

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT AND INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY 2010

INTRODUCTION

Bron Afon is a regeneration agent, helping shape places and communities, and offering opportunities through its investment to people, homes and communities across Torfaen. A major part of our work is in the provision of housing, but this is not the only way we affect the places we invest in.

How we decide to invest, and what we invest, will have critical impacts on our communities. We could offer one-off, quick fixes, or we could make lasting and real investment decisions that are irreversible because they deliver skills, jobs, confidence, health, enterprise, independence and social ownership to enable regeneration to continue in to the future.

A key investment area is in our work with tenants, residents and communities. Community Investment is therefore closely linked to Community Involvement – in fact the two elements are inextricably connected, since our investment is partially in the process of actual community involvement; and the development of better involvement impacts critically on the way we invest in our homes and our communities and on our capacity as an organisation.

This paper sets out our vision for community investment and involvement and it defines and explains our mechanisms for involvement. Across the strategy we define key principles and key outcomes to set the vision for what we are trying to achieve.

The central ethos of driving community investment and community involvement is vested in a whole Directorate of Bron Afon – in itself a remarkable investment – under the Director of Community Investment and Involvement. But this core team exists to promote and develop community investment and involvement right across the organisation, throughout all the Directorates and throughout the different mechanisms that bring our tenants and residents into dialogue and involvement with the organisation. These aspects are shared across all in-house functions as well as across our communities.

The Strategy itself implies no change to the existing Business Plan for Bron Afon or to the current resources deployed, but critically it carries forward an approach to evaluating parts of our current investment in terms of capturing real costs and benefits to people, homes and communities, or in joining together current work streams to focus on specific outcomes. The Community Investment and Involvement Board and Membership Sub-Group deliberates on new priorities for this work and, where relevant, has approved new external funding bids to enable Bron Afon to pursue specific aims. (A specific example is to develop volunteering, where a Lottery bid has been approved in mid 2010.)

Critically our Community Investment and Involvement Strategy needs to follow our core aims and values:

- To provide high quality energy efficient affordable homes, high quality communal areas and excellent services to tenants and leaseholders in Torfaen;
- To promote and support vibrant, safe, clean and healthy communities working in close partnership with residents and the Council;
- To run an open and democratic organisation with high levels of community involvement;
- To use the resources we have to achieve these aims to best effect in maximising other benefits to the community including creating and sustaining local jobs, increasing skills and minimising negative impact on the environment;
- To provide support for people who need it.

Bron Afon's values:

- Cares about people and communities
- Is passionate about excellent service delivery
- Is innovative and creative and willing to take risks
- Listens and learns
- Respects and values diversity and promotes equality of opportunity
- Is trustworthy, open and honest in all it does

Notes:

The reader will find that certain sentences and paragraphs throughout the document are printed in **bold** type: The purpose here is to enable a quick read that enables the key points to stand out from the main body of the text.

Please note also that this strategy is a living document. We will amend and add to it as time goes by. Where we realise that our practice has not been effective we will change the focus; where we know that our work is achieving our vision, then we will give that work greater emphasis.

SECTION ONE - COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

INTRODUCTION

Community investment is about supporting and building sustainable, resilient communities where people want to live and work:

- It involves investing in people for example by providing support or care to those who need it, creating jobs, increasing skills and finding different ways in which we can tackle poverty ;
- It includes our work to invest in homes and buildings to ensure they are of the highest quality, and investing in communities for example through physical improvements to the environment and infrastructure, tackling problems of anti social behavior, improving the facilities, amenities and services of our communities, and taking steps to help increase community cohesion.
- It includes everything labelled as regeneration but is wider and includes support to maintain strong communities that do not need regenerating.
- It includes everything that is labelled as community development, helping to support and build the capacity of people within a community to influence and control issues within their area that affect their lives and address and resolve their own problems.

POVERTY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Above all we regard affecting and reducing poverty, and promoting equality of opportunity as overarching purposes across several different dimensions of Bron Afon's work.

Many of the communities we serve in lie within the poorest and most deprived in Wales.

Poverty itself is multi-dimensional. It includes low incomes, low wages, debt, and benefit dependency. Poverty covers the lack of material goods; it also encompasses poverty of opportunity, lack of experience, aspiration, low self-esteem and the lack of self-confidence. Often poverty relates to a lack of the basic skills we all need to be able to realise full inclusion and citizenship activity within our society. On the other hand, poverty for some people may mean a lack of family and friendship, isolation and loneliness.

Bron Afon touches lives and places in many different ways. We are clear that we can affect deep change in the communities we work with through the best practice in community investment and involvement. We regard the quality of the relationships we have with people and the quality of the service we provide as part of that best practice.

This paper sets out some of the key considerations we will keep in mind to guide Bron Afon towards investing in better futures and the greater involvement in that process of our tenants, residents, communities and staff.

1.0 What does Community Investment mean?

1.1 Community investment means supporting many different resources and activities across Bron Afon:

- it covers the amount of staff time we devote to any particular area of work;
- it covers the amount of money we spend on any particular activity;
- it also covers what opportunities we chase and the emphasis we place on trying to bring in income from other sources; how we recognize a good opportunity and whether we place priority on it;
- how we work with partners to attract support for our work;
- how we buy in the contractors and goods and services that we use in our work – procurement;
- whether we are clear when an investment needs adjusting or changing;

1.2 Community Investment is enshrined in how Bron Afon works:

- Is accountable to the communities it serves
- Welcomes constructive challenge
- Involves people in decisions that affect them
- Has sustainability at the heart of its thinking
- Is proud to be a non-profit making social business delivering a public service

1.3 The Community Investment and Involvement Strategy links, informs and supports other strategic areas of Bron Afon's business:

- It will replace the preceding Community involvement Strategy adopted in November 2007
- It will replace the preceding Community Investment Strategy adopted in November 2007
- It relates to the current Procurement Strategy
- There are connections to the Property Management and Disposal policy
- The Strategy connects to the Environmental Sustainability Strategy (due to be re-written in 2010)
- The Anti-Social Behaviour Policy is a relevant connecting policy
- The Business Plan 2009- 2010
- The Equalities and Diversity Strategy

2.0 What are we trying to do?

The Board of Bron Afon has agreed a set of big, longterm aims and outcomes that will drive the Bron Afon Investment Strategy forwards: We define our 'outcomes', to make sure we are clear what we are trying to achieve

**WHAT WE WANT
FOR OUR
COMMUNITIES -
OUR OUTCOMES**

**STRONG RESILIENT AND
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES
WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE AND
CAN CONTINUE TO LIVE**

**HEALTHIER PEOPLE WITH
OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVOLVEMENT
LOCALLY IN HEALTHY ACTIVITY**

**CONFIDENT, PEOPLE WITH HIGH
ASPIRATIONS WHO HAVE A STRONG
SENSE OF SELF ESTEEM**

**BETTER PLACES THAT FEEL SAFE
AND ATTRACTIVE TO EVERYONE
LIVING THERE AND WHERE GOOD
SERVICES OPERATE**

**OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK: SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT, VOLUNTEERING
OPPORTUNITIES, JOBS AND EMPLOYMENT**

**DIGITAL INCLUSION: OUR COMMUNITIES
ENJOY ALL THE BENEFITS OF NEW
COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY**

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND
INVOLVEMENT WORK WITH OUR
COMMUNITIES SO THAT COMMUNITIES CAN
BE INVOLVED IN FINDING SOLUTIONS TO
THEIR OWN ISSUES AND PROBLEMS**

**FAIRNESS: EQUALITIES, SOCIAL INCLUSION
AND CONTRIBUTING TO ENDING POVERTY
IIN OUR COMMUNITIES**

3.0 Our underlying themes.

We recognise that key themes must underpin our work, to ensure we are keeping an eye on the wider picture and to check that we are working in a consistent and principled way. We have defined these themes as:

THE KEY THEMES THAT UNDERPIN OUR WORK

Making sure we are listening to Local Issues and finding ways to support communities in developing their own solutions

Developing our Land assets to help develop opportunities for creating benefit for the community eg through play, through better security, better health, growing food, for training in horticulture, for generating energy

Keeping aware of climate change issues and developing ways of working that are 'green' – concerned with sustainability and greater bio diversity

Ensuring that in everything we do we try to create opportunities to improve skills, knowledge, experience and sustainable jobs at reasonable wages

Supporting and nurturing community and social enterprise and enterprising solutions to problems, across Bron Afon and in the wider community

4.0 Our Priorities for Investment and Involvement.

4.1 The Bron Afon Board has set some immediate priorities for investment and involvement:

- **Young People** – to focus on supporting activities that engage with young people and involving them in the work of the organisation, both inside, and outside in our communities
- **Digital inclusion** – ensuring that we try to find ways of making sure our tenants and communities have the best chance to take advantage of the digital age; new technologies; better communication; ‘smart’ ways of reducing fuel poverty; access to training and learning through the world wide web; improving broadband technology; quicker access to on-line services. Ensuring that our communities are not doubly disadvantaged, by poverty that excludes them from new technological advances
- **Training and learning** - both within the organization and outside in our communities – making sure Bron Afon encourages all possible ways for our tenants, our communities and our staff to come and gain experience and training from our in-house operation; and making sure we help find new ways for our communities to get access to opportunities, to get work experience; supported placements; training, work and jobs.
- **Better Buying and Selling** - contracting methods and processes inside Bron Afon - making sure that we procure contracts, goods and services with maximum benefit to our communities, as well as a price that we can afford.

