirm the visit through the communication channel of my choice"

We now send appointment letters by text, letter or via telephone conversations (not voicemail messages on mobile phones).

You said....."I want you to tell me who will be visiting me and listen to me if I have a preference over who visits"

When we book the TSO appointment with you we will tell you the name of the Officer visiting and discuss with you if you have a preference over who calls.

You said....."When you visit me, I want you to summarise what will happen next"

The TSO now leaves an action sheet with useful telephone numbers, a summary of what was discussed during the visit and information on what will happen next for you to keep as a reminder.

If you would like to join to the HIP group or know more about its work, please contact our Tenant and Community Involvement Team on 01495 235011 or email tenantinvolvement@caerphilly.gov.uk

Awards winners announced

Tenants from across the Caerphilly county borough were recognised at a special awards ceremony in September. This year's Caerphilly Homes Celebration Evening was held at Newbridge Memo; it saw the winners announced for our first gardening contest, alongside the third annual Transforming Lives and Communities Awards.



Winners of the gardening contest:

Best hanging basket / pot / container:

- Winner - Deanne Jurich, Rudry
- Second place – Steve Perkins, New Tredegar
- Third place – Rosalind Price-Edwards, Lansbury Park

Best garden:

- Winner - Sandra and David Williams, Abercarn
- Second place – William Rothwell, Markham
- Third place – David John Davies, Lansbury Park

Best community garden:

- Winner - Taraggan, Bargoed
- Second place – Hafod Deg Resource Centre, Rhymney
- Third place – Trevelyan Court, Lansbury Park

Winners of the Transforming Lives and Communities Awards:

Transforming Lives – Group award:

- Winner - Abertysswg Forum Group
- Runner up – Friends of Gwyddon Court and Ranks
- Runner up – Crumlin High Level School

Transforming Lives – Individual award:

- Winner - Roger Rowland
- Runner up – Christine Evans

'The Extra Mile' Employee Award

- Winner – Ray Jenkins, Tenancy Enforcement Officer
- Runner up – Steve Jarrett, Sheltered Housing Officer

Transforming Communities – Group award:

- Winner – Hafod Deg Gardening Project
- Runner up – PenyDre Tenants and Residents Association, Rhymney

Transforming Communities – Individual award:

- Winner – Mike Perry
- Runner up – Mona Whittaker

An award was also presented to Stan Mark, Chair of the former Top of Panside Residents Association (TOPRA), for longstanding contribution to his community.

A number of the awards were sponsored by the single source supply partner for our Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) programme – Robert Price Builders' Merchants, along with their suppliers: Worcester Bosch, Seren Electrical, Nuaire, Quinn Radiators and Solar Windows Ltd.

The evening also saw us premiere a new film, showing some of the achievements made across Caerphilly Homes over the past year. You can watch the film on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2dRihlviaY>

Congratulations to all of the winners and runners up!

Moving home?

What you need to do and how to avoid any nasty surprises.

You may have decided to move home for a number of reasons and whether you're moving to another council property, to one owned by another landlord or buying your own home there are some things you need to do beforehand.

Remember – if you're exchanging properties with someone else you must get permission first from your respective landlords.

Top tips before you move:

- You must **give us at least 4 weeks notice** – this needs to be in writing to your local housing office. If you leave your home before the tenancy end date, you will normally be charged for all the rent until the 4 week period ends.
- **Let us know your forwarding address** – this is so that we can contact you in the future, if we need to. For example, if we need to return any overpayment.
- **Make sure that your rent account is up to date** - if you leave any debt at the end of your tenancy we will actively seek to recover this from you.
- **Ensure your home is left clean and tidy and in a good state of repair** – if we have to clean, remove rubbish you have left behind or repair any damage to the property you will probably have to pay for any work we do.
- **When you leave, everyone who lived in the property with you (including pets!) must move out.**
- If you carried out any improvements yourself, you must either leave the property as it is, or restore it to its original condition. Some improvements, such as central heating must be left. Please contact your housing office for more advice.

How much might it cost if you leave your home in a poor state?

Here are some examples:



New text message alerts for repairs

We're constantly looking for ways to improve the way we work and the service you receive as tenants. Our latest development is the launch of a text messaging service for our Housing Repair Operations team.

