

# Public Document Pack

Gareth Owens LL.B Barrister/Bargyfreithiwr  
Head of Legal and Democratic Services  
Pennaeth Gwasanaethau Cyfreithiol a Democraataidd



To: Cllr Ron Hampson (Chairman)

CS/NG

Councillors: Amanda Bragg, David Cox,  
Peter Curtis, Ron Davies, Glenys Diskin,  
Rosetta Dolphin, Jim Falshaw, Alison Halford,  
George Hardcastle, Ray Hughes, Brian Lloyd,  
Mike Reece, Gareth Roberts and Sharon Williams

17 January 2013

Sharon Thomas 01352 702324  
sharon.b.thomas@flintshire.gov.uk

Dear Sir / Madam

A meeting of the **HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** will be held in the **DELYN COMMITTEE ROOM, COUNTY HALL, MOLD CH7 6NA** on **WEDNESDAY, 23RD JANUARY, 2013** at **10.00 AM** to consider the following items.

Yours faithfully

Democracy & Governance Manager

## **AGENDA**

- 1 **APOLOGIES**
- 2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**

- 3 **MINUTES** (Pages 1 - 6)

To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2012.

- 4 **HOMELESSNESS & WELFARE REFORM** (Pages 7 - 18)

Report of Director of Community Services

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County Hall, Mold. CH7 6NA  
Tel. 01352 702400 DX 708591 Mold 4  
[www.flintshire.gov.uk](http://www.flintshire.gov.uk)  
Neuadd y Sir, Yr Wyddgrug. CH7 6NR  
Ffôn 01352 702400 DX 708591 Mold 4  
[www.siryfflint.gov.uk](http://www.siryfflint.gov.uk)

The Council welcomes correspondence in Welsh or English  
Mae'r Cyngor yn croesawau gohebiaeth yn y Cymraeg neu'r Saesneg

- 5 **SUSTAINABILITY IN HOUSING** (Pages 19 - 44)  
Report of Director of Community Services
- 6 **PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL** (Pages 45 - 54)  
Report of Director of Community Services
- 7 **PDA AND CAPITA UPDATE** (Pages 55 - 60)  
Report of Director of Community Services
- 8 **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME** (Pages 61 - 66)  
Report of Member Engagement Manager

# Agenda Item 3

## HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 5 DECEMBER 2012

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA on Wednesday, 5 December 2012

**PRESENT: Councillor Ron Hampson (Chairman)**

Councillors: Amanda Bragg, Peter Curtis, Rosetta Dolphin, Jim Falshaw, Alison Halford, George Hardcastle, Ray Hughes, Brian Lloyd, Mike Reece and Gareth Roberts

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors: David Cox, Ron Davies and Sharon Williams

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Veronica Gay and Patrick Heesom

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment (for minute number 34), Cabinet Member for Housing, Director of Community Services, Head of Housing, Housing Strategy Manager, Neighbourhood Housing Manager (North), Interim Asset Manager and Community Support Services Manager

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Member Engagement Manager and Committee Officer

**32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**

No declarations of interest were made.

**33. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2012 had been circulated with the agenda.

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**34. GYPSY/TRAVELLERS NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

The Head of Housing introduced the report to consider the Gypsy-Traveller Needs Assessment that would inform the development of a Gypsy-Traveller Strategy. The Housing Strategy Manager detailed background including the Council's involvement in the North West Wales Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA), the findings of which were attached to the report. Councillor P.J. Curtis pointed out that the privately owned site at Dollar Park was located in Holywell and not Greenfield as stated in the report.

The assessment of sites across North Wales indicated that Flintshire was the most significant provider, which raised concerns amongst Members at the lack of progress made by the other Councils in the area. The Housing Strategy

Manager commented on the expectation by the Welsh Government (WG) for all Councils to make provision where the need was identified. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment said that he would endeavour to persuade other Councils in North Wales to be as proactive as Flintshire in the provision of sites and to share the responsibility, in line with WG guidance.

Councillor A.M. Halford enquired as to the latest position on the Council owned Riverside site in Queensferry. The Housing Strategy Manager explained that a flood risk assessment had been commissioned by the Environment Directorate and that if a positive conclusion was reached, a planning application would be submitted for the extension to the site. Access to the site was the subject of ongoing negotiations and a small amount of WG funding would be available. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment said he was hopeful that the site would be extended with provision for a transit section.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the findings of the North West Wales Gypsy-Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTNA) be noted; and
- (b) That the approach to develop a dedicated Gypsy-Traveller Strategy for Flintshire be endorsed.

**35. QUARTER 2 SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORTS**

The Head of Housing Services introduced a report for the Committee to note and consider the 2012/13 Quarter 2 (July to September 2012) service performance reports, note the position of the Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges (SARC) and progress made against the Improvement Targets contained within the performance reports.

The Head of Housing gave a short presentation on performance, outlining work which had been undertaken to improve performance and areas where improvement was needed, as outlined within the report.

**People & Customer Indicators**

Councillor G. Hardcastle asked why there had been a downturn in complaint handling during the period. The Head of Housing explained that under the Corporate Complaints procedures, each service area manager was responsible for responding to complaints in their areas. The downturn in figures for Housing was due to insufficient prioritising of responses to complaints, however a review had been undertaken and assurances were given that work would be carried out with managers to improve this.

Councillor J.E. Falshaw referred to the increase in absenteeism in the section, which also occurred in some other areas of the Council, and asked how this could be improved. The Head of Housing said that changes to Council policy in reducing Human Resources involvement at early stages of absences meant that more responsibility was given to service area managers which she felt was positive in alleviating any possible delays. She pointed out that although the figures in the report were split between different sections of Housing, this did not

reflect the number of long-term absences within each section which had a significant impact on figures. Proactive work was being carried out by managers to help employees return to the workplace as quickly as possible such as analysing the causes of absences, helping individuals to access Occupational Therapy services at a cost to the section and considering the potential for employees to carry out the part of their job that they were able to, although they may be unable to undertake the full duties.

In response to a question from Councillor A.M. Halford on the process for employees accessing Occupational Therapy services, the Head of Housing said that HR assistance was needed on promoting services and approaching employees to discuss phased return to work. The Director of Community Services added that HR resources dedicated to assisting the Directorate were small but were committed to supporting managers through the sickness absence process.

Following queries raised by Councillor Hardcastle, it was confirmed that return to work interviews were undertaken and that the sickness absence target for all Council employees was no more than 9.8 full-time equivalent (FTE) days per annum.

Councillor P.J. Curtis felt that this target should be reduced and suggested that long-term absence figures should be separated in future to reflect a clearer position. The Head of Housing agreed that this would be helpful and had been raised on previous occasions with the suggestion for a summary of long-term absences to be given. She went on to say that no absences had been recorded for a third of employees in Housing and that a 100% attendance pilot project in the section had resulted in those employees receiving certificates.

Councillor Halford asked if the suggestion to split long-term absence figures could be passed to the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee which received reports from HR on absences. The Head of Housing agreed that this could be done.

### Neighbourhood Management

The Head of Housing introduced the newly appointed Neighbourhood Manager for the North area who was also responsible for managing the Income Team.

Councillor R. Dolphin welcomed the reduction in rent arrears which she said would be significantly affected by the 'Bedroom tax' and asked for clarification on the allocation of voids properties for homeless individuals. The Head of Housing explained that Members had previously agreed to allocate six units from the Council's stock across the county to use as temporary accommodation for homeless families to reduce reliance on using B&B facilities. Individuals who were homeless were prioritised on the housing waiting list, in line with the Council's statutory duty, and could be placed in these units. There was potential for tenancies to be granted on these properties whilst taking into account ability to pay rent.

In response to further comments, the Head of Housing said that officers were mindful of local Member concerns when placing individuals in accommodation but that this arrangement was a more cost-effective alternative to using B&B facilities which were mainly located away from villages. The Community Support Services Manager added that Members had previously raised concerns about families being housed outside their area and schools and that allocating void properties in this way reduced the likelihood of this.

The Head of Housing agreed to look into queries raised by the Chairman and Councillor Curtis on void properties in their wards that were allocated for homeless people.

In response to queries raised on the Welsh Water Assist Scheme, the Head of Housing explained that the scheme had so far resulted in reduced charges for 100 Council tenants and would be promoted in the Council newsletter. The Neighbourhood Manager (North) explained that the scheme was to benefit low income families with high water usage who would not benefit from using a water meter. Following Councillor Dolphin's request for Members to be made aware of such schemes so that they could share information with residents, the Head of Housing agreed to share a briefing note with tenants and Members. Councillor Halford said that discussion on the Welsh Water Assist Scheme tied in with concerns previously raised by the Committee on the Council's process for paying water rates.