4.2 These priorities are not isolated or ‘stand alone’ – they each interrelate and link across from one to the other

For example a key area of working on investment to deliver a key outcome, such as jobs and economic activity, might involve us working on several themes together:

- It might involve **young people in learning about work** through a placement on one of our **contracts** – this links three priorities – young people; learning and training and work, as well as the way we contract building services and insist on clauses that require the contractor to provide a work experience placement
- Another example might be finding sources of cheaper broadband or computers, (**digital inclusion**) and making sure we tell everyone we can reach, demonstrating their use in meetings, encouraging younger Members to use digital means of working with us.

We will seek to constantly maximize the ‘fit’ between all our themes so that our actions deliver against more than one theme at a time.

5.0 What factors are special about the way Bron Afon works?

5.1 Bron Afon has a unique set of ways of working that enables us to support outcomes and theme based approaches to community investment and involvement:

- We are increasingly involved in local community projects, we encourage staff and Member involvement in our communities and we link to communities’ concerns and priorities;
- We hear local stories and we collect local data and evidence about community concerns and issues;
- We are committed to using our strategies to affect the outcomes we have committed to, and to prioritizing the themes we have agreed;
- We have a complex set of in-house systems and functions that we can use to find ways of linking to external community issues;
- We can support local and national campaigns, and can work with many national and local partners to achieve our vision for communities
- We have access to many national platforms and decision-makers.

6.0 Why have a strategy anyway?

6.1 By defining our strategy we will be able to make better decisions about:

- Our priorities for project development and about which external funds we want to look for;
- We will be able to feel more confident about the value of the time we spend in working in partnerships and in meeting with key partners;
- And we will be able to measure the distance we have travelled in improving our investment by looking at the outcomes we have decided are important, and whether we have got closer to reaching them.

- We will be able to judge whether or not to support local initiatives by seeing whether they fit with our themes

7.0 What is the Policy Context we are operating in?

It is important that we do not work entirely alone. We have defined our Aims, Themes and Priorities by looking very carefully at the policy context we are working in.

7.1 The International, European and National context.

We are located within the context of a European and a National Government, both of which place certain boundaries on the way we operate, and offer us opportunities to develop within the priority areas of the European Convergence Programme.

The Welsh Assembly Government constantly refines and re-aligns its own strategic priorities. In considering the context of WAG policies we note the importance of:

- The overarching working principle for Wales of **Sustainable Development**; to tackle climate change and increase bio-diversity.
- Economic Development, for example **The Heads of the Valleys** – a Strategic Capital Investment Area - and its current working priorities, in particular the emphasis being placed on developing Carbon reduction initiatives
- **Social and Community Enterprise** as a priority and the increasing emphasis on mutual ownership models
- **Lifelong Learning** – that learning, training and personal development continues throughout our lives.
- **Healthier communities**, actively engaged with better health development
- **Support and care** for the most vulnerable in our communities
- The modernization of Local Government and the development of **Local Service Boards** (LSBs)
- **Financial Inclusion** – reducing personal debt and its consequence, long-term poverty, and ensuring people can use bank accounts and the other normal methods of personal financial activity.
- **Digital Inclusion** – that Broadband and the new communications technologies are available to the poorest citizens in our communities
- **Communities First and inclusion** – investment in the **poorest communities**, enabling them to become equal ‘quality of life’ areas with good services and facilities; enabling them to find their own preferred solutions to key issues: child poverty and low economic activity - jobs and work.

- **Engagement and participation**; consultation, engagement and involvement of everyone in civic society
- **Volunteering** and citizenship
- The lack of basic skills – **literacy and numeracy** – the vital life skills we all need to be independent, and to be able to earn a decent living

The **European Convergence Programme for West Wales and the Valleys** is a funding context that we need to understand and to operate within. Much of the Programme drives forward the Welsh Assembly Government's key priorities. Parts of the Programme are about delivering the same themes and aims as our own in Bron Afon.

7.2 The Local context

Locally we are also working within a policy context that affects and helps shape some of our work: We are clear that we need to work in partnership with **Torfaen County Borough Council** on certain of our theme areas: literacy and numeracy; young people and local youth facilities; play and the development of better opportunities for well supported play activities; crime and community safety; environmental and waste management services; litter and recycling; local health development and education; digitalization of our technologies; skills development and the development of the 'local economy'.

There are other local policy contexts as well – the **Police** have a neighbourhood policing policy which supports our communities; the **Health Board** seeks to develop better primary care and social care facilities; **Torfaen Voluntary Alliance** has an important role in developing volunteers and local skills and capacity.

We are interested in supporting and working with others and understand that we may need to share outcomes across and between other organizations – for example Bron Afon will not deliver healthier communities alone. But we will share in the development of healthier communities initiatives, policies and programmes. We are committed to working in close partnership with the **Local Service Board** and its various sub-partnerships.

We will work with other organisations that share our aims; share (non personal) information and data with them; and we will share outcomes and the review and improvement of our joint work.

There are many **local projects groups and voluntary and community sector organisations** that we will network with in order to keep our eyes and ears open to new local investment opportunities and needs:

- For example if we bring a tenant or resident with a personal need such as alcoholism, or debt, into touch with a local organisation designed to help, then we have invested in that person
- For example if we know that a local school needs support with a project that affects life for our tenants and residents and their families, then we will want to try to support that project.
- Where we are supporting a local group that is trying to develop new projects, or develop existing projects, then we will try to assist with funding advice and with bidding for funds.

We will constantly keep good relationships with key policy makers and with the key organisations that are involved in improving and investing in these policy areas at local and at community level.

8.0 Partnership working

There are other national and local bodies which promote and develop different policy interests and maintain funding streams to promote certain activities.

The range of partners we have worked with over the last year includes:

TCBC, and several departments of TCBC, Communities First, The Big Lottery, the Energy Saving Trust, Community Housing Cymru, The South East Wales Energy Partnership, Want to Work, JobMatch, The Welsh School of Architecture, Keep Wales Tidy, and the University of Glamorgan. We are constantly forging new relationships, meeting with external organizations and looking at potential joint delivery of projects.

- During one month early in 2010 our staff met and worked with three schools in Torfaen, encouraging work experience placements, developing curriculum work, encouraging Youth Membership, and participating in the Green Futures open space Programme being developed inside Bron Afon.
- Representatives of some schools and youth groups have become the Founder members of Bron Afon's Youth Forum.

Working with the Neon Youth Club in Blaenafon and with the Baker Street older people's complex, we have developed a vegetable growing project.

When we took the Bron Afon bus out to one estate to talk to people about their concerns and ideas for the area, we got JobMatch and the Lighthouse project to come with us.

Several tenants from the estate got help with looking for jobs and a few got advice and support set up with agencies that help people with specific drug and alcohol issues.

Working with the Building Research Establishment, and with the Heads of the Valleys team from the Welsh Assembly Government, we have been able to bid for and bring in £1.7 million, to add increased energy efficiency

These are examples of working in partnership to deliver on our key priorities and concerns.

An annex to this Strategy lists the current range of partners we currently relate to.

9.0 Local Capacity and Enterprising Projects

9.1 We understand the maxim – *'Give a person a fish and they eat for one day; give a community the tools and equipment and skills to fish and they will eat forever.'*

This is a critical way of looking at our investment strategy: We want to ensure that what we do has long term impacts. We need to ensure we are not always doing things FOR people; but that we are doing things WITH people, and making sure that they are able to develop knowledge, confidence and the skills to be able to continue without us.

