



Mark Noakes (CCBC), Leader Cllr Philippa Marsden, Shaun Couzens (CCBC) & Mark Painter (Llanmoor) at the historic ground breaking

Work begins on first new council homes

Work has begun in building the first Council owned homes in the Caerphilly county borough in 18 years. These are the first to be built as part of an ambitious programme that will see new Council homes developed throughout the county borough.

The homes are being developed by Llanmoor Homes at Bedwellty Field, Aberbargoed. The 55 property development will include 6 social rent homes which will be owned and managed by Caerphilly County Borough Council. In addition, the site will also include 2 low cost home ownership properties; offering opportunities for first time buyers to purchase their own home.

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YOUR HOMES, YOUR FUTURE

Affordable homes on the site are being delivered through a Section 106 agreement between the Council and Llanmoor, which aims to bring benefits to the local community as a result of the development. Llanmoor will also be creating areas of open space, retaining a number of existing trees within those areas and constructing a local play area.

Cllr Philippa Marsden, Leader of Caerphilly Council, said "This is a significant milestone for

us in delivering on our commitment to begin a programme of new Council house building in the county borough. We're grateful to Llanmoor for working in partnership with us to deliver these new high-quality Council homes that will help with our programme of development to meet the local demand for affordable housing. I look forward to visiting the site again to see building work progress and to welcome the first families who will call these properties 'home'."

Communities in the Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent council areas will get extra support as the 2021 Census approaches



The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has appointed a Census Engagement Manager to support Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent residents and help make Census 2021 a success.

Alan Cotterill, the area's Census Engagement Manager, will help organisations, charities, faith groups and community leaders within the counties raise awareness of the census and the value to residents in taking part. The census is a once-in-a-decade survey that provides a snapshot of households in England and Wales, helping to plan and fund public services.

Everyone across England and Wales will be asked to take part and the information people give will decide how services are planned and funded. Ultimately, it ensures funds are invested in emergency services, health care, school places and other vital services. For the first time, the census will be run primarily online, making it easy for most people to complete the questionnaire on any device – whether that be a computer, a mobile phone or a tablet.

Local Census Support Centres will be offering help, while paper questionnaires will be available for those who need them. All census staff will operate in line with the Government's latest Covid-19 guidance.

The 2021 Census will include a new question on veterans of the UK Armed Forces, as well as voluntary questions, for those aged 16 and over, on sexual orientation and gender identity. The census will be held on 21 March 2021. While results will be available the following year, all personal records will be locked away for 100 years and kept safe for future generations.

For more information, visit [census.gov.uk](https://www.census.gov.uk)

To reach your local Census Engagement Manager, contact: Alan Cotterill -

✉ alan.cotterill88@field.census.gov.uk or follow [@censusgwent](https://twitter.com/censusgwent) on twitter or Instagram

Welsh Housing Quality Standard Programme update

Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic we were on track to complete the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) programme, which includes internal and external work to homes, in June 2020. Of all Council owned homes in the county borough, over 98% currently comply with the standard.

As a result of the disruption and restrictions caused by the pandemic, Welsh Government extended the deadline to complete the programme from December 2020 to December 2021. The most recent Tier 4 lockdown restrictions resulted in all internal works, including kitchens, bathrooms electrical rewires and gas central heating upgrades, being placed on stop. External works have continued during this time, but at a much slower pace in line with detailed safe systems of work and risk assessments.

With the COVID-19 vaccination programme roll out progressing and reducing numbers

of positive cases, we hope to still be on scheduled to complete our WHQS programme by August 2021. Tenant, staff and contractor safety, however, remains our utmost priority which means that WHQS works are taking much longer to complete than usual, as the pandemic continues. For those few households that are affected, your ongoing patience and understanding is very much appreciated.



EU citizens apply to the EU Settlement Scheme

If you were an EU citizen, resident in the UK by 31 December 2020, you and your family members (including non-EU citizens) need to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme to continue to live, work and study in the UK beyond 30 June 2021.