Councillor M. Reece said he would speak to officers on suggested alternative uses to the empty library building and other properties in Bagillt.

#### Housing Asset Maintenance

Members welcomed the significant improvement in time taken to resolve non-urgent repairs. In response to queries from the Chairman, the Interim Asset Manager said that the time taken to resolve repairs started from the time the request was received and that any inspection cards left at properties in which the owner was not present, now included the operative's mobile telephone number for ease of contact.

#### Community Support Services

The Community Support Services Manager provided explanation on the increase in the average number of days that families had spent in B&B facilities and spoke about the challenges faced by the increasing number of people who were presenting themselves as homeless, which now included individuals who had not previously used this service. Officers were working proactively to help although there were difficulties due to B&B facilities within the county being accessed by other Councils.

Members were also advised that the Community Support Services Manager would be working with the Welsh Local Government Association and Welsh Government (WG) on the potential impact of welfare reform changes which would also be discussed at the Committee's meeting in January 2013.

In response to questions asked by Councillor H.G Roberts, the Director of Community Services confirmed that Flintshire had offered assistance to Denbighshire County Council following the recent flooding in St Asaph. The Head of Housing said that Flintshire had not been approached by any Councils in England to accommodate homeless families.

### Housing Renewal and Housing Strategy

Following a comment from Councillor Roberts, the Head of Housing said that the WG White Paper included proposals to help encourage residents to bring their properties into use with the potential for enforcement to be used on those who did not co-operate. Councillor Halford asked if an update could be received on letters which had been sent to owners of empty properties and the Head of Housing replied that progress would be reported at the January 2013 meeting.

On the Community Energy Saving Programme, Councillor Dolphin was aware of a case where grant funding had been withdrawn due to work not being carried out and asked if another application could be made for further funding which was to be made available. The Head of Housing agreed to look into this and respond.

Councillor Curtis spoke about the effect of unkempt empty properties and shops on surrounding areas and gave examples within his ward. The Head of Housing agreed to respond on this.

Councillor Hardcastle asked if Members' thanks could be passed to the Rent Arrears team following a recent visit.

### **RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the comments/observations of the Committee are fed back to the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee who are responsible for the overview and monitoring of improvement targets;
- (b) That the Head of Housing and Member Engagement Manager raise with the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee the suggestion for future absence reports to separate figures for long-term and short-term sickness absences;
- (c) That the Head of Housing pursue queries raised by the Chairman and Councillor Curtis on allocated void properties in their wards;
- (d) That the Head of Housing provide a briefing note to Council tenants and Members on the Welsh Water Assist Scheme; and
- (e) That the Head of Housing pursue the enquiries made by Councillors Curtis and Dolphin and provide responses.

**36. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Member Engagement Manager introduced the report which gave Members the opportunity to consider and update the Committee's Forward Work Programme.

The Committee agreed to the suggestion for progress reports on mobile PDA devices and Capita to be scheduled into the Forward Work Programme.

Councillor P.J. Curtis and other Members welcomed the detailed and informative reports which were being received from the Housing section.

**RESOLVED:**

That the draft Forward Work Programme be agreed, with the inclusion of progress reports on mobile PDA devices and Capita.

**37. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE**

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.45 am)

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**Chairman**



## FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**REPORT TO:** HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**DATE:** WEDNESDAY, 23<sup>RD</sup> JANUARY 2013

**REPORT BY:** DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

**SUBJECT:** HOMELESSNESS & WELFARE REFORM

### **1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.01 To update the Committee of the work in progress to develop and implement a range of measures that will help mitigate the full negative impact of the welfare reforms from falling upon vulnerable households and in doing so protect the Housing Revenue Account income and ensure the Local Authority's statutory homelessness duties are fulfilled as cost effectively as possible

### **2.00 BACKGROUND**

2.01 The provisions in the Welfare Reform Act 2012 fundamentally reform the social security system. A significant number of welfare benefits will be subject to amendments. Some benefits will be slightly tweaked (i.e. Industrial Injuries Benefits) while others, such as means-tested benefits, will go through major transformations that will culminate in their abolition following the introduction of Universal Credit. The aim of the reforms is to make the benefit system simpler, to ensure work always pays, and to deliver annual savings of £18 billion from the social security budget by 2015.

2.02 Members will be aware that the Council is currently developing a long-term and proactive Welfare Reform Strategy to help households impacted by the welfare reforms. The strategy comprises of four major Projects:

- I. Welfare Reforms - Mitigating Homelessness;
- II. Social Fund Replacement - Local Assistance Scheme;
- III. Implementation of the Universal Credit;
- IV. Council Tax Replacement Scheme.

2.03 To oversee the development and implementation of the strategy, a dedicated Welfare Reform Programme Board has been established. The Leader of the Council chairs the Programme Board, and its

membership comprises of representatives from all key stakeholders, i.e., Flintshire County Council (Councillors and Officers), Third Sector organisations, the DWP, and the Health Authority.

- 2.04 The changes to the social security system have the potential to reduce benefit income within households across all of Flintshire's communities. The assumption from the Government is that the majority of households will be able to replace their lost benefit income with earned income and the Universal Credit. With its single income taper withdrawal figure this policy has been designed with the aim that work always pays. However, we expect that some of the more vulnerable households in the County may experience the most severe financial pressures and not have the opportunity to alleviate these pressures by going into employment.
- 2.05 If the reduction in welfare benefit income cannot be replaced by earned income this will affect a household's ability to pay their contractual housing costs and increase the threat of the household becoming homeless. An increase in homelessness will place additional financial pressures upon the Council through the budgetary costs associated with the fulfilment of its statutory homelessness duties.
- 2.06 Alongside, the potential increase in budgetary expenditure on statutory homelessness duties, the Council is considering the potential budgetary impacts of the proposed changes to homeless legislation within the Welsh Housing White Paper. These changes include, ending intentionality amongst homeless families and introducing a new statutory duty linked to delivering housing solutions to all households at risk of homelessness, not only those deemed to have a priority need status.
- 2.07 Whilst the Council support the concept of an improved safety net for all households at risk of homelessness through the enhancement of homeless prevention services, it is concerned that this will require significant additional resources. At present, the Council is involved with on-going discussions with the WLGA to identify the potential cost of the proposed changes.

### **3.00 CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.01 The majority of the welfare reforms begin to be implemented from April 2013 and the process of transforming the social security system will not be complete until 2017 (at the earliest). However, some reforms are already in progress, such as reducing housing benefits (HB) for private sector tenants. These reforms, along with the current economic climate, are creating an increase in the numbers of

residents approaching the Council's Advice and Homelessness Team as homeless. During the period October to December 2012, fifty-four formal homeless applications were made from the 207 households who received specialist advice and support. Compared to the same period in 2011, this represents an increase of 58% in formal homeless applications (34 were made in the period October to December 2011).

- 3.02 When the main reforms of the social security system start to be implemented, more residents (tenants and owner-occupiers) will find themselves at a heightened risk of losing their homes. For example, the reduction in the amount of HB paid to working age social housing tenants who are under occupying their home will result in 1,200 FCC tenants losing HB totalling £12,500pw. The reforms of sickness and disability benefits will mean around 4,000 residents may lose some or all of their sickness and disability benefit income. The loss of sickness or disability benefit may also result in the householder losing HB or the financial support they receive from other means tested benefits towards their mortgage interest payments.
- 3.03 To help households address the problems they will face because of the welfare reforms and mitigate the risk of homelessness, it is essential that they have timely and easy access to advice and support services.
- 3.04 The Council's Neighbourhood Housing Service has commenced a project to support its working age tenants who are under-occupying their home. The aim of the project is to help tenants to address the problems that the reduction in their HB entitlement will create and to manage their long-term housing expectations. Tenants have been given the opportunity to meet with the housing team to discuss their options and draw up a housing support plan, noting their preferred long-term housing option and identifying the on-going advice and support, they need to attain this option. Information on the preferred options of tenants is attached at appendix 1, alongside a breakdown of current stock turnover that demonstrates the mismatch between need and supply
- 3.05 The Housing Service is also developing a 'Money Management and Prevention of Eviction' project where an Accommodation Support Officer will work with tenants in arrears to help them to develop the skills needed to manage their household budget effectively. The project will run initially for a 12-week pilot period when its outcomes will be evaluated to assess its impact. A similar scheme is currently being scoped for new tenants.
- 3.06 The positive engagement with tenants, being advanced through these two projects, will help form the basis of the Neighbourhood Housing

Service continued engagement with all its tenants in order to prepare them for future welfare reforms that will affect them. For example it is proposed that rent is paid directly to them within a four weekly payment of Universal Credit or Pension Credit. This measure is proposed to start to be introduced from April 2014, following the evaluation of a number of pilot projects currently being undertaken across the United Kingdom.