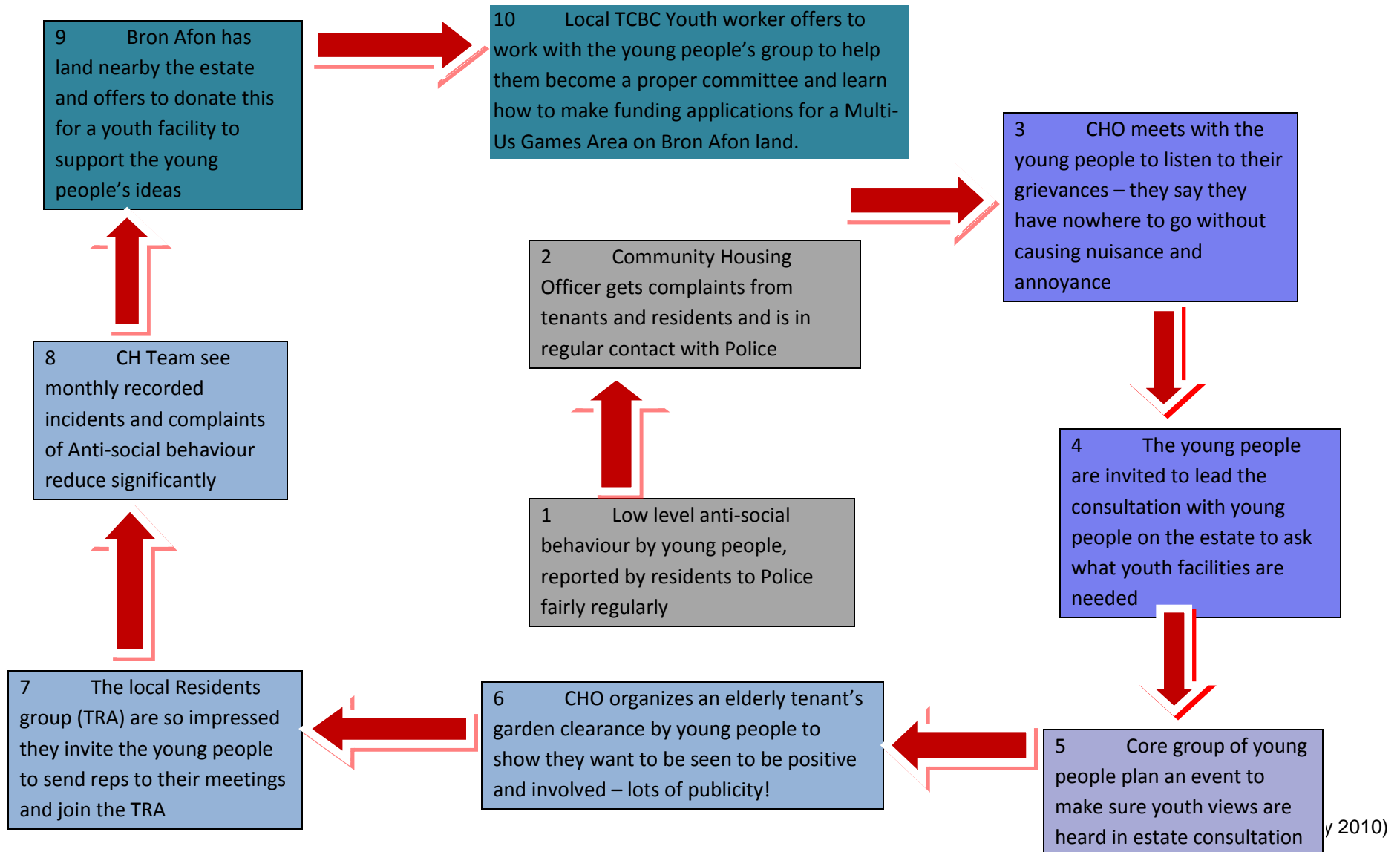
We also need to look at our own portfolio of assets; people; skills; knowledge and land and buildings – can we support an initiative by using any of them differently? Could the offer of a piece of land, or the use of a part of a building we no longer need for example, make the critical difference and enable a community group to develop its own project? Can we work with a partner to ensure this group gets support with funding applications, skills development, the drafting of a business plan etc?

9.2 Supporting local 'enterprising' projects

These are examples of creating independence, capacity and a socially enterprising way of supporting local initiatives. Ownership and independence are parts of developing sustainable solutions and communities:

- In the diagram below we describe a project that is underway in Pontnewynydd. Young people were being reported for anti-social behaviour and local residents were constantly calling the Police; the Community Housing Officer has worked with both young people, the Police, the residents and the youth service. The result is a reduction in anti-social behaviour, the beginnings of a youth committee and plans for a young people's facility, young people volunteering in the community and some entering serious training and work experience placements with Bron Afon.

The Bron Afon Virtuous Circle – Community Development Model



- In Blaenavon the biggest single issue identified by the community when we completed our community survey was the lack of facilities for young people. We have worked with a set of partners to support and develop a youth club, raised money for the club, involved the young people in a town centre project and linked together older people wanting to grow vegetables with young people able to do some of the physical work and learning to grow food. Some of these young people have volunteered to become the founders of our Youth Forum.
- In another area where a school has closed and the whole site might have been sold off, we are working to try to develop a base for support several existing community- based enterprises to use the former school building.
- In-house we have developed the Bron Appetit café; owned as a social enterprise by Bron Afon and offering work experience and training to a range of adult volunteers and placements

These are examples of local initiatives which have grown from good practice in Community housing based on good community development principles:

If a local initiative or project fits with our themes then we should always try to support it through capacity, skills and resource support.

10.0 WHQS and Community Housing Investment

10.1 Bron Afon has a major task to deliver the Welsh Housing Quality Standard across all its stock. This is our core investment and it is a key priority for the whole organisation. This Community Investment and Involvement Strategy fits with the WHQS Programme in terms of designing and delivering added value to the Programme.

10.2 Procurement

It is critical that we maintain our principles, values, themes and priorities in the way we buy and sell goods and services.

This affects the way we source our supplies for repairs and maintenance – who supplies them? Are they a local company? Are we sure the materials are 'sustainable' and produced ethically?

Good practice in procurement also concerns the contractors we use when we are commissioning work to our homes and environments –

- Where are they from?

- If they are a relatively inexperienced local small firm, can we assist them in developing their business by offering them a small 'trial' contract?
- Will bigger contractors take on apprentices or trainees or work experience placements?
- Are they able to train up our workers as well as their own?
- Can they support a local project whilst they are on site?
- Do they have good employment policies and are they as concerned as us with treating our tenants courteously and properly?

We can't always expect to gain 'wins' from every one of these questions. We also have to be critically concerned with the cost of goods and contracts if we are to deliver cost effectiveness. But we can try to ensure that we add value to the local economy by acting carefully: after all Bron Afon is one of the biggest employers and purchasers in the area.

We have a long way to go in this investment process, and we will increase our concern with adding value through procurement by extending our concerns into the framework of questions we apply to in-house supplies and contracts for goods and the ways in which we monitor impacts and outcomes from procurement.

The Quality Design Forum of our Members has made it a core concern to think carefully and set up ways of ensuring that we get the results we want, the outcomes we think are important, from all our contracts.

We will support and develop the Quality Design Forum in its continuous endeavors to improve our procurement methods.

We are also involved in offering our contractors goods and services to Leaseholders and to owner occupiers who want the advantage of lower bulk prices that we can obtain through our procurement process

10.3 The skills and future of our workforce.

Bron Afon will not be delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard work for ever.

By the time the WHQS Programme is completed we need to make sure that our workforce has new skills and new work to do.

So we are committed to a continual role in looking at the sphere of developing new '**Greener Skills**', and trying out new materials and elements that we think will be a part of the '**low carbon**', low energy future. We are already learning, for example, how to fit solar panels and saving on energy costs; we are trying out new renders that give a higher quality insulation to our homes. Learning to work with new materials and skills on older housing, rather than new build, means we are developing the potential to be able eventually to offer this work out to the wider

community when we have made sure our stock is refurbished. This would be an example of the way we are investing in our workforce.

Meanwhile we invest very seriously in our workforce, in respect of current training and development routes. All our trades are involved in different qualification pathways and it is a part of our everyday working to ensure all staff can take advantage of training when it is appropriate. Bron Afon invests in a full-time Learning and Development Team to support this work.