Even if you have lived in the UK for many years or you have a permanent residence document, you still need to apply. You do not need to apply if you have indefinite leave to remain or enter, or you are an Irish citizen, but you can if you want to.

The online application checks your identity and UK residence, and asks you to declare any criminal convictions. The deadline for applications is 30 June 2021.

For more information visit www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families



COVID-19

To book a test contact **119** or visit <https://gov.wales>

Testing

The Council is supporting Aneurin Bevan Health Board to provide COVID-19 test and vaccination facilities in the Caerphilly county borough.

As well as mobile testing units, the region's first local testing site is also operational in Rhymney. The local testing site is a walk-through coronavirus testing facility and forms part of the Government's UK-wide drive to improve the accessibility of coronavirus testing for communities.

If you have symptoms of Coronavirus, no matter how mild, contact Aneurin Bevan Health Board who will book you a test in a location convenient and appropriate for you.

Test, Trace and Protect

If you are contacted by the Gwent Test, Trace and Protect service you will be advised that you must self-isolate.

If you have tested positive for COVID-19 you will also be asked where you've been and who you've been in close contact with. This will help the team contact anyone who may have caught the virus from you.

Isolating stops you giving the virus to your friends and family, reduces pressure on the NHS and saves lives.

To book a test contact **119** or visit: <https://gov.wales/getting-tested-coronavirus-covid-19>

Vaccinations

Newbridge Leisure Centre is currently being used as a mass vaccination centre by Aneurin Bevan Health Board, to help increase capacity and ensure as many eligible residents as possible are able to access the new vaccine. The larger site replaces the Council's Penallta House building that was previously used as a vaccination hub.

Please wait to be invited for your vaccine; appointments will come directly from Aneurin Bevan Health Board. If you have any issues attending your appointment, or the location given is not convenient, please contact the Health Board to discuss.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Local Testing Sites

Rhymney, Caerphilly

Former Aldi Carpark site,
Old Brewery Lane NP22 5EZ

OPEN NOW:
8am - 8pm 7 days a week

Do you have symptoms of COVID-19?



Please book a free COVID-19 test today.

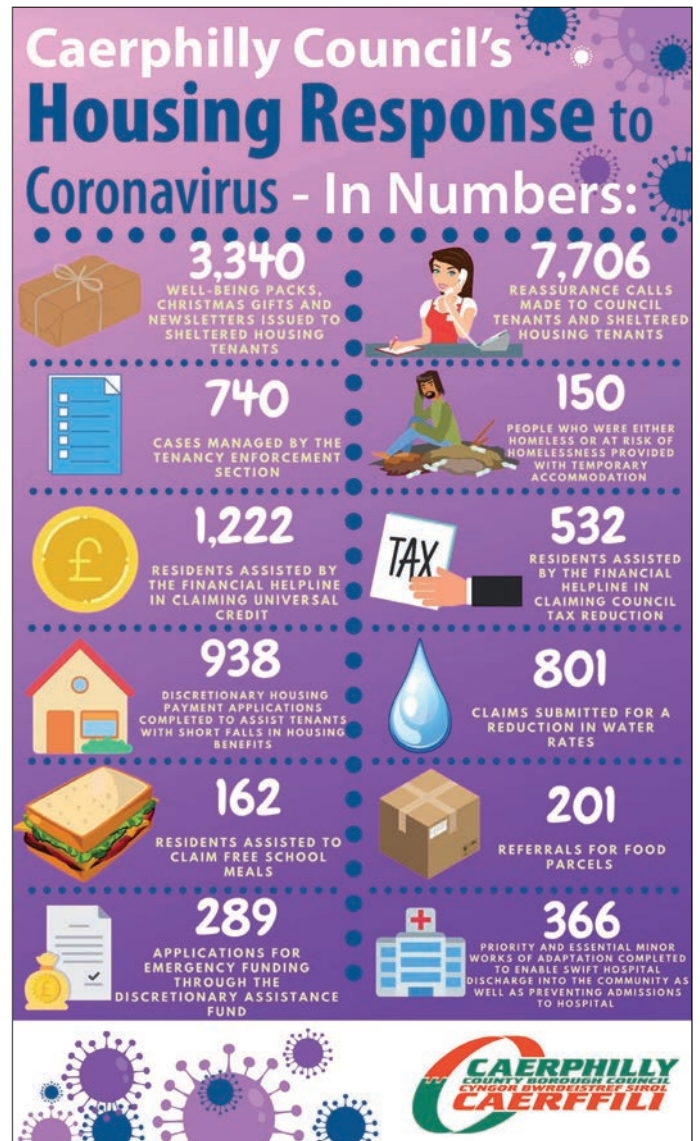
Phone **119** or go to:

www.gov.wales/coronavirus



OUR RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

Staff across Caerphilly Homes have risen to the challenge throughout the past year, in addition to continuing to deliver day to day services for tenants, many were redeployed to support other key areas of the Council's response; such as the Free School Meals home delivery initiative and the Community Response scheme supporting the most vulnerable residents.



Rent and affordability review

Thanks to everyone who gave their views on rent and affordability by completing a survey last year.

We had over 235 responses and the lucky winner of the prize draw has had their £50 Love 2 Shop vouchers.



The Welsh Government expects landlords to set a rent and service charge policy to make sure social housing stays affordable for current and future tenants. This means that each year we need to consider whether our rent is value for money and if it's affordable for tenants, before we consider any rent increases.

On 10th February the Council's Cabinet met remotely to consider feedback from the survey and to decide the annual rent increase for 2021/22. An increase of 1.5% was agreed, which is the lowest for a number of years; with the average annual increase over the past 7 years being 3.33%.

Cllr Lisa Phipps, the Council's Cabinet Member for Housing and Property, said "We understand that any increase in rent will be a concern, particularly during the current pandemic, and have a range of support available to tenants who find themselves experiencing financial difficulties. If rents are not increased annually this has a detrimental impact on the delivery of housing related services, investment in current housing stock and meeting our commitment to provide new affordable housing; to reduce waiting lists and homelessness. It could also result in additional borrowing, which will in turn increase debt charges, and ultimately lead to the council having to review the services currently being delivered."

Over 130 tenants told us that they'd be happy to talk to us more about this; we will be in touch during 2021. If you would like to be involved then please telephone or email the **Tenant & Community Involvement Team** on **01443 811433** or tenantinvolvement@caerphilly.gov.uk

Can our Tenancy Support Service help you?

Our team of Tenancy Support Officers offer one to one advice and support to people experiencing financial difficulties.

We understand that Covid 19 has had a serious impact on the lives of many tenants and we're working hard to provide support to those people affected. We offer help to maximise your income, give advice and support with Universal Credit issues, help to apply for discretionary housing payment, energy advice, help to reduce water charges. We also make referrals to help with finding employment or increasing skills and assist with solutions for debt.

If you are a council tenant and would like more information about the Tenancy Support service call **01443 866534** or text **RENTHELP** to **81400**. Alternatively email tenancysupportoffice@caerphilly.gov.uk

Tenant Participation: Past, Present and Future

The past year has seen many changes in the way we involve tenants. Tenants are still at the core of everything we do but as a result of COVID-19, the way that we do things has changed. In the space of a few months the face to face meetings became telephone calls followed by virtual meetings which brought their own unique challenges!

Thankfully we and our tenant volunteers have been able to adapt to the new virtual world and are busily embracing this different way of working. So, to the present; we are still holding our Tenant Information Exchange every 4 to 6 weeks online via Microsoft Teams. You may also have seen or taken part in some of our surveys either by telephone, through an e-bulletin or social media. If you did, we thank you for your time.

Our Armchair Reviewers continue to give their views on the style and content of this newsletter before we send it to all tenants, as well as giving feedback on other documents when needed. We are also continuing to provide information, competitions and involvement opportunities through the Caerphilly Homes Facebook and Twitter pages.

Something that has proved to be very popular with our involved tenants since the pandemic is our new weekly Tenant Participation email. This provides lots of information; ranging from where tenants can find support, to what is happening in the world of housing and the adventures of our team mascot! Intrigued? Then why not join many other tenants and sign up to the weekly email by contacting us on the details below.