3.07 The Neighbourhood Housing Service is also reviewing and considering revisions to its policies. During this work some very sensitive issues that will be created by the HB reforms will have to be addressed. These include the following issues related to the management of rent arrears and the allocation policy.

- At what amount of rent arrears would it be appropriate for the Housing Service to begin legal proceedings to seek possession where the tenant's arrears have accrued because of the HB reduction?
- Should legal action for possession be taken at different amounts of arrears depending upon an individual tenant's response to the financial problems the HB reduction has created? For example, if a tenant has positively engaged with the Housing Service and taken up offers of advice and support to try to resolve their financial problems but these have proven unsuccessful, should the Housing Service allow their arrears to accrue to a higher amount before implementing legal action than a tenant who has refused all offers of help and support?
- What should our financial provision be for bad debt over the next three years while these changes bed down?
- Should the housing allocation policy be strictly aligned to the HB regulations which may mean housing lower priority cases that match the size of a property or do we knowingly allow people to under occupy?
- Should the allocation policy allow an applicant, with the financial means to pay their rent without assistance from the HB scheme, to be offered a property, which according to the HB rules they will be under occupying should they subsequently need to claim HB to help them to pay their rent?
- Should the current policy on transfers be revised to allow tenants with rent arrears to be able to move to smaller accommodation?
- Should the lettings age of some of the Council's older persons housing be reduced to enable them to be allocated to younger people, for example, bedsits and 1 bedroomed

flats in locations that are not wholly suited for older people?

- Should the housing investment programme be focussing more on investments that make tenant's homes cheaper to run, for example, prioritising of gas areas rather than improving bathrooms?

- 3.08 The HB reduction relates to tenants of all Social Landlords and the Housing Service will work closely with Housing Associations operating in Flintshire to align approaches where possible. This will support the development of measures to minimise homelessness and mitigate the financial pressure placed upon the Council through the fulfillment of its statutory homeless duties to Housing Association tenants who could be evicted due to rent arrears caused by the HB reduction.
- 3.09 The Council is also funding additional staffing resources to establish a Welfare Reform Response Team to assist residents, across all tenures, who are in need of advice and support during this period of significant change. This team, initially two officers, (an application has been made to the Welsh Government for funding for a further three officers) will target and engage with households and help them to identify and implement solutions that will enable them to maintain their contractual housing payments. For example, assist households to effectively manage their financial commitments and improve their budgeting skills, to maximise their household income, and to improve prospects of obtaining employment through accessing training or volunteering opportunities, etc.
- 3.10 The proactive and early intervention work, outlined above, will ensure some households are able to remain living in their current accommodation. However, not all interventions will have successful outcomes and some households will, unfortunately, become homeless.
- 3.11 It is therefore essential that measures are introduced that will enable the Council's statutory homeless duties to be fulfilled as cost effectively as possible. For example, the Housing Options Service is examining an option to lease a property comprising of 12 units of single person accommodation. Given the largest group at any time accommodated within B&B are single households, this accommodation will enable the Council to reduce the use of B&B accommodation as interim/temporary accommodation. Just as important, the Housing Options Service will work with the residents, who are placed in the accommodation, and help them to address any underlying problems which contributed to their homelessness and in doing so ensure they are better able to sustain their own accommodation over the longer- term.
- 3.12 The proposal in the report to the Executive on the 24 January 2012, that more difficult to let council property could be utilised as temporary homeless accommodation is now in operation. The (then) Executive

agreed that up to eight units of Council stock could be used as temporary accommodation. Five properties are currently being used to accommodate seven homeless households.

- 3.13 One three-bedroom house is being used to accommodate three single young people. This is the first time the Council has used a shared house as accommodation and appropriate support is being provided to the residents. Given the difficulty in finding suitable and affordable accommodation in the private rented sector for single people aged 16 – 34 years old and the lack of 1-bedroomed social housing for this age group, the shared house model will be an essential tool in helping the Council reduce the budgetary cost of providing accommodation for single homeless households.
- 3.14 It is also important that the private rented sector within Flintshire remains a viable housing option for all residents, regardless of their income, in order to enhance homeless prevention activities. The availability of private rented properties will become more critical should the proposal in the Welsh Housing White Paper to allow Councils to discharge homeless duties in to a private sector property, without or without the applicants agreement, become law.
- 3.15 Unfortunately, the reduction in the amount of HB paid to tenants renting from a private landlord that was implemented in January 2012 has provided a disincentive to some private landlords to accept tenants who will be reliant upon HB to help pay their rent. In addition, the introduction of the Universal Credit from October 2013 where payments in respect of housing costs will be made directly to claimants may provide further disincentives to private landlords to accept low-income tenants.
- 3.16 Thus, the Council needs to develop sustained and proactive relationships with private landlords in order to increase the number of landlords within the County who are willing to provide accommodation for rent at local housing allowance rates. Options to be considered will include, working with an established Social Lettings Agency and examining the benefits to be obtained from establishing an in-house Private Rented Access Team to engage effectively with private landlords. A Flintshire Private Rented Sector Fair is also being planned to be held in March 2013. This event will allow the Council and other agencies to engage with current and prospective landlords to provide information and advice and to promote the Private Rented Sector as a key contributor to meeting housing need and demand in Flintshire.

#### **4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.01 That the Committee notes the measures outlined in the report that are being implemented to help address the impact of the Welfare Reforms and provides views on the policy issues for landlord services outlined

in 3.07 so that firm proposals can be developed for Cabinet approval.

## **5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.01 The financial pressures upon the Council that may be created by the full impact of the welfare reforms are significant. These pressures include the £700,000pa reduction in the level of Central Government revenue that is paid directly to the Housing Revenue Account in respect of housing benefits to assist tenants with low incomes to pay their rent. The Council is also anticipating an increase in expenditure with all costs associated with the provision and management of emergency and temporary accommodation for homeless households. The Council anticipates there may be additional pressures on other services, notably Social Services, due to the possible strain on families.

5.02 A 2013/14 budget pressure bid of £250,000 has been approved in relation to the expected budgetary increase in expenditure on the Council's statutory homelessness duties.

## **6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

6.01 The programme of proactive work being undertaken to try to mitigate the increase in homelessness will target and protect, as much as possible, the most vulnerable members of our communities from being adversely affected by the Government's Welfare Reforms.

## **7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

7.01 None specifically associated with the content of this report

## **8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

8.01 The consequences of the welfare reforms will be felt across many of Flintshire communities; however, some groups will be harder hit than others. For example, single people aged under 35 years old, people of working age with long-term health problems/disabilities, families with four or more children and working age social housing tenants. The successful attainment of the objectives within the Mitigating Homelessness Project will ensure the adverse impacts of the welfare reforms upon such groups are reduced.

## **9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.01 None specifically associated with the content of this report

**10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

10.01 Any proposal to introduce amendments to the Neighbourhood Housing Service's policies will be subject to appropriate consultation.

**11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

11.01 A Welfare Reform seminar for Members was held on the 12 November 2012

**12.00 APPENDICES**

12.01 Appendix 1: FCC tenants – under occupying

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985  
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

**Contact Officer: Katie Davis  
Telephone: 01352 703158  
Email: [Katie.davis@flintshire.gov.uk](mailto:Katie.davis@flintshire.gov.uk)**



Appendix 1: FCC tenants – under occupying

**Table 1**

All FCC tenants identified as under-occupying their home were contacted and offered the opportunity of a meeting with a member of the Housing Team to discuss the Housing Benefit reforms affect them. 78% of the tenants responded to the offer and engaged with the Housing Team.

	South	North	East	
<b>Complete</b>	329	363	202	894
<b>No Response</b>	86	104	68	258
<b>Incomplete</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>467</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>1152</b>

**Table 2**

During the meeting with the Housing Team, the tenants identified how they were going to address the problem when their Housing Benefit is reduced in April 2013. 32% (360 tenants) of the tenants indicated that they would pay the shortfall, whilst 10% (118 tenants) stated they wished to move. The Housing Team will continue to work with all the tenants to help them achieve their preferred outcome.

Want to Move	<b>118</b>
Will Pay The Shortfall	<b>360</b>
Find Work	<b>56</b>
Lodger	<b>32</b>
Fully Occupied	<b>131</b>
Over Occupied	<b>3</b>
Not Claiming Benefit	<b>97</b>
Refused to Sign	<b>3</b>
Query with HB/ Disability	<b>82</b>
No Response	<b>260</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>*1142</b>

\* 10 forms logged as completed had not been input at the date the table was populated.