We take pride in our apprenticeship system which we deliver in partnership with TCBC's **Torfaen Training**. Since Bron Afon began we have taken on a total of 47 apprentices. We record and report on their progress through our measurement framework.

Increasingly we see Bron Afon as a 'porous' enterprise – we want people to be able to come in and gain experience and working opportunities, even if we have not formally employed them. We take in several different types of work experience placements across both the 'white' and the 'blue' collar parts of Bron Afon:

- From Schools – in the 21 months since we began thirty young pupils have come into Bron Afon on placements
- From Social Service we have taken referrals for example for adults with learning difficulties and for people with other special disabilities
- From Hales House young people who have left care homes or come from other homeless referrals have begun a programme of visits and 'experience' days working in our headquarters. Some are now on lengthier placements.
- From the Future Jobs Fund we are currently working with adults who have been out of work to assist them in getting back into work with additional experience and skills

We are working with local agencies to offer placements to some of the people who live on estates where a lot of WHQS work will be taking place. Our apprentices will be 'buddies' to these placements and supervisors will oversee the basic Bron Afon accreditation that our apprentices undertake at the beginning of their work with us. Hopefully the people on placements will then be interested and equipped to apply for apprenticeships or other traineeships.

We will constantly seek to maximize the investment opportunities that our WHQS and Community Housing work delivers. We will go beyond the bricks and mortar investment to find other support, other resources and other outcomes and impacts.

10.4 Reducing carbon and energy use and delivering fuel poverty

It is a central concern of investment in our stock that we look at the long term costs of living in and sustaining our homes. If we can invest now then the costs of running the house or flat, into the 'low carbon' future, for example the costs of heating, will be affordable. This is already a critical concern of those in our communities who suffer already from fuel poverty. Reducing fuel poverty is a realizable aim connecting many strands of our property investment decisions: the quality of windows and doors, the types of render, insulation specifications etc..In particular what types of fuel, boilers and heating systems we install.

Bron Afon has been awarded new funding from the Welsh Assembly's 'ARBED' funding to add to the existing business plan, explicitly to deal with reducing energy loss and energy use in our stock. Similarly we are investing in solar panels on some of our blocks.

Bron Afon will continue to regard the development of better solutions to energy and carbon reduction, and potential energy generation as important areas for research, monitoring and innovation.

11.0 Community Housing Teams and Community Forums

11.1 Bron Afon is also investing in the key process of developing Community Housing Teams in each of our 17 Communities:

Bron Afon is undergoing a major shift in the way our housing management is delivered. We believe we have a role to play to improve the quality of life in each of our communities. We are investing in the development of Community Housing Teams and in the long-term process of supporting the growth of Community Partnerships and Forums in all our communities.

This approach is a radical departure from the historic and conventional way that housing is delivered and managed.

- By investing in the development of Community Teams, Partnerships and Forums each community has the chance to develop its knowledge of local organisations and issues and to improve Bron Afon's and other community services and facilities.
- We are spending staff time in carrying out detailed community surveys so that we understand the issues that people in that community think are the most pressing and important.
- We will improve the way we engage in our communities – encouraging and supporting the Members who are Environmental Monitors, conducting

regular Walkabouts in each community, using the Bron Afon Bus to reach the parts of our stock that are more isolated, and encouraging partners to use the bus to bring other services to our communities

- When we know what people think, we are investing time and effort in supporting local solutions – such as activities and facilities for young people; such as better recycling facilities; such as land and gardens and allotments for growing local food, such as better and more defensible space around blocks to create privacy, safer spaces and a sense of ownership.
- We are investing in the process of financial inclusion - We employ a Money Advisor so that as we get to understand more and more about the issues facing some of our poorest tenants we can offer support to enable them to escape the nightmare of chronic debt.
- We have invested in the Community Finance Initiative which will reduce personal debt and will enable people to get access to affordable credit.
- We have developed a framework for an intensive Family Support Project and we are currently working to find funding and resources for this critical initiative with key partners, recognizing that many agencies spend scarce resources on interventions with the same families over and over again.
- We wish to encourage the process of community informal learning through the development process – offering people the chance to gain new confidence and skills from being engaged with finding local solutions to the issues that concern them.

11.2 Sometimes the key agency providing a local solution to an identified issue will not be Bron Afon – it might be a local Communities First Partnership, or another local group. When we know that this is an issue our communities want action on, then we will support the local group or organization to find local solutions and other sources of support and investment.

We are trying to maximize community investment and involvement, and we recognize that we will do this through practical projects that are supportive to groups, programmes, actions and processes that develop local ownership and skills – that 'self-grow'.

We want to support local employment; develop skills; deliver against the quality of life issues that our communities tell us are important – often to do with services, or the lack of services.

12.0 Green Futures

Bron Afon has developed an innovative approach to the open communal spaces we own. The Green Futures Programme exists in order to develop a key strategy around our Community Shared Open spaces, so that what we invest in our land and the external environments around our homes brings the maximum returns to all our communities to support young people, health, skills, new ownership models, food and growing local produce;

Over the course of 2010 Green Futures is examining and learning about:

- Climate change
- Sustainable Development and bio-diversity
- Food and Growing produce in the urban environment
- Social Justice and the needs of young people in open space
- Litter, waste management and recycling schemes
- The generation of energy and carbon reduction initiatives that our land could support
- Sustainable Design
- Health and leisure opportunities in our open spaces
- The Green economy and the skills and jobs that we could develop connected to open space

The long term outcome of this Programme will be to impact on the way we invest in our open spaces, whether to create more secure and defensible spaces around flats; whether we enable local young people to have access to better play facilities; in creating space for growing food; to exercise more easily; to generate energy from wind or exploit solar energy sources; and to create better recycling and re-use facilities opportunities. We also anticipate that through these developments we will be able to develop skilling opportunities as well as small-scale social enterprise activity.

13.0 Finding and Funding Opportunities and Investment

13.1 The process of keeping in touch with policy developments at all levels, and being able to gather information about possible funding streams as they are devised and announced is a key part of our work.

Bron Afon has already invested in the post of a Community Investment Manager. The remit of this job is closely tied to the key priorities and contexts of this Community Investment and Involvement Strategy.

A further part of this work is to keep up to date about certain product developments and to know that we are finding the best solutions we can afford when we are trying to find carbon reducing measures for our homes and community projects - Within the Asset Management Team we now employ an officer who's remit is to scan the horizon of technological change and advances in materials, processes and techniques. This post carries responsibility for monitoring the outcomes of the WAG ARBED investment in our stock, which will impact on fuel poverty.

We will provide Members and the Board with regular summaries of all current and envisaged funding bids

But it is also clear that good Community Investment and Involvement is intrinsically tied to the whole way Bron Afon operates – both within and outside of its core remit as a provider and investor in housing.

Maximising investment, in the widest sense of the word, has to be a driver for all our work with people, homes and communities. This process needs to spread into the new areas of Community Housing and community - based ways of working; better contract monitoring; recycling; carbon and energy reduction etc..

13.2 The Community Investment remit will extend across Bron Afon to ensure we are seeking to support better investment solutions to identified problems

- For example we have invested in a new post, our Money Advisor— offering financial solutions and support to those in greatest debt. We see this as an investment in people, but also an investment in a better way for Bron Afon to work: By avoiding an eviction due to rent arrears for example, we reduce our staff time and the expense of a tenancy 'turnover' as well as reducing stress, strain and upheaval for an entire family.
- For example within the CII Team there is also an environmental Management Officer post focused on sustainability across the whole organization and developing knowledge in carbon and energy issues, developing new partners, and developing projects like the one that sorts fly-tipped waste and recycles unwanted furniture within the Community Caretaker pilot Programme.
- We will monitor and reduce waste from our offices, from our works Programme and by our partner contractors out on site
- We will research the potential of developing sustainable, solar generated lighting for our open spaces so that people can feel safe at night without cost to the community

14 .0 Research and Future Developments

14.1. It is part of our normal working to keep up to date with future trends and with opportunities to improve our performance in community investment. We need to understand where and how we can decide to invest differently if this would bring better quality of life to our communities and reduced spending on carbon and energy in our operation.

- We will seek to develop our land and assets to best serve our communities.
- We have the opportunity to develop new build affordable housing on our land, developing new skills and new types of sustainable housing
- We are investing in solar products on our buildings to deliver cheaper energy
- We are conducting feasibility studies and monitoring new applications and materials to improve insulation and reduce energy costs
- We are investing in the process of scanning new products and applications, methods and techniques that will enable us to judge the best way to bring our stock up to and beyond the WHQS levels

14.2. We will also focus attention on the potential for developing new social enterprises:

We could develop new social and community enterprises either owned by Bron Afon, or supported by Bron Afon, that will enable us to diversify our work and develop new skill and job opportunities, in new services and products.