When tenants report a repair or need for a surveyor appointment to the Centralised Repair Team, they will receive two text alerts. The first text will be sent following the report of the repair, as confirmation of the appointment, and the second text alert will be sent as a reminder 24 hours before the appointment.

If this turns out to be successful, we may look to roll out text alerts to other service areas at Caerphilly Homes.



Do you live in social rented housing?
Why not **swap** homes?



HomeSwapper is the **largest** national mutual exchange service for social housing tenants wanting to swap homes both **locally** and **nationally**.

- 9/10 get matched within 24 hours
- See all your matches in an instant
- Search for swaps locally or nationally
- 100+ matches per member on average
- Thousands of homes added every week
- Build your own multi-swaps with our unique tools



www.homeswapper.co.uk

Welsh Housing Quality Standard programme continues to transform homes, lives and communities



Pupils from Fochriw Primary School receive their water bottles

Our Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) improvement programme continues to transform tenants' homes, as well as the lives of local people and the communities in which they live.

During financial year 2015/16 we invested £25 million into improvements to tenants' homes across the county borough. This is more than double the amount previously spent by the council on its former housing capital programme. Caerphilly County Borough Council received £7,340,000 from the Welsh Government Major Repairs Allowance for the 2016/17 financial year which has contributed to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) improvements. We also recently started surveying properties in our sheltered housing schemes in

preparation for their improvements to begin in the next financial year.

We've also been doing all that we can to make sure the money that's invested is used to deliver wider benefits throughout the county borough. For example, a number of jobs and training opportunities have been created as a direct result of the WHQS programme. To date, 108 new permanent full time positions have been created with the council, its appointed contractors and supply partner. There have also been a number of work placement opportunities made available and 25 apprenticeships created through WHQS.

Our contractors and supply partner have also given support to local schools and community projects, such as the donation of 120 water bottles from Robert Price Builders' Merchants, our single source supply partner, to Fochriw Primary School earlier this year. The water bottles were donated to help promote healthy living amongst pupils, as well as helping them stay hydrated after their daily 'Mile around the MUGA' initiative.



WHQS apprentices with Cllr David Poole (Cabinet Member for Housing) and Marcus Lloyd (WHQS & Infrastructure Strategy Manager)

Would you like to receive more regular news and updates from Caerphilly Homes?

We've recently launched a new service which provides FREE email alerts and news bulletins direct to your email address.

To subscribe to this service simply click the link below, add your email address and select 'Housing' along with any other topics you're interested in.

<https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKCAERPHILLY/subscriber/new>



**Llinell Gymorth
Byw Heb Ofn**

Darparu gwybodaeth a chefnogaeth
cyfrinachol ynghylch trais domestig,
trais rhywiol a thrais yn erbyn merchod
yng Nghymru

**Live Fear
Free Helpline**

Providing confidential support
and information on domestic
abuse and sexual violence and
violence against women in Wales

0808 80 10 800

Helping lower tenants' energy bills

Over recent years significant investment has been made into making tenants' homes across the county borough more energy efficient. We've done this through working in partnership with a number of energy companies, as well as successfully applying for funding from Welsh Government.

Phillipstown was the third area in the county borough to benefit from a successful funding bid to Welsh Government's Arbed scheme; following on from previous schemes at Fochriw and Hollybush. Around £2.5 million has been invested into making homes more energy efficient in Phillipstown. Works included external insulation, energy advice and voltage optimisers.

Around £1.2 million was invested into installing external wall insulation to 184 properties in Gelligaer, Pontlottyn and Gilfach. These works were carried out as part of the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme, with Eon contributing an estimated £312,000 to the programme.

ECO is a government energy efficiency scheme aimed at helping to reduce carbon emissions and tackle fuel poverty. Under the scheme, larger energy suppliers deliver energy efficiency measures to homes and are given targets based on their share of the domestic gas and electricity market.



The second phase of Eon's ECO programme is expected to see around £2 million spent on improving the energy efficiency and appearance of homes in Lansbury Park. Surveys are currently being carried out on the estate to determine what works can be carried out.