We have also continued to carry out satisfaction surveys with tenants who have received support from our Tenancy Support Officers. Looking to the future we have several projects planned, including more discussions with tenants on the rent and affordability review, an 'Online Senate', tenant satisfaction surveys with those who have received support from our Welfare Benefit Service and online focus groups. We also hope to be able to restart some of the face to face projects that we have put on hold as soon as it is safe to do so.



If you would like to get involved in shaping housing services, please get in touch to find out more by calling **01443 811434** - emailing tenantinvolvement@caerphilly.gov.uk or contacting us via social media.

Contact us

Although our offices remain closed to the public, there are still lots of ways that you can contact us.



Upper Rhymney Valley Area Housing Office:

Tel: **01443 873535**

Email: urvaho@caerphilly.gov.uk

Eastern Valleys Area Housing Office:

Tel: **01495 235974**

Email: eastvalleyaho@caerphilly.gov.uk

Graig-y-Rhacca Neighbourhood Housing Office:

Tel: **02920 853050**

Email: graiyrrhaccanho@caerphilly.gov.uk

Lansbury Park Neighbourhood Housing Office:

Tel: **02920 860917**

Email: lansburyparknho@caerphilly.gov.uk

Report a repair: Tel: **01443 864886**

Email: dlopbe@caerphilly.gov.uk

Older Persons' Housing:

Tel: **01443 873552 / 873553**

Email: OlderPersonsHousing@caerphilly.gov.uk

Floating Support: Tel: **01443 811425**

Email: FloatingSupport@caerphilly.gov.uk

Rents: Tel: **01443 811450**

or text **RENTHELP** to **81400**

Email: rents@caerphilly.gov.uk

Council Tax: Tel: **01443 863002**

Email: counciltax@caerphilly.gov.uk

Housing Benefit: Tel: **01443 866567**

Email: benefits@caerphilly.gov.uk

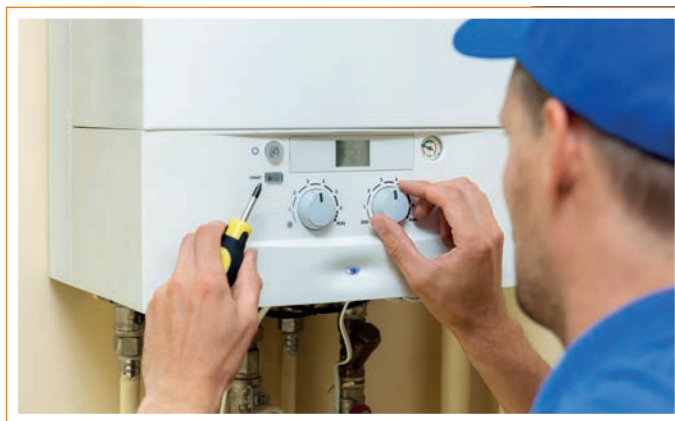
Tenant & Community Involvement Team

Tel: **01443 811433 / 811434**

Email: tenantinvolvement@caerphilly.gov.uk

Don't miss your heating service!

We have a duty of care and a legal obligation to make sure that all gas and solid fuel pipework and heating systems are in a safe condition and that an annual service is carried out to ensure this.



During the COVID-19 pandemic we have continued to carry out servicing of gas and solid fuel heating systems. This is a mandatory requirement but is also vital in making sure tenants and their families, particularly our most vulnerable, are protected from potentially fatal risks, including carbon monoxide exposure or gas explosions.

We understand that this is a worrying time and you may be concerned about having people enter your home. We want to assure you that every measure has been put in place to keep you safe. Our engineers follow guidance issued by Public Health Wales and Welsh Government to ensure the safety of themselves and the households they're visiting.

Making sure your annual heating service is carried out is really important for your safety but, please also help ensure the safety of our engineers by contacting us to rearrange your appointment if anyone in your household develops any symptoms of coronavirus or has been advised to self-isolate.