- We will develop better caretaking of our estates and better cleaning, maintenance and gardening services
- We will examine the opportunities for developing enterprises that involve processes where we currently hire and rent products – scaffolding, skips, specialized machinery etc.
- We will consider the feasibility of selling services we already operate – training; management; surveying; project managing; delivering housing refurbishment to other sectors such as owner occupiers
- We will look at undertaking the servicing and maintenance of services in other areas than housing, within the local environment
- We will undertake to work with partners who need our support in their social enterprises to deliver better services and facilities for local communities – for example we are supporting the Co-Star project with its food growing and ‘veg. box’ scheme.

SECTION TWO - COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Community involvement is at the heart of Bron Afon Community Housing and therefore it is central to the running and development of all Bron Afon services and all areas of Bron Afon business. This is supported by one of our core aims to be an open and democratic organisation with high levels of community involvement and emphasised in our organisational values; to listen and learn, be open and honest in all we do, be accountable to the communities we serve and to involve people in decisions that affect them.

As an organisation we have developed a latent appetite amongst our tenants and residents to have more influence over our services by demonstrating that they have a 'real' influence and giving their participation a 'real' purpose.

As a Community Housing Mutual we are owned by our tenants and residents as share holder members and we strive to involve them in everything that we do. By listening to our tenants and members we make better informed decisions, continually improve our services, find lasting solutions to problems, improve our tenant's satisfaction in the services we provide and give local people the opportunity to determine the future of their local communities, whilst gaining skills, experience and developing them as individuals.

This part of the Strategy sets out how tenants and members can influence the development of Bron Afon and our services along with how we will encourage and support community activity and development. Community Involvement is not just about formal structures and meetings. It's about conversations, practical projects in communities tackling local issues, working with partners and building relationships, e.g. Co Star, Bron Afon members working as volunteers, community clean ups, the new role of the community Caretakers and engaging young people in local communities.

2.0 OUR VISION FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Enabling people to be proud of where they live and have more opportunities to be involved in influencing decisions and providing opportunities to take action to improve the quality of life in our communities.

Increasing the levels of democracy and providing greater opportunities for Bron Afon Members to be a self-managing, independent scrutiny body that will hold Bron Afon to account on behalf of Torfaen's communities.

3.0 DEVELOPMENT OF THIS STRATEGY

Our original Community Involvement strategy was developed in 2007 following extensive consultation with our tenants and communities, as part of the pre ballot consultation in the stock transfer process. Our tenants told us that they wanted a democratic landlord that was accountable to the communities it serves. The Offer Document to tenants was developed in partnership with tenants, residents and members and the strategy was successful in developing a wide menu of options for tenants and members to be involved in influencing the development of Bron Afon and its services.

Our new strategy will build upon the existing successful community involvement mechanisms as well as learning from feedback from Bron Afon members and staff. We held a special Community Involvement Strategy review day where active Bron Afon members and staff from across the organisation were asked to tell us what worked well, what needs improvement and how we could improve, and new ideas for how tenants and members could be involved. All feedback has been used as the basis to develop the new strategy.

There will be a focus on involving people where we feel involvement has been limited previously, such as young people and supported housing.

Bron Afon has won two prestigious awards for its community involvement work and we want to continuously improve our systems for involvement and relationships with our tenants and members to continue to be a good practice organisation. We intend to continue to seek awards for all the work we do as an organisation for recognition and to share good practice with others. Furthermore we want our involved Members to reach even higher and develop greater confidence in their crucial scrutiny role, so that we learn and improve from their challenges to all our work

There have been differing levels of commitment to community involvement across Bron Afon and now we need to concentrate on embedding the culture and raise the awareness and understanding of involvement and why it's important. We have reconsidered staffing arrangements in the Community Involvement Team to enable us to effectively support and facilitate community involvement in Bron Afon and will realign the team to become a support function and enable other teams in the organisation to encompass community involvement.

The new strategy will support the new role of Community Housing Officers and the implementation of Community Teams, which is a radical shift in the way we deliver our housing management services to be more responsive the needs of Torfaen's communities.

4.0 KEY OBJECTIVES

- To increase the involvement of tenants and members at all levels and work in partnership with them to improve the quality and delivery of our services
- To develop and improve methods of involvement and identify areas of good practice to ensure that our work is effective
- To maximise the number of tenants and members we have involved
- To increase the representativeness of active members
- To increase support for the development of our members and staff
- To provide support to those who need it in order to be involved
- To embed the culture across the organisation so that all staff play a part in promoting and supporting Community Involvement and develop closer working relationships with Bron Afon members
- To build on and develop closer working relationships with key partners within the borough
- To support and encourage projects that will improve the quality of life for wider communities by working in partnership with tenants, residents and partners
- To involve tenants and members, to individually and collectively influence and control issues within their area that affect their lives and address and resolve their own problems
- To increase effective monitoring and evaluation of community involvement activities and provide feedback on outcomes of these to our tenants, members and communities ensuring that this impacts on our service delivery.

5.0 WAYS TO GET INVOLVED - LOCAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Bron Afon is more than a housing organisation, we are a Community Regeneration Organisation and we are committed to investing in people, homes and communities. Therefore community activity extends further than those of our landlord function. We will work in partnership with other organisations to support local people to have an influence in tackling social, economic, and environmental issues for themselves and their communities and ensure what we do has a long term impact.

We will encourage practical projects aimed at improving the quality of life for local people and to develop communities where people feel proud to live and work. We will work with the whole community, including young people to encourage projects that make a real difference and we will work with our partners and local groups to support and increase capacity, services, facilities and amenities in communities. External funding will be sought for projects such as lottery funding or Tenant Empowerment Grants.

Prior to transfer we worked in partnership with Bron Afon members to identify 17 natural communities that reflected community identity as closely as possible. We have aligned our housing management services around each of these communities.

The following section sets out how we will support the community to influence development and delivery of the priorities for each community:

5.1 Community Teams (also described in Section One – 11.0 page 24)

We are aligning our services around the 17 communities and will be rolling out the development of a 'community team' for each community. Each team will consist of staff such as:

- Community Housing Officer – who plays a central role
- Repairs and Improvement
- Grounds Maintenance
- Community Safety
- Community Involvement

Working this way means we can have a more focused presence in the community and develop better relationships with the people who live there. We can draw on the extensive local knowledge of our staff and gain a better knowledge of local needs and priorities and local environmental and property issues. We have piloted this approach in two communities: Blaenavon and Pontnewynydd.

We have developed a Toolkit to support the establishment and development of Community Teams.

One of the key tasks for each team will be to engage the community to identify local priorities. Consultation will be tailored to each community but has included:

- Door knocking
- Bron Afon Bus
- Community Events
- Community Newsletter
- Community Forum
- Partnership working
- Youth events

Examples of good practice and success from these teams is set out below:

Blaenavon

The main and overwhelming priority for Blaenavon following consultation was lack of youth and children's facilities. To tackle this issue we worked in close partnership with Communities First, local police and the Youth Service and as a result we have:

- Developed a young people's group - 'Bron Afon busters'
- Installed a Multi Use Games Area
- Opened a youth club called the '*The Neon*' that now has over 300 members.
- Engaged young people in working with Bron Afon –
 - helping us develop a Health and Safety DVD
 - a visit to Bron Afon to have some practical experience of plastering and plumbing
 - delivering leaflets in the community

Pontnewynydd

Pontnewynydd is a community struggling to re-establish its identity and regain its confidence, to be able to meet the challenges that lie ahead. The multi agency approach is tackling some of the intergenerational issues and perceptions.

The consultation and engagement in the community is still in early days but has achieved the following outcomes:

- We have worked with key young people to develop a youth treasure hunt and consultation event to find out young peoples priorities
- Involved young people, local tenants and residents in a garden clearance for a local elderly tenant
- The perception of young people being a cause of some of the problems in the area is changing.
- A dedicated group of youngsters are now working with us to develop youth provision in the community.
- A young man who was 'perceived' to be the main ring leader of a gang involved in anti social behaviour activities in the area has turned his life around in a short period of time.

By working with us, he has:

- built up his confidence
- gained employment and is now studying
- been invited to join the local residents association committee

5.2 Community Forums

Community Teams led by the Community Housing Officers will establish a Community Forum in each community. We will support the forums to become independent groups so that they increase their skills and capacity and can access funding for projects and initiatives for the benefit of the wider community.