Appendix 1: FCC tenants – under occupying

**Table 3** Under- occupying by bedroom numbers

As table 3, shows over 60% of the affected tenants are under-occupying by one bedroom, with the majority needing a two-bedroom property.

	<b>Under occupying by 1 bedroom</b>	<b>Under occupying by 2+ bedroom</b>
Tenants	693	459

**Table 4** Total FCC Stock

As can be seen from table 4, the Council has 977 two-bedroom and 3,277 three-bedroom properties within its general needs stock.

<b>Property Size</b>	<b>General Needs</b>	<b>Sheltered</b>	<b>Total</b>
<u>One Bedroom</u>			
Flat	178	514	<b>692</b>
Bungalow	13	1136	<b>1149</b>
House		1	<b>1</b>
<u>Two Bedroom</u>			
Flat	281	340	<b>621</b>
Bungalow	3	617	<b>620</b>
House	693	1	<b>694</b>
<u>Three Bedroom</u>			
Flat	63		<b>63</b>
Bungalow	27		<b>27</b>
House	3231		<b>3231</b>
<u>Four Bedroom</u>			
House	117		<b>117</b>
<u>Five Bedroom</u>			
House	11		<b>11</b>
<u>Six Bedroom</u>			
House	4		<b>4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4577</b>	<b>2609</b>	<b>7230</b>

\* FCC stock also includes 25 x 3-bedroom house – shared ownership.

\*\* The above figures exclude the Flint maisonettes

Appendix 1: FCC tenants – under occupying

**Table 5:** Number of FCC vacant properties from Oct 2010 - Oct 2012

As can be seen from table 5, over a two-year period only 159 two-bedroom properties within the general needs stock became available for letting. This is an obvious concern when the majority of our tenants who are under – occupying need a property of this size. **We can assume that it will probably take around two-years to re-house those tenants who have expressed an interest in moving at the moment (allowing for the fact that in addition to these 118 households who have asked this move, there will be new households joining the housing register who will also need two-bedroomed accommodation.)**

**This however takes no account of the 360 households who are saying that they will remain in their current accommodation and make up the shortfall. It is likely that during the course of 2013 a number of these households will decide that a move to smaller accommodation would be beneficial once they have tried to make up the shortfall in their Housing Benefit entitlement and, in addition, pay a council tax contribution that they currently don't need to meet.**

	<b>1 Bed</b>	<b>2 Bed</b>	<b>3 Bed</b>	<b>4 Bed</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Sheltered Stock</b>	366	149	nil	nil	515
<b>General Need Stock</b>	41	159	307	11	518
<b>Total</b>					1033

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## FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**REPORT TO:** HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**DATE:** WEDNESDAY, 23 JANUARY 2013

**REPORT BY:** DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

**SUBJECT:** SUSTAINABILITY IN HOUSING

### **1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.01 To consult with Members on a proposal to develop a Sustainability Strategy for Housing and to outline the success of existing energy efficiency schemes in Council stock and in private homes.
- 1.02 To inform Members of changes to energy efficiency funding, with the ending of the Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP) and the introduction of the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) and the Green Deal.
- 1.03 To outline to Members the rationale for the collection of water charges and to seek support for the continuation of this service.

### **2.00 BACKGROUND**

- 2.01 Social housing is a social business and therefore it is vital that there is a positive impact of that business on its customers and the local environment. This also ties in with the Council's corporate commitment to reduce carbon emissions from its own assets (excluding Council housing) by 60% by 2050.
- 2.02 There are two aspects of sustainability that require consideration by the Housing Service. Firstly, there is energy sustainability of the homes we provide. This is an important point in the context of rising fuel bills and falling household income as a consequence of welfare reform. It is also a requirement of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard that all our properties meet an energy rating of SAP 65.
- 2.03 The intention is to develop a sustainability strategy for housing which would combine these two elements, sets out an action plan and also develops a suite of targets for the next 5 years.
- 2.04 The development of this strategy is timely, as there remains a high degree of focus on energy sustainability, waste management and energy efficiency retrofit by both the Welsh and Westminster governments.

- 2.05 In terms of new build housing, Welsh government demands that any new homes funded through Social Housing Grant must meet Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3 as a minimum. The highest code level is currently 6 and various demonstration projects exist to demonstrate the benefits of this level of energy efficiency.
- 2.06 However, the cost for Code 3 Homes will be higher than traditional build, typically costing in the region of £1200/sq metre. Costs associated with the higher codes range between £1200/sq metre, up to £1600/sq metre. Higher code levels therefore have an impact on the amount of development that is financially viable. A balance must be struck between the levels of energy efficiency offered and ensuring the cost of providing the homes with these measures is not prohibitive to developers.
- 2.07 A key driver for private housing development standards will be new building regulations, known as Part L, which will govern conservation of fuel and power. A Welsh government consultation on the new standards ended during October 2012. There has been some resistance from developers during the consultation; given the additional cost per unit of accommodation should higher standards be implemented.
- 2.08 An example of a recent new build would be the Trueddyn development, consisting of both private and social housing. Efforts to reduce resident costs through energy efficiency measures were part of the scheme. The properties were built to Code 4, which is above the current minimum standard of Code 3 for social rented properties. However, this increased the price per unit and was only feasible due to 58% of the build cost being funded through Social Housing Grant (SHG).
- 2.09 The total build cost of the social housing properties consisting of 18 units, was £2.2M, with £1.4M being provided through the Social Housing Grant programme. Further new build of social stock to this standard will be particularly problematic going forward, as the programme to support it is forecast to decline 30% year on year.
- 2.10 Energy Efficiency and the Community Energy Saving Programme**
- 2.11 Energy Efficiency continues to dominate both the Westminster and Welsh government's agenda. In terms of accessing additional resources, energy efficiency continues to be one of the few growth areas. It is therefore vital that Flintshire continues to be at the forefront of this agenda in the region, if it is to secure the high levels of external funding enjoyed over the last 2 years, which totalled £1.25M
- 2.12 The CESP has now closed, as all work was required to be completed on site by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2012. At the point of preparing this report CESP had delivered:-

Number of Homes	Type of Measure
136	External Wall Insulation
365	Heating Replacements/Fuel Switching
25	Solar Thermal Installation
152	Solar Photo Voltaics
500	Energy Advice

- 2.13 CESP has delivered approximately 439 measures in over 200 Council homes in the last 2 years. These measures will create bill savings of over £1.8M for our tenants during their lifetime. In private homes 132 measures have been installed this year alone, creating lifetime savings of over £800K for householders.
- 2.14 One of Flintshire's strengths is the level of data it now holds about the energy efficiency of the County's housing stock. However, that volume of data now warrants a specialist IT solution to ensure that it can be drilled down by area and types of measures required, with links to fuel poverty and deprivation.
- 2.15 The new system will ensure that bids going forward are robust and help maximise the Council's degree of success in obtaining external funding. The system, known as UNO, will be implemented from April 2013 and will support this. The system will allow all the Council house EPC data to be uploaded and ensure optimum targeting of bids and measures. It also has the capability to store Energy Performance Certificate assessments, which the service hopes to start offering on a chargeable basis during 2013/14 as a revenue raiser.
- 2.16 Welsh government energy efficiency programmes**  
Whilst ECO and Green Deal will form an important part of any Sustainability Strategy, we should not lose sight of the existing Welsh government programmes. Therefore, the Arbed and Nest schemes will need to be reflected.
- 2.17 Currently Mostyn and Oakenholt are the subject of further bids for Arbed funding. Based on the Arbed scoring criteria, these areas offered us the opportunity to present the strongest bids for the County. The score for Mostyn was highest and is therefore our preferred bid. The higher score for Mostyn is in reflection of the fact that it's an off-gas area. Oakenholt scored second highest due to the level of solid walled properties present.
- 2.18 Nest is the Welsh government's fuel poverty scheme. It aims to help reduce the number of households in fuel poverty and make Welsh homes warmer and more fuel efficient places to live. The Nest scheme has an active presence in Flintshire and key to the success of the strategy will be to align this programme with Arbed, ECO and Green Deal to provide the best offer to the County's residents.

## **2.19 Reducing reliance on oil for heating**

As part of the Council's commitment to reducing fuel poverty, opportunities to reduce tenant's reliance on oil to heat their homes are being robustly pursued. Successful bids for funding have resulted in mains gas being provided to Sealand Manor, Isabella Court and Coppa View.

2.20 The Council's housing asset management strategy has been aligned to allow for the installation of new gas central heating systems in Council homes and energy efficiency top up loans have been provided to address the small numbers of private householders who wished to participate. Discussions are currently ongoing with Wales and West utilities for another 7 possible sites for the forthcoming year.