Easy ways of saving energy and money at home



Even if your home isn't one which has benefitted from energy efficiency works, there are still some simple things you can do at home to reduce the amount of energy you use and bring your bills down. Here are some top tips:

- Make sure your electricity and gas company are offering the cheapest energy tariff. Also, check comparison websites to make sure you're getting the best deal.
- Close curtains at dusk to keep the heat in.
- Don't dry clothes on radiators – use an over-bath clothesline or clothes horse.
- Only boil as much water in the kettle as you need (but make sure you cover the element).
- Place reflector panels or aluminium foil behind radiators.
- Try to avoid placing furniture in front of radiators.
- When cooking, select the correct hob for the pan and cook with lids on saucepans.
- Turn down your thermostat by just one degree (this could save £65 a year on heating costs!).
- Turn it off! Make sure electrical appliances, like TVs etc, are turned off when they're not in use and not left on standby.

Garden inspections

We want to improve local communities and make them places where people are proud to live. Whilst the majority of our tenants take great care of their gardens, there are sometimes just a handful of untidy gardens which affect the whole appearance of an area.

Please be aware that we carry out regular inspections throughout the county borough to check the condition of tenants' gardens. If a garden is found to be in an unacceptable condition we will write to the tenant reminding them of their obligation to maintain it and asking that the situation is resolved.

Remember – keeping your garden, forecourt or other area attached to it (such as paths or steps) in good condition and free from rubbish is a condition of your tenancy agreement. Failure to meet any conditions of your tenancy agreement may result in us taking legal action.

If you are having difficulties maintaining your garden, please contact your housing office to discuss this.

We'd like to know, if a gardening service was available would you use it? Get in touch to give us your views by telephone: 01443 864262 or email: whqsenquiries@caerphilly.gov.uk

Over £16 million affordable housing investment in the Blackwood area

Joint working between our Housing Strategy Team and Pobl, one of our housing association partners, has resulted in a number of new affordable housing developments in the Blackwood area. Together these schemes equate to a total investment of over £16 million; £5.8 million of this was secured through Welsh Government's Social Housing Grant programme.

Recent and ongoing developments in Blackwood have resulted in a total of 117 new affordable homes across a range of tenures, from social rent to low cost home ownership and open market sales. These developments consist of a mix of property types and sizes including Cwmgelli Lodge – a 22 person facility for younger people with dementia. Other developments also contain properties adapted specifically to meet the needs of individual families. Pobl's affordable housing developments in the Blackwood area include schemes at Woodbine Road, Oak Terrace, Waunborfa Road, Thorncombe Road and the site of the former Blackwood Junior School.

As well as providing additional affordable homes for local people, these developments have also delivered a number of other benefits, including jobs and training opportunities.



Woodbine Road development

Support has also been given to a number of local groups and initiatives, including fencing donated to Blackwood Comprehensive School and a local football team, as well as the demolition of the derelict former Girl Guide hut.

Changes to the way people apply for social housing

Caerphilly's Common Housing Register and Common Allocation Policy launched on Monday 5th December. This means that the process of applying for social housing will now be much simpler and quicker, as applicants now only have to complete one single application form to apply for housing with one or more social landlords in the county borough.

Our partner housing associations who've worked with us to introduce the Common Housing Register and Common Allocation Policy are Aelwyd, Cadwyn, Charter, Derwen, Linc-Cymru, United Welsh and Wales & West.

The allocations policy of each social landlord has now been replaced with the new policy. Existing social housing applicants still requiring housing, who responded to the re-registration exercise during the summer, have been reassessed and transferred onto the single waiting list. All new applicants will now be assessed under the

new policy. All applicants on the single list are placed in one of three priority bands that closely matches their housing need. Applicants in the highest band will normally be offered accommodation first.

Applicants will be required to complete and maintain their housing applications via a newly developed website called Home Search Caerphilly. There is a whole host of other information also available on the website, including how to register for housing, how applications are assessed, areas where housing is located and profiles of each area.

Further information can be found on the council's website or at the Home Search Caerphilly website. Alternatively you can contact the Common Housing Register Assessment Team by telephoning 01443 873521 or by email at CHR@caerphilly.gov.uk

Whilst we do our best to make sure that the information in this newsletter is accurate, we can sometimes get things wrong; please always check with us first!