We will explore the possibility of start up and annual grants to support forums to be independent and self sufficient.

The Community Team and Community Forum will work together to identify community priorities and develop an action plan for local solutions. We will also explore the possibility of introducing Community Agreements.

5.3 Community Questionnaire

The Offer Document to tenants sets out our commitment to conduct a detailed survey of all our communities so that we understand people's concerns about their homes and their neighbourhoods – the issues and problems they know about.

The survey consists of a door to door survey by the Community Team using a questionnaire.

All Community Teams will be expected to conduct a survey in their area of all tenants and their close neighbour residents.

The survey will identify a communities priorities for improvement, gaps in service provision and facilities, how safe people feel, etc. This will form a basis for developing a Community Action Plan. External partners have been involved in our community consultation work: for instance Job Match and Lighthouse took part in events in Blaenavon and Pontnewynydd to directly deal with issues around support into work and drug and alcohol issues.

5.4 Walkabouts

Community Housing Officers develop a routine series of walkabouts in each community. This provides the opportunity for members of the community to identify issues that needs attention and influence solutions.

The review has identified that we need to carry out more publicity of walkabouts to encourage more people to take part and feedback results more effectively.

5.6 Community Caretakers

We are currently piloted a Community Caretaker service in St Dials. The Caretakers have a high presence in the community and their role includes cleansing and upkeep of the community (Bron Afon land). They have very hands on approach and through talking to local people about how they can improve the cleanliness of the area, have made a huge impact in the community in a very short period of time. They will work with local communities and Community Monitors to improve the local environment and take a pride in where they live.

6.0 WORKING WITH LOCAL BRON AFON MEMBERS

It's important that we get to know the members in communities and always try to actively recruit more members, so that we can include as many local people as possible in identifying priorities and involving them in influencing improvements.

Every community is different so we can work with local members to find out what local solutions will be the most effective in an area, e.g hold meetings at the local school or church or maybe even a local clubhouse. Not all members have the time to attend meetings but some people may sign up as members just to be kept informed about what is going on, or be able to influence our services through different methods, such as visits or surveys or by working as local environmental monitors.

The Community Investment and Involvement Team and the Community Investment and Involvement Board and Member Sub-Group has identified the frontline Teams working from the Property directorate as an underused asset in respect of informing tenants about our work and assisting in recruitment of new community Members.

7.0 WORKING WITH PARTNERS (also see Section One – 8.0 Partnership Working p.15)

We have already forged good working relationships with many external organisations that share our aims to develop joint projects, share good practice and knowledge and explore joint funding opportunities. At a community level we work closely with Communities First, the Police, the TCBC Youth Service and Play Service, for example, to explore projects and outcomes for communities. We recognise that Bron Afon cannot deliver all priorities but will work with local groups and partners to find local solutions.

We also don't want to duplicate good work that is already being done by other organisations in Torfaen so we will develop a database of all participation and engagement activities so that we can work with other partners to engage the local community.

8.0 WAYS TO GET INVOLVED - INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRON AFON AND OUR SERVICES

Our strategy retains the successful Involvement methods developed over the previous years and our review has highlighted where these can be improved. In addition through our action plan, we will develop new ways for tenants and members to be involved.

We recognise and appreciate that not all tenants and residents want to be involved in formal structures and meetings and we will continuously develop ways of communicating with our communities, in partnership with our communications forum. An important element of this strategy is to develop mechanisms to capture feedback from day to day contact with our tenants, members and communities, and use this information to make improvements.

We will develop new ways of increasing the levels of member's scrutiny in the organisation so that we can be more accountable to our tenants and members and we will also develop mechanisms for feedback from all involvement so that the impact of the involvement can be feedback to tenants and members.

A list of options available to be involved in Bron Afon is set out below. These options offer differing levels of involvement from active participation in decisions and influencing service development to information and communication.

- **Tenant Board Membership**

There are five tenant places on Bron Afon Board. Any tenant can stand for board membership and they are elected through a ballot of all tenants. The board receive support and development opportunities and have currently gone through an appraisal process which has resulted in an action plan to improve their effectiveness.

- **Bron Afon Membership**

Membership is open to tenants and residents of Torfaen. The membership jointly own Bron Afon and play an important role in holding the Board to account.

Becoming a member will be seen as an active expression of tenants and residents identifying with Bron Afon and what it is trying to achieve.

Members can choose their own level of involvement to suit their needs, circumstances and interests.

- **Membership Committee**

The Membership Committee is now an established committee of 25 members that are democratically elected by the Membership to hold Bron Afon to account on behalf of tenants and residents in Torfaen. The

Committee plays a scrutinising role within the organisation and ensure that members play an active role in how Bron Afon develops and improves its services. We are about to implement a Membership Committee Development Programme to support and improve the effectiveness and independence of the committee and assist them to focus on their following priority areas:

- Allocations
- Membership Recruitment
- Grounds Maintenance
- Community Involvement and Investment
- Anti Social Behaviour
- Adaptations/Disability

We are also due to support a process of self appraisal for the Membership Committee to identify any area's for improvement.

During the next year we want to develop the capacity of the Membership to hold Bron Afon to account, to scrutinise and to challenge our work. We are exploring the development of such work with a new partner RSL and hope to host learning visits and learning exchanges with their Members.

- **Quality Design Forum**

The Quality Design Forum is another established group of trained members. They play an important role in monitoring the repairs and improvement programme and were involved in developing priorities for WHQS improvement work, design, procurement and selection and monitoring of contractors.

We are currently working with the QDF review their objectives and to design a new development programme for the group. We are looking at recruiting new interested new members and staff to take part to revive the work of the group and to expand the areas of concern to the QDF across our business.

- **Area Forums**

We have four Area Forum based on the four areas of the borough. They come together to discuss local issues of a common concern. The Community Involvement Team works closely with the chairs and Community Housing Officers to service and facilitate these meetings and we feedback to issues that arise through the format of 'you said/we did'.

- **Tenant Forum**

The Tenant Forum was included in the Offer Document as tenants told us they would like the opportunity to meet as a group of tenants, should the

need ever arise where they would need to discuss issues that only affect tenants. We are yet to have the need for this group to be established.

- **Task and Finish Groups**

Task and Finish Groups are used to review a particular policy or service, e.g. allocations policy, recharges policy or Community Caretaker pilot service. They usually take the format of a short series of meetings attending by members and frontline staff and review what we are doing at the moment, share ideas and identify good practice and put together a draft policy based on decisions made by the group that is then presented by SMT. This format currently works well.

- **Supported Living Forum**

The Supported Housing Forum has recently changed its name from 'Sheltered Housing Forum' in line with the renaming of the service, as a result of the review of elderly and support services. The forum has been involved in influencing the review and will be instrumental in monitoring the implementation of the new service and the development of Supported Housing in the future.

- **Leaseholder Forum**

We recently re-launched the Leaseholder Forum and currently reviewing the role of the forum and its objectives. They have been involved in developing communication for leaseholders around our external improvement programme and service charges. We will work with the forum on how we can continuously improve the involvement of leaseholders in communities and WHQS main works programme.

- **Communications Forum**

The Communications Forum is a newly established group that work with us to improve our communications to tenants and communities. The group have already overhauled our 'Community News' newsletter to tenants and leaseholders and developed a kite-mark for all our communications to help us develop information to tenants that is easy to understand and interesting.

- **Equalities Forum**

We will develop a group of members and staff to look at issues of equalities and diversity in the services we deliver. We will develop a development programme for this group and one of the priorities for this group will be to focus on how we can reach those who are not currently reaching in our communities, e.g. disabled or housebound people or ethnic minorities.

- **Sounding Board**

We are just about to launch our Sounding Board that will be open to tenants and residents. This will be a pool of members that are willing to take part in various formal and informal methods of involvement in service reviews and monitoring quality and performance. This will include surveys, policy reviews, mystery shopping, service improvement monitors.

- **Service Improvement Monitors**

This is a group of members who are linked to the Quality Design Forum. They currently monitor the work carried on the improvement programme through carrying out telephone survey's and more recently have started visiting tenants in their homes to inspect the work carried out and to establish if the tenants are satisfied with the work and how they find the whole experience of having the work done. They focus on quality of work and conduct of workmanship and identify any areas for improvement. New work involves visits to see work underway or carry out post- improvement interviews with tenants. We will work with members to expand this role to other services in Bron Afon.