2.21 Where gas cannot be made available 21 ground source heat pumps and 2 air source heat pumps have been fitted. A further 30 air source heat pumps are also out to tender at the moment, with view to their installation in this financial year.

2.22 The Arbed Scheme continues to be delivered by Welsh government and their delivery partner Wilmot Dixon in Holywell Central. This Scheme will be providing external wall insulation and new central heating systems within that Lower Super Output Area (LSOA).

## **2.23 ECO and the Green Deal**

All the existing UK wide energy programmes came to an end on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2012, which include CERT and CESP. These have been replaced by the new Energy Company Obligation (ECO) from January 2013. ECO is effectively a levy placed on Utility Companies to provide funding for energy efficiency measures, focusing on those measures for hard to treat properties, such as external wall insulation and the replacement of G rated boilers with A rated boilers.

2.24 The ECO market will be highly competitive, as utility companies seek to discharge their obligations around carbon savings. The greater the carbon saving a measure can provide, the more attractive it will be to utility companies who are getting more for their money. Flintshire's Housing Renewal Service is well positioned to deliver on ECO schemes, having managed similar work in both the public and private sector through the former CESP.

2.25 New UK initiatives to support energy efficiency retrofit will include the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) and the Green Deal. ECO is very similar to the former CESP, in that it is an obligation placed upon utility companies to fund energy efficiency measures in homes. However, ECO will not be restricted by geographical boundaries as was CESP.

2.26 The Green Deal is the Coalition Government's flagship energy efficiency programme, aiming to provide finance in the form of Green Deal loans for energy efficiency measures.



- 2.27 All Green Deal loans are subject to the golden rule, which states that the amount of money borrowed must be offset by the reduced cost of the householder's energy bill. The loan is collected via an additional standing charge attached to the electricity meter for a maximum period of 25 years. However, whilst the standing charges on the meter will be higher, overall energy usage will be lower, giving a lower energy bill overall. As the loan is attached to the electricity meter, it is tied to the property and not the individual and will be transferred to the new occupier where there is a change of tenant or owner.
- 2.28 Certain measures, such as external wall insulation are costly and will often not meet the requirements of the golden rule. In such cases the utility companies will be expected to provide ECO funding to reduce the level of the Green Deal loan, thereby meeting the golden rule.
- 2.29 Green Deal finance is tenure blind and can be used in social housing, private housing, including privately rented housing (where the right to refuse a reasonable request is to be restricted) along with community buildings and commercial premises.
- 2.30 Given that social tenants can access the Green Deal, the Council will need to consider whether it will give permission for its tenants to enter into Green Deals for measures it cannot provide in the short to medium term e.g. external wall insulation.
- 2.31 The Council could also consider whether it is appropriate to include Green Deal loans as part of its investment strategy in Void properties. This would again allow for more external wall insulation in solid walled properties, or accelerate the boiler replacement programme to assist in meeting the Welsh Housing Quality Standard. As stated previously the WHQS requires that all properties must meet an energy rating of SAP 65. This can be difficult to achieve in solid wall properties.
- 2.32 If this option were to be pursued, tenants would be contributing towards the cost of improvements to their homes. However, they would not be negatively impacted by this, as their overall energy bill would be lower than if the measures had not been installed.
- 2.33 The Department of Energy and Climate Change has issued guidance to local authorities, setting out how they can be involved with the Green Deal (a copy is annexed to this report). In brief local authorities can take 3 roles, as a provider, a partner or a promoter.
- 2.34 The promoter model is where the local authority will advertise the availability of Green Deal loans within its area generally. This will simply be an awareness raising exercise and the Council will not be linked to any provider.
- 2.35 In the partner role the Council would link with an approved Green Deal provider. This provider, from the private sector would effectively be

promoted by the Council in return for social gain. An example of this would be if the Council negotiated with that provider to offer targeted help at reduced cost for its own stock or for vulnerable households in the area.

- 2.36 Finally there is the provider model, where the local authority would invest some of its own capital in the provision of loans and deliver the scheme through a procured delivery partner. This offers the Council the greatest control over the operation of the scheme in its area and there is the potential that a profit could be made from the interest applied to the loans, which is likely to be set initially at 5.5%.
- 2.37 Welsh government has funded consultancy support to examine the various options open to local authorities in a regional context. Marksman Consulting have been working on a joint business case with Flintshire and Wrexham under the provider model. As previously stated, the provider model is one in which Council's would invest some of their own capital in the provision of recyclable Green Deal Loans to householders.
- 2.38 The business case is now almost complete and shows that for the programme to be self financing it would need to complete measures in 8,000 homes over a 3 year programme across the 6 North Wales counties. Whilst this number may appear high, it is only 5% of the entire accessible market, which are those homes still requiring energy efficiency measures.
- 2.39 Delivering Housing Services in a sustainable way**  
Management of water and waste will also need consideration in the strategy. A great deal of work has already taken place in the recycling of materials and this presents an opportunity to set targets around recycling a higher proportion of the waste material generated.

Water is a significant issue, not simply in terms of the way in which we operate our business but also for our tenants. This will also need to be included within the strategy but a more detailed consideration of the collection of water charges is included within this report as requested by Members.

### **3.00 CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **3.01 Background – The Collection of Water Charges**

3.02 Flintshire County Council is party to a contract with Welsh Water and Dee Valley Water which collects water charges along with the rent for council dwellings. The Council collects the charges which are paid to the water companies in one lump sum, and the Council receives commission.

3.03 The contract is able to be terminated by either party by giving 12 months notice.

### **3.04 Income**

- 3.05 In the last financial year, the council paid Welsh Water £2,542,231 and Dee Valley Water £437,888
- 3.06 The Council then collected the water charges for each tenanted property along with the rent for the property. The water charges are paid with the rent, in the same way as service charges.
- 3.07 In 2011/12 the council earned commission from the contract of £481,548

### **3.08 Advantages to the Council**

- 3.09 The contract provides a substantial income stream which is ring fenced to the Housing Revenue Account and is re-invested to improve homes and services.
- 3.10 The transactional costs of operating the scheme are low as the charges are collected along with the rent for the dwelling. In some cases, where tenants are in receipt of full Housing Benefit and have accrued arrears they may meet the criteria for third party deductions, This is where the Department for Work and Pensions will take the weekly amount, and an amount for arrears directly from a customers benefit and pay it to the rent account.
- 3.11 The Council is able to identify households who are struggling and reduce debt through the Welsh Water Assist Scheme [further details annexed to this report]
- 3.12 As the council has been operating this scheme for many years, tenants who are in receipt of full Housing Benefit are used to having to make payments to the council for their water. This means that customers are already used to having to make payments towards their rent and so when universal credit is introduced, the change will not be as great, than for tenants of other social landlords whose rent is paid solely by benefit and who are not in the habit of having to make any payments to their landlord at all.

### **3.13 Disadvantages to the Council**

- The council carries arrears of water rates as “rent arrears” and therefore the amount of arrears is higher than they would have been if the council did not collect the water charges.
- 3.14 The amount is charged and collected to the tenant’s rent account; therefore it is not possible to calculate the exact percentage of arrears which are solely due to water charges.
- 3.15 It is estimated that the amount of water arrears is approximately 10% of current debt and therefore the contract remains of considerable benefit to the council.

3.16 The only way to produce exact data on the amount of arrears attributable to water would be to charge water separately on a sub account. This would involve additional cost to the council to invest in the IT necessary to do this, but is a solution which is currently being investigated.

### **3.17 Advantages to Customers**

3.18 Tenants of the Council are able to pay their water charges along with their rent using the range of payment methods offered by the Council.

3.19 Water rates are based on the rateable value of the home and not on the amount of water used, so for many households are less expensive than water meters. As the amount charged is fixed for the year and is not linked to consumption, it can make budgeting easier for customers.

3.20 Customers can however apply to have a water meter. Water meters can be more economical for some households as the water charges are based on the rateable value of a dwelling. Consumer Advice Organisations say that the “Rule of Thumb is that if there are more bedrooms in the property than people, then it may be worthwhile to consider a water meter”

3.21 Permission to have a water meter installed is not automatically granted by the Council. Property type would be a key consideration when determining whether or not permission should be granted to have a water meter installed. A fully occupied family house, for example, would be unlikely to benefit from a water meter and would probably increase the household’s costs.

3.22 Not all properties are able to have a water meter. Some flats which have shared pipework may not be able to be fitted with a meter. The individual water company can legally refuse to fit a meter in such circumstances where they deem it to be “impractical”.