- **Community Monitors**

Community Monitors act as our 'eyes and ears'. They monitor the grounds maintenance service and again focus on the quality of service that is delivered around their homes and communities. They report any issues of concern to Bron Afon. We have identified that we need to monitor this initiative more effectively.

- **Annual General Meeting**

All members have the right to attend our Annual General Meeting were they can vote on rule changes and have the opportunity to raise questions or concerns to the board. We have held two AGM's that have both been successful in different ways. Last year the AGM was linked to a family fun day that was felt to be a great success. We are currently reviewing the format for future AGM's and need to consider how we can get the most for our members at the meeting in terms of holding Bron Afon to account.

- **Events**

We take part in a range of events, usually through the summer period. We use events to give information, consult communities on specific issues and recruit new members. We will be establishing criteria this year to decide which events we attend based on value for money for our members and communities and the impact we have for Bron Afon and communities.

- **Green Futures Programme** (Also see Section One, 12.0, p 26)

This is a new innovative programme that focuses on open communal spaces and will develop a strategy around our shared Community Shared Open Spaces. The programme offers OCN accreditation for those that take part and will examine and learn about a range of issues around the environment such as, climate change, sustainable development and bio-diversity, social justice and the needs of young people in open space and health and leisure opportunities. We have a very mixed group of staff, members and young people regularly attending the monthly sessions. This programme will span 2010.
- **Mystery Shopping**

We will develop new opportunities for tenants and members to be involved in monitoring our performance through regular mystery shopping. This will be linked to Service Improvement Monitors and the inspection and scrutiny of the organisation.
- **Newsletter**

We have a newsletter that is issued to tenants, leaseholders and members quarterly. The newsletter is called Community News and has recently been redesigned with the Communications Forum to make it more interesting for tenants. It includes information about Bron Afon's services, partner agencies, advice, such as financial or debt advice, good news stories and interesting articles about tenants. We have recently introduced a page called 'Up your Street' on the recommendation of the Communication's Forum. We will continue to work with the Forum to ensure the news remains interesting, relevant and easy to understand.
- **Annual Report**

We issue an annual report that will be available to all tenants and members to report on the Bron Afon's performance. We will work with the Communications Forum to make sure the report is interesting and easy to understand.
- **Annual Tenant survey**

Every year we will commission an external agency to undertake a tenant satisfaction survey to give tenants the opportunity to tell us how they think we are performing as an organisation. This will identify what we are doing well and areas for improvement.
- **Home visits**

Home visits are one of the most effective ways of finding out what local people's priorities are. We undertook home visits to all homes when we

transferred to Bron Afon to sign tenancy agreements and introduce ourselves as the new landlord. We carry out home visits when we are doing Community Questionnaires and have recently visited all tenants living in Sheltered Housing as part of the review of older person housing. This gives people the opportunity to tell us their views and maybe share concerns on a one to one basis; they don't have to give up too much time, as they would if they were to attend a meeting. We will always carry home visits were we have the capacity to do so.

- **End of Tenancy Questionnaires**

All tenants that end their tenancies are asked to complete a questionnaire so that we can identify any trends for people leaving an area or specific areas for improvement in our services.

- **Tenant's Handbook**

All tenants are issued with a handbook when they sign for a new tenancy. It includes helpful information about our services as a landlord.

- **Compliments and Complaints**

We encourage compliments and complaints and we monitor this closely. This way we can identify trends in areas that we are doing well and any areas that we need to improve. We always respond to complaints in a personal manner to try and resolve any issues as simply as possible and always learn from these experiences.

- **Bron Afon Website**

We are currently developing our website so that it is interesting and relevant to tenants and communities. We will also be introducing ways that tenants and members can use the website more actively to help us to improve our services. We will be exploring the idea of a dedicated member's area that will hold information about member involvement, meetings, minutes, your community, facilities, online forum, etc.

9.0 VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteering provides an excellent way of engaging with local communities, providing them with opportunities to learn and enhance their skills and experience, as well as gaining self confidence and self esteem.

Bron Afon currently offer a number of ways to get involved in volunteering in Bron Afon, e.g. working in the cafe, attending meetings, work placements and litter picks. The Community Involvement Team will work closely with all teams in Bron Afon to expand the volunteering opportunities in Bron Afon.

Through the Big lottery we have recently obtained funding to employ two volunteer coordinators. These officers will develop community-based opportunities to volunteer and support our work with residents of supported living schemes; they will further develop our work with young people; we hope they will enable us to take forward our work with developing play accreditation for volunteers from our communities who want to work on play-schemes and with youth groups; they will also enable us to develop our Family Support Project by finding and supporting people who are able to give time and support to our isolated elderly tenants, and to others who are lonely or otherwise needing friendship and support.

We will also enhance the opportunities for accredited volunteering opportunities.

10.0 YOUNG PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT

Bron Afon is committed to involving young people in the work we do as an organisation and in communities. We have already forged close working relationships with schools, community focused schools, TCBC Play and Youth service to improve how we collectively engage young people.

We have already started work to engage young people, particularly in Blaenavon where we worked with the Police and Communities First to set up the Neon Youth Club. We have set up a Young People Forum and the young people from Blaenavon are the founder members. They've called themselves the 'Bron Afon Busters' and have worked with us on developing a Health and Safety DVD where they wrote the script, recorded the sound track and acted in the film.

We have also worked with young people from Hales House who have left care homes or come through other homeless referrals; we have arranged a programme of visits and 'experience' days working in our headquarters. Some are now on lengthier placements. We are now offering OCN accreditation for the skills they are developing as part of this initiative.

We are also introducing a scheme of 'mini monitors' in partnership with schools. This is similar to the role of community monitors and works with young children from primary schools through the 'walking bus' schemes to identify and learn about environmental issues.

We will build on the work we have done with young people in Blaenavon across other communities. We will also develop a young peoples' membership. We will work with young people themselves to decide how they want to be involved in Bron Afon and communities and develop a plan separate to this strategy for young people involvement.

11.0 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

We are committed to developing the capacity of Bron Afon Membership and more importantly that of individual members to increase skills, confidence, knowledge and experience.

We offer a wide range of learning opportunities for members including in house and external training and we are just about to roll out the Membership Committee Development programme. Members are invited to take part in joint training sessions with staff and we will open these opportunities up to wider members and will work with key partner organisation, for instance, Torfaen Voluntary Alliance to run joint training sessions. This not only opens up the scope for training possibilities but also offers good networking opportunities.

We are pursuing academic training for our members and we are piloting an accredited training course, 'Introduction to Housing'. This is being delivered by UWIC. We will also pursue all possibilities for Open College Network (OCN) accreditation for volunteering and being involved in projects that offer new skills and learning. For instance, the Green Future's programme will be OCN accredited.

We will always make opportunities for members to attend conferences and seminars and study visits to other organisations to share good practice.

We also recognise that we need to embed the culture of Community Involvement throughout the organisation. Not all staff have a good awareness and understanding of Community Involvement and why it's important. We have recently introduced a Management Development Programme that all managers and supervisors will take part. This has included sessions on organisational values and will we also include a session on Community Involvement.

We are running sessions on Community Development for Community Housing and Community Involvement staff and will assess what other learning and development needs there are for wider staff in the organisation to ensure community involvement becomes a focus in all our work.

Staff from different teams across the organisation will in the future be required to commit a number of hours to the work of Community Teams, e.g. take part in events, litter picks or consultations.

12.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Bron Afon is committed to ensuring that involvement in Bron Afon and Torfaen's communities is accessible to everyone, particularly those whose individual circumstances make it difficult (e.g. people with support needs, hearing, sight or mobility difficulties, or language or literacy problems).

We will endeavour to address such needs to ensure everyone has the opportunity to have a say. We will monitor those who become actively involved to gain a profile of which groups are participating and those which are underrepresented.

We will introduce an effective system of collating and retaining information of any individual's special needs or circumstances to enable us to look at ways of improving our services and making involvement accessible to all.

We will seek to remove barriers to involvement to encourage those who are traditionally 'hard to reach' to be involved.

We will monitor carefully who is involved and develop an action plan to address underrepresentation.

We are aware that the way we communicate with tenants and residents also affects how likely they are to become involved. The Communications Forum has begun to address this and has developed a 'Kite-marking' system to ensure all written communication from Bron Afon is easily understood and uses plain language. Furthermore we constantly strive to imagine new ways of communicating that are not dependent on the written word, but use for example symbols and pictures. The 'Traffic light' system, used on the letters now being sent from the Rent Recovery Team, are a good example of this.