3.23 Customers who want to find out whether they are better off having a meter can obtain a general comparison from the Consumer Council for Water. For a more accurate and specific comparison, they can contact the water company directly.

3.24 The Council has agreed as part of its contractual agreement that no customer would have possession proceedings brought against them for water charges alone. Conversely if a customer was charged by the water company directly and accrued arrears, the water companies have powers to apply for warrants for seizure of goods through the County Courts.

### **3.25 Summary**

3.26 The contract to provide the collection of water charges provides a substantial income to the Authority’s Housing Department.

- 3.27 Extra help is made available to some low income households who are struggling to make their water payments, at no extra cost to the Council.
- 3.28 The water rates system as opposed to metering is financially beneficial to the majority of Flintshire County Council tenants, as the majority of dwellings are not under-occupied.
- 3.29 Where households do not benefit from the traditional water rates system, they can apply for permission to have a water meter fitted.

#### **4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.01 That Members support the development of a Sustainability Strategy for Housing and note the success of energy efficiency schemes to date.
- 4.02 That Members note changes to energy efficiency funding, with the ending of the Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP) and the introduction of the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) and the Green Deal.
- 4.03 That Members support the collection of water charges based upon the rationale presented.

#### **5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.01 The collection of water charges raised an income of £481,548. This level of income can be expected going forward should Members support the continuation of this service.

#### **6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

- 6.01 The collection of water charges allows the housing service to identify tenants who may be struggling to pay their water bill and signpost them to appropriate support agencies, such as the Welsh Water Assist Scheme.

#### **7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

- 7.01 A sustainability strategy will ensure that, subject to budget, Council and private sector homes are as energy efficient as possible. It will also ensure that Council's housing service operates its business in a sustainable and cost effective way.

#### **8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 8.01 The Housing Services supports some of the most vulnerable groups in the County and is the subject of regular Equality Impact Assessments.

Any strategy developed would be the subject of an EIA to ensure that no protected groups are disadvantaged.

**9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.01 None arising out of this report.

**10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

10.01 None required as a result of this report.

**11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

11.01 None required as a result of this report.

**12.00 APPENDICES**

12.01 Local Authorities and the Green Deal – Department of Energy and Climate Change

12.02 Welsh Water – Water Assist Scheme

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985  
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

**Contact Officer: Gavin Griffith/Helen Grant**

**Telephone: 01352 703428/ 01352 701141**

**Email: [Gavin\\_Griffith@flintshire.gov.uk](mailto:Gavin_Griffith@flintshire.gov.uk)  
[Helen\\_Grant@flintshire.gov.uk](mailto:Helen_Grant@flintshire.gov.uk)**

# Local Authorities and the Green Deal

Information note

November 2011

## Local Authorities and the Green Deal

**This document sets out information that local authorities may wish to consider by way of preparation for the introduction of the Green Deal.**

### What is the Green Deal?

The Green Deal is a new finance framework that will provide householders and businesses with the upfront capital to carry out energy efficiency improvements to their properties and repay through their energy bill. This will be achieved by attaching a Green Deal charge to the electricity meter at the property concerned with the protection of the Green Deal "Golden Rule", that is, any charge attached must be less than the expected savings from the retrofit.

The Green Deal can be provided by commercial companies, social enterprises and local authorities, acting alone or in partnership. Further details on proposals for the Green Deal are set out in DECC's consultation document at

[http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/consultations/green\\_deal/green\\_deal.aspx](http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/consultations/green_deal/green_deal.aspx)

### What benefits will the Green Deal offer to local authorities and their communities?

The Green Deal will provide an opportunity to significantly improve the energy efficiency of local homes and businesses. In the process, with millions of British properties requiring insulation, the Green Deal offers an opportunity for local authorities to help drive economic growth, unlocking billions of pounds worth of investment and supporting thousands of jobs. Insulation installers, manufacturers and others in the supply chain, including many small businesses, all stand to potentially benefit.

Potential benefits to local authorities are likely to be:

- new sources of revenue to deliver energy efficiency retrofits;
- help to reduce fuel bills for local residents and businesses;
- opportunities for local economic and physical regeneration;
- support for wider local strategic priorities (better health outcomes, reduced fuel poverty);
- support for the maintenance and generation of local jobs and skills.



## How can local authorities get involved?

Local authorities have an important role to play in helping their residents and businesses to realise the benefits of the Green Deal. Every householder and business in the country has a local council they can refer to. Local authorities can also work with local community leaders to generate interest and take-up of the Green Deal, taking opportunities to engage local people and bring communities together to improve cost effectiveness.

Local authorities are therefore well placed to champion the Green Deal locally, stimulating activity to meet specific local needs and supporting wider strategic priorities. In particular local authorities:

- are able to link wider strategic priorities and funding streams e.g. through health, education and regeneration agendas;
- are able to draw on established local networks, partnerships, services and delivery partners;
- can draw on existing links with business and social enterprises and provide gateways through local advice agencies and services;
- are trusted to act in the best interests of their local residents.

To deliver the Green Deal locally there are broadly three approaches local authorities might choose to adopt:

- Provide – the Green Deal directly to their local residents and businesses, co-ordinating finance and delivery;
- Partner - work in partnership with commercial Green Deal providers and community partners to deliver and facilitate delivery; or
- Promote – by acting as advocates for the Green Deal locally.

These are covered in more detail in the appendix below.

## What might local authorities do now to prepare for the Green Deal?

The consultation document highlighted above sets out DECC's proposals for the Green Deal and the future Energy Company Obligation. However, local authorities have asked what they can do between now and the Green Deal going live to begin to plan how to help their residents and businesses benefit from the Green Deal.

There are a number of issues local authorities will need to consider in deciding what role/s they might play in delivering the Green Deal. Early planning will provide an advantage when it comes to attracting investment from Green Deal providers (it is anticipated that commercial providers will be seeking partners during 2012) and energy companies. The following section sets out some issues local authorities might wish to consider to prepare for the Green Deal:

### **Local strategic planning/synergies**

- How can Green Deal help deliver and support your local strategic objectives?
- Can it be coupled with other environmental objectives in your area?
- What are the opportunities to link with other energy efficiency, fuel poverty or regeneration schemes e.g. different schemes are available in Scotland and Wales?
- Do you have planned maintenance, refurbishment or regeneration works in the coming year/s that might provide synergies with the delivery of the Green Deal?
- Are there opportunities to roll out Green Deal on a community wide, street by street basis? There are many examples under the Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP) where this has proved cost effective.
- Are there opportunities to utilise other national programmes e.g. the Feed in Tariff and the Renewable Heat Incentive?
- Are your key local stakeholders and businesses aware of the opportunities the Green Deal might provide?
- Are local councillors (and where appropriate the Local Enterprise Partnership) aware of the opportunities?
- Who in the authority needs to know about the Green Deal e.g. what are the financial and legal implications, what planning issues might there be?
- Are there incentives (financial or non-financial) that the authority might offer to help drive demand for the Green Deal?
- Who in your area might benefit the most from improvements in energy efficiency?

### **Housing stock data**

- Do you have a good understanding of the condition of local housing stock and the households for whom Green Deal packages might be most appropriate, including on occupancy and tenures?
- Do you have a local strategy to stimulate interest in and promote the take up of energy efficiency measures?

### **Potential partners & local supply chains**

- Do you have existing partnerships that you can draw on to deliver the Green Deal e.g. relationships developed under CERT & CESP?
- Who are the key local community organisations that you might partner with e.g. to help engage households?
- The major energy suppliers will deliver the future energy company obligation (which replaces CERT & CESP) which will support many Green Deals, is it worth discussing their plans and local opportunities for these with them at an early stage?
- Is there a local supply chain with the necessary skills to deliver the Green Deal – what are the opportunities to create local jobs?
- What procurement requirements might be necessary to deliver the Green Deal locally e.g. the scale of work might dictate specific requirements?
- What can you offer commercial Green Deal partners, what are the benefits of them working with you e.g. do you have potential 'ready to go' projects?
- Are there opportunities to work with other councils, social housing providers and/or community groups?

### **Finance**

- What are the benefits to you of financing a Green Deal scheme in your area?
- What are the different financing options available?
- Depending on how you might want to deliver the Green Deal what are the financial/resource implications?
- Are there State Aid issues which might need to be considered?

## Next steps

Following the consultation exercise DECC will publish final proposals for both Green Deal and the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) which will be reflected in secondary legislation in 2012.

To support local authorities DECC and DCLG are developing guidance on local carbon reduction and the Green Deal, planned for spring 2012. This guidance will build on the experience from the Local Carbon Framework pilots and support future requirements under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 (HECA) in England; HECA has been repealed in Scotland and Wales.

In England, councils are also encouraged to sign up to the forthcoming new Nottingham Declaration, which will enable them to express their ambition for the Green Deal.

In the meantime, both CERT and CESP remain available up to December 2012, significant opportunities still exist under both programmes. CERT & CESP will be replaced by the new ECO which will operate alongside and complement the Green Deal, particularly to support vulnerable, low income households and hard to treat properties (e.g. those with solid walls).

## For further information:

For further information on local authorities' involvement in the Green Deal please contact: [Steve.ives@decc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Steve.ives@decc.gsi.gov.uk) or [Abigail.Burridge@local.gov.uk](mailto:Abigail.Burridge@local.gov.uk) or for Wales [craig.mitchell@WLGA.GOV.UK](mailto:craig.mitchell@WLGA.GOV.UK)

## Appendix

### POTENTIAL LOCAL AUTHORITY MODELS FOR DELIVERING THE GREEN DEAL

#### 1 Local Authority as a Green Deal Provider

Local authorities might raise finance themselves (sources might include the Public Works Loan Board or commercial sources) either individually or in a consortia to deliver the Green Deal locally. Benefits of such a model could include:

- control over strategic planning and local delivery to address specific local priorities;
- ability to reinvest revenue streams into other local projects;
- direct delivery through local supply chains, creation of local training and employment opportunities.

For example Birmingham City Council (BCC) is exploring a model consistent with this approach and is currently in the process of procuring a Delivery Partner to manage the delivery of the Green Deal, including marketing the programme, engaging customers and selling measures, surveying, assessing, refurbishing and maintaining properties, and managing supply chain growth and innovation.

It is anticipated that BCC will provide up to £75m of finance for an initial Pathfinder Programme (expected to last approximately 3 years) with significant potential further investment through the future energy company obligation.

BCC's 'contract notice' names 22 local authorities, 9 registered social landlords and 3 other public authorities who have expressed an interest in using the services of the Delivery Partner once appointed. Together this has a potential contract value of £1.5bn. The procurement documents (contract notice, pre-qualification questionnaire and descriptive document are available from [energysavers@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:energysavers@birmingham.gov.uk)

#### 2 Local authority as a Green Deal partner

Local authorities might look to form partnerships with one or several commercial Green Deal providers to deliver to their local residents and businesses. This approach might be similar to the relationships many councils already have with energy companies to deliver CERT and CESP schemes.

Benefits of such an approach include:

- retaining an influence over how Green Deal is delivered to local residents and businesses;

- the ability to draw in significant new sources of finance to the local area;
- providing reassurance to local residents and businesses on delivery of Green Deal to maximise take up.

This may prove to be a favoured route for the vast majority of local authorities to deliver the Green Deal. For example Greater Manchester (GM) is already running a social housing scheme in conjunction with existing CERT and CESP offers that is seeking to test elements of the Green Deal process and how this might work for local residents.

This includes a free loft and cavity insulation offer for households in all tenures which will help to engage households, coupled with a consistent approach to resident engagement as set out in the GM behavioural change report 'The Missing Quarter'. Strong networks between GM local authorities, social housing providers, contractors, SME's and colleges are also being developed to build a skilled, competent supply chain, ahead of the introduction of the Green Deal.

### **3 Local Authority as an advocate for the Green Deal**

A local authority may facilitate and/or support commercial Green Deal provision its area, for example perhaps acting as a conduit for local commercial activity and/or providing leads on a commission basis.

Benefits from this approach might include retaining an overview of how Green Deal is being delivered and contributing to local priorities. However, the ability to influence local employment opportunities and links with other strategic objectives may be more limited.

#### **General**

These models are not mutually exclusive. Councils might adopt one, all, or part of these approaches to deliver the Green Deal. Other innovative models for delivery may also be developed. DECC is aware of many councils across the country who are already starting to scope the Green Deal, with examples of work with adjacent authorities (e.g. across whole counties) and local delivery partners including Local Enterprise Partnerships and social enterprises.

You may wish to note that the Energy Saving Trust plans to publish a report shortly that considers several models of local authority financing of energy efficiency programmes based on existing best practice.

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Department of Energy & Climate Change  
3 Whitehall Place  
London SW1A 2AW  
[www.decc.gov.uk](http://www.decc.gov.uk)

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# Welsh Water Assist



Dŵr Cymru  
Welsh Water



**Welsh Water Assist application for 2012 - 2013**  
(Household Customers only)  
Do you, or anyone in your household, receive any of the BENEFIT(S)/TAX CREDIT(S) listed below?

YES - Please complete SECTION 1 and 2

- Income Support
- Income related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Pension Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit (except families in receipt of the family element only)
- Council Tax Benefit (except for single person No. of the person who receives these benefit(s)/tax credit(s))

**NO - you are NOT ELIGIBLE**

**GUIDANCE NOTES**  
To qualify for Welsh Water Assist, someone in your household must be receiving at least one of the benefit(s)/tax credit(s) listed. You must include with this application a photocopy of your most current award notice for benefit(s)/tax credit(s) dated within last 12 months.

To avoid any delays the processing of your application please send ALL pages of your award notice. As copy certificates will be retained for our files we recommend that any bank details shown are scribbled out before they are sent to us.

Please give the name and National Insurance No. of the person who receives these benefit(s)/tax credit(s)

Insurance No. \_\_\_\_\_

The person named on the bill MUST complete this section. Notes carefully before completing this form.

CUSTOMER REFERENCE NUMBER: 8

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile number: \_\_\_\_\_

Please confirm the date you moved into this property, if after 1 April 2012: \_\_\_\_\_

If your property has a water meter please provide the following information (if safe to do so):  
 Meter Reading: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please continue to SECTION 3**

# Welsh Water Assist

If yours is a low income household and you have a large family, or a family member with a medical condition that requires the use of a significant amount of extra water, you may qualify for reduced charges through Welsh Water Assist.

**To be considered you MUST:**

Receive a qualifying benefit/tax credit

**AND**

Have a medical condition that requires the use of a **SIGNIFICANT** amount of extra water

**OR**

Receive a qualifying benefit/tax credit

**AND**

Have 3 or more children under the age of 19, living at your house who you claim Child Benefit for.

***Please note:** you **do not** qualify for Welsh Water Assist if you water your garden with a non-handheld appliance such as a sprinkler or domestic irrigation system, or if you have a swimming pool or pond with a capacity of over 10,000 litres.*

The Welsh Water Assist charges are £125.00 for water and £125.00 for sewerage for the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013.

If your property is supplied by a water meter and the charge calculated from actual usage shown on the meter, using the standard measured tariff, is less than the Welsh Water Assist tariff, your bill will be based on the actual reading. Otherwise the bill will be capped at the Welsh Water Assist level.

# How to apply

1. Fully complete the attached application form. Please read the guidance notes to help you do this.
2. Return the completed form to us with all the necessary supporting evidence.  
**We will accept photocopies**
3. We will give you a decision within 10 working days:
  - ▶ If your application is unsuccessful we will tell you why.
  - ▶ If your application is successful, the reduced charges will apply from the start of this year's bill, (or date of occupancy if you moved in after 1 April 2012).

**Any arrears will be included in the payment plan.**

## **Annual Review/Audit**

Every year between April and July we complete an annual review/audit of customers currently on Welsh Water Assist. We will contact you during this review period to confirm that you continue to qualify.

This leaflet is available in other formats, including audio cassette/CD and large print. For more information or help with this form, please contact us on **0800 052 0145 Monday - Friday 8am - 8pm, Saturday 8.30am - 1.30pm.**

# Important information about Here to Help

At Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water we are committed to providing the highest standard of service to all our customers. We understand that not everyone's situation or needs are the same and for this reason we have our free service 'Here to Help'.

## Are you?

- ▶ disabled
- ▶ older
- ▶ ill

## or do you have

- ▶ learning difficulties

If you have a medical condition that requires a constant supply of water we will provide you with an alternative supply during emergency interruptions.

In order to benefit from this service you must be registered on our Additional Services register.

Access to the information you give us to register for this scheme will be restricted to our employees or agents. They need this information to deliver an alternative supply to you. **All information received is treated confidentially.**

If you are applying for Welsh Water Assist because someone in your household has a medical condition, YOU WILL BE PLACED on our Additional Services register automatically. If you DO NOT wish to be please tick the box on **Section 3** of the application form.



# Welsh Water Assist application for 2012 - 2013 (Household Customers only)

Do you, or anyone in your household, receive any of the **BENEFIT(S)/TAX CREDIT(S)** listed below?