SECTION THREE - MONITORING AND MEASURING WHAT WE DO

1.0 We are in the process of devising an impact and monitoring system that will be shared across the whole organisation and takes as its starting point the three-part strap line of our Bron Afon logo: People, Homes and Communities

- We need to record all our activities across the regeneration agenda.
- We want to ensure that our ways of working can be measured so that we can tell if we are making a difference

Developing robust systems of data keeping and activity and outcome monitoring will support the development of good clear funding bids. How do we do this work and what are the best systems we can use?

We will record and monitor both numbers of activities and work completed and we will update this constantly and use it to inform our Membership and Board of progress

We will also constantly review our outcome framework and add new areas for monitoring and recording.

2.0 When we measure impact we are clear that it is not good enough simply to measure amounts of money – either money we have spent ourselves through Bron Afon’s budget, or new funding we have brought in from external sources.

We need to use a wider framework of Value. To do this we will try to measure impacts in terms of a wider way of measuring – such as the ‘Triple Bottom Line’ approach which counts impacts on people, places and the Planet

- for example we will be measuring the carbon footprint of our headquarters in the future and will develop an integrated system for carbon reduction across Bron Afon’s total operation. This work is underway. We hope to achieve Green Dragon Status for Bron Afon.
- We will be an active proponent of the 10:10 Carbon Reduction Commitment in Wales

3.0 One of the important aspects of our monitoring concerns our commitment to reducing poverty. It is therefore crucial that we measure and monitor the impact of our investment in our homes against the cost of the energy used to heat these homes. For example we are determined to evaluate the impacts of the Airey Houses refurbishment against the reduced cost of heating. Equally we

are planning to carry out a detailed monitoring of the impact of the ARBED expenditure on heating and energy costs in the flat blocks where it is targeted.

4.0 We also recognize that sometimes our ambitions for our people, homes and communities are not going to be realized through Bron Afon working alone, and as we have explored earlier in this paper, we need to work with others.

- Part of the way we will measure progress on these shared concerns will be through a close partnership with Torfaen CBC and the Local Service Board and seeking to work with the key outcomes that the LSB has prioritised.
- Equally we are working closely with the Police to develop our knowledge about crime data and community policing for example in their support of detached youth work, in the better design of external space to 'design out crime' etc.

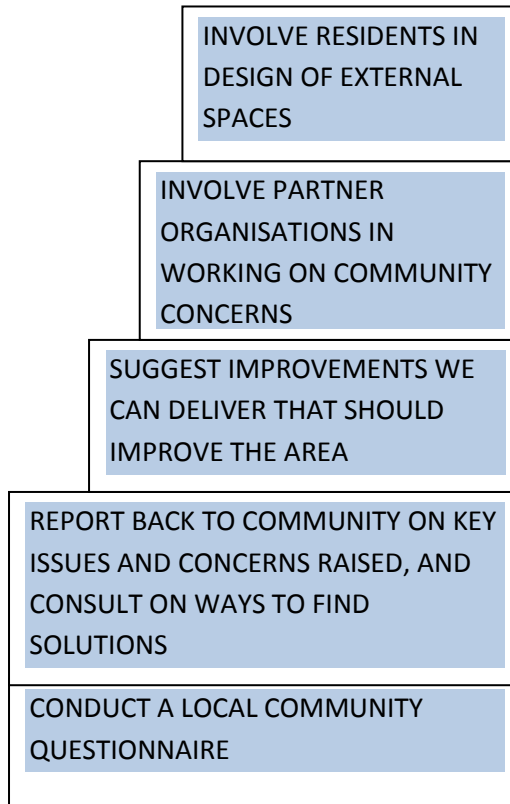
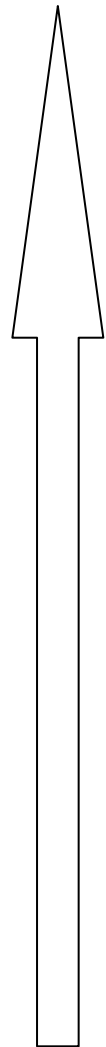
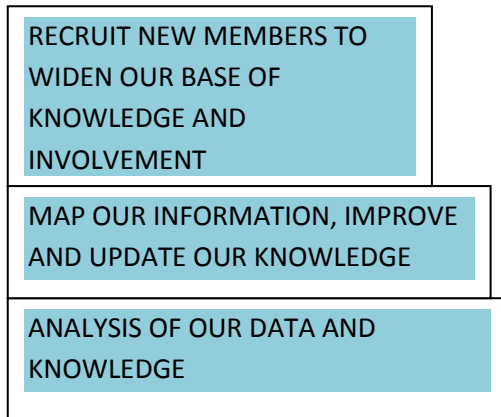
5.0 Illustrating and modelling what we do

So that we can develop understanding of our policies on Community Investment and Involvement we believe everything should be clear and easily understood by all our stakeholders; staff, tenants, Board, community groups, other partners.

One technique for doing this is to develop simple models to illustrate our work and our processes:

- We will use stories, quotes, anecdotes and the words of our Members and our communities; we will record with photographs and project files; if we are able to we will find other good practice externally which will support and encourage projects, for example telling a Community Group where we have found another example of their concerns and a useful contact for them to connect to.
- We work through the Communications Forum to improve our ways of connecting to our people and communities and we will seek to improve the use of different techniques, technologies and plainer language to ensure people understand our work and can work with us – recently we have started to develop our thinking about digital communications with our communities and how we can reduce the digital divide in the poorest communities
- We will support and engage with community events and showcase our work to the wider community

- One model is shown below – the way we seek to get maximum returns on our WHQS investment, combined with our Community involvement and our Community housing role to develop more Sustainable Communities. Other types of diagrams have been used in this document.



ANNEX – BRON AFON'S CURRENT PARTNERS

TCBC :

- Community Safety Partnership
- Strategic Group for Local Service Board
- Health Social Care and Well Being Partnership
- Communities First Thornhill
- Communities First Blaenavon
- Communities Trevethin
- Communities First St Cadoc's and Penygarn
- Torfaen Business Voice
- Play Service
- Youth Service
- Anti - Poverty group
- Torfaen Benefit and Advice Network
- Social Enterprise Network Torfaen
- Cleaner Greener Communities in Torfaen
- Social Care Partnership forum
- Grounds Maintenance – street scene
- Refuse Collection Service
- Homeseeker
- Communities North
- Communities south
- Community Cohesion Network
- Cleaner Greener Communities in Torfaen
- Community Focused Schools

Other partnerships:

- Wales Social Landlords Forum
- Community Housing Cymru
- Chartered Institute of Public Relations Cymru
- Chartered Institute of Housing
- Wales Council Voluntary Action
- Housemark Wales
- Moneyline Cymru
- Financial Inclusion Network CHC
- CHC Social Enterprise European Convergence Working Group
- Community Regeneration Network CHC

- Torfaen Training
- Careers Wales
- Coleg Gwent
- Welsh Assembly Government
- Building Research Establishment
- South Wales Locksmiths
- Argos
- Connaught Academy
- Cookson Electronics
- Grahams
- Plumb Centre
- Richmond kitchens
- Moores
- Travis Perkins
- Ferroli Limited
- Glow worm
- Buy 4 Wales
- E-practice
- Gwent Probation Service
- Gwent Police
- South East Wales Energy Efficiency partnership
- Torfaen Voluntary Alliance
- Welsh European Funding Office
- The Mark Group
- Climate Energy
- Micual solar
- British Gas
- Science Shop Wales
- Women's aid
- Development Trust Association
- Police and Communities Together
- Wales Social landlords ASB Forum
- South Torfaen Action Team
- Strategic Assessment Planning
- Hales House
- Social enterprise Support Group
- Solace
- Merthyr valleys Homes
- Valleys to Coast
- Newport City Homes
- UWIC

- University of Wales, Cardiff, School of Architecture
- University of Wales, Cardiff, School of City and Regional Planning
- Construction Skills Wales
- Heads of the Valleys , Department of Economy and Transport, WAG
- United Welsh Housing Association
- Melin Homes
- Community Development Cymru
- Community Development Foundation
- Moneyline Cymru
- Merthyr Valleys Homes
- Design Commission for Wales
- Sustainable Wales
- Valleys Kids
- Torfaen Allotments Association
- Rhondda Housing Association
- Wales Cooperative Centre
- Age Concern
- Member of the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply
- Procurement for Housing
- OXFAM Wales