**YES - Please complete SECTION 1 and 2**      **NO - you are NOT ELIGIBLE**

**SECTION 1 – Which of the benefit(s)/tax credit(s) are received by someone in your household (please tick ALL that apply).**

- Income Support
- Income related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Pension Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit (*except families in receipt of the family element only*)
- Council Tax Benefit (*except for single person discount or disabled relief*)

### GUIDANCE NOTES

To qualify for Welsh Water Assist, someone in your household must be receiving at least one of the benefit(s)/tax credit(s) listed. You must include with this application a photocopy of your most current 'award notice' for benefit(s)/tax credit(s) i.e. dated within last 12 months.  
**To avoid any delay in the processing of your application please send ALL pages of your 'award notice'.**  
As copy certificates will be retained for our files we recommend that any bank details shown are blanked out before they are sent to us.

Please give the name and National Insurance No. of the person who receives these benefit(s)/tax credit(s)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
National Insurance No: \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION 2 – The person named on the bill MUST complete this section.**  
*Please read the notes carefully before completing this form.*

**CUSTOMER REFERENCE NUMBER: 8**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Mobile number: \_\_\_\_\_

Please confirm the date you moved into this property, if after 1 April 2012: \_\_\_\_\_  
If your property has a water meter please provide the following information (if safe to do so):  
Meter Reading: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### CHECKLIST

- Tick the boxes as appropriate.**
- I've completed all the sections of the form that apply to me.
  - I've completed SECTION 1 and 2 and enclosed a photocopy of the most recent 'award notice' for the benefit(s)/tax credit(s) and removed any reference to any bank details.
  - If I've completed SECTIONS 3 and 4, it has been stamped, signed and dated by my Doctor or Practice Nurse.
  - If I've completed SECTION 5, I've enclosed a photocopy of the most recent 'Child Benefit Award Notice' for each child named and removed any reference to any bank details.
  - I have completed SECTION 6 with my signature and date.

**FAILURE TO COMPLETE THE APPLICATION FORM AND PROVIDE THE NECESSARY SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION WILL RESULT IN YOUR APPLICATION BEING REFUSED AND RETURNED TO YOU.**

### How did you find out about Welsh Water Assist?

- Welsh Water staff
- Registered Social Landlord staff
- Word of mouth
- Welsh Water website
- Citizen's Advice Bureau
- Consumer Council for Water
- Advert on bill
- Other (please specify below)

### SECTION 6 – You MUST complete this section.

**DECLARATION – Please read carefully before signing.**

I declare that the information I have given is correct to the best of my knowledge and I understand that any false information may disqualify my application for Welsh Water Assist.

I will notify Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water immediately if there are any changes to the circumstances that affect my application for Welsh Water Assist e.g. change of address, no longer on benefits.

I authorise the authority that administers my benefit(s)/tax credit(s) to give information to Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, should it be necessary, in order for the information I have provided to be verified.

If I have made an application for Welsh Water Assist on the basis of a medical condition, I authorise the medical person to give information about the condition and its impact on water use to Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, should it be necessary, in order for the information I have provided to be verified.

I do not water my garden other than by hand-held means, or have a swimming pool or pond of over 10,000 litres capacity. I do not receive any contributions towards the cost of water from the Health Authority.

**WARNING If you deliberately give us misleading information you are committing a criminal offence and could be prosecuted.**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return your application form along with the necessary documentation to:

**Freepost Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water**

There is no need to put a stamp or any further address details when responding.

Do you, or anyone in your household, have any of the **MEDICAL CONDITIONS** listed below?

**YES - Please complete SECTION 3 and 4**

**NO - Please continue to SECTION 5**

**SECTION 3** – You **MUST** complete this section if you are applying because of a medical condition. Please name the person who lives at this address with a medical condition that requires the use of a significant amount of extra water: \_\_\_\_\_

Which of these medical conditions do they have?  
(Please tick all that apply)

- Desquamation (*flaky skin disease*)
- Weeping skin (*eczema, psoriasis, varicose ulceration*)
- Incontinence
- Abdominal stoma
- Crohn's disease
- Ulcerative colitis
- Renal failure requiring home dialysis  
*(except where the health authority contributes to the cost of the dialysis)*
- Another medical condition which requires the use of a significant amount of extra water.

Please tell us the name of this condition and why you need to use a significant amount of extra water: \_\_\_\_\_

If you **DO NOT** wish to be placed on our Additional Services register please tick the box.

**GUIDANCE NOTES**

You **MUST** let us know why the medical condition means that you or someone in your household uses a lot of extra water.

Please confirm the medical condition(s) that the person has by ticking all relevant boxes.

If you receive dialysis at hospital you will not be eligible for Welsh Water Assist.

Please provide details of the doctor or consultant who can confirm that you have this condition, if necessary, we may contact them directly to clarify the details you have given.

**SECTION 4** – Your doctor **MUST** complete this section to confirm your medical condition.

Your doctor, nurse or suitably qualified medical person must provide the **STAMPED** hospital/surgery address in the box provided together with a signature and date to confirm your illness ticked above.

Doctor/Nurse  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Does the person who receives the benefit(s)/tax credit(s) also receive Child Benefit for **THREE** or **MORE CHILDREN** under 19 living in your household?

**YES - Please complete SECTION 5**

**NO - please complete SECTION 6**

**SECTION 5** – You **MUST** complete this section if you are applying because you have a large family.

I confirm that the person who receives benefit(s)/tax credit(s) (named in **SECTION 1**) is responsible for, and claims Child Benefit for, three or more children under the age of 19, who have not left full time education and who live at the address on the water bill. (Please tick the box)

Please give the full names and dates of birth of these children:

**NAME** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE OF BIRTH** \_\_\_\_\_

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**GUIDANCE NOTES**

You **MUST** provide the full name and date of birth for each child aged under 19.

You should tick the box if the person in receipt of benefit(s)/tax credit(s) is responsible for and claims Child Benefit for three or more children who are under the age of 19, who have not left full time education and who live at the address on the water bill.

You **MUST** include with this application a photocopy of the most recent 'Child Benefit Award Notice'. The 'award notice' **MUST** be less than one year old.

If you cannot find your 'award notice', please contact the Child Benefit Office.

Please continue to **SECTION 5**

Please continue to **SECTION 6**

## FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**REPORT TO:** HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**DATE:** WEDNESDAY, 23 JANUARY 2013

**REPORT BY:** DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

**SUBJECT:** PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL

### **1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.01 To provide an update to Members on delivery of the Housing Renewal Service and to seek support for continued delivery of the Renewal Area programme.
- 1.02 To bring forward proposals and seek Member support to alter the way in which disabled adaptations are provided in Council stock.

### **2.00 BACKGROUND**

- 2.01 The Housing Renewal Service has continued to deliver its statutory responsibilities in respect of Disabled Facilities Grants and its other core functional areas. These include, Home Repair and Renovation Loans, Energy Efficiency Retrofit (which will be the subject of a separate Scrutiny Report) and the reoccupation of long term Empty Homes.
- 2.02 **Loans for Repairs and Improvements**
- 2.03 Members approved a new loans based Private Sector Renewal and Improvement Policy in 2010, which aimed to ensure the sustainability of the Service in the long term. This is in line with current Welsh government thinking and a manifesto commitment to support affordable loans for homeowners.
- 2.04 The transition from Grant's to Loans in 2010 has resulted in a loan register to date of £768K (monies to be repaid to Flintshire Council). The aim of the arrangement is to have recyclable funding to support the provision of further home loans in future years and to safeguard this facility for some of the most vulnerable households in the County.
- 2.05 Demand for this assistance remains high, with 26 loans completed in Quarter 2 and a similar number forecast to be completed in Quarter 3. All capital monies for loans in 2012/13 have now been committed.
- 2.06 10 valid applications submitted after the new Policy was supported by

Cabinet in July 2012, but before the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2012 implementation date remain eligible under the old interest free system. These need to be progressed, but due to full commitment of the current years budget will now be completed early in the 2013/14 financial year.

2.07 During the transition from interest free to interest bearing and equity loans, a small budget of £50K has been made available to Street UK (the Council's loans administrator). The rationale for this is that it allows the Service to continue providing help and support during this period on a recyclable basis. Therefore, the cash flow generated by repayments should allow more people to be assisted during Quarter 4, despite no new capital monies being available.

## **2.08 Empty Homes activity and the Houses into Homes Scheme**

2.09 Activity in this area continues to enjoy a high profile by Welsh government and a national target of 5000 homes returned to occupation during this term of government has been set. To assist in this endeavour, a £10M national revolving loans fund has been established and is being managed through 6 Regional Groups.

2.10 As Members may be aware, Flintshire Housing Renewal was asked to lead for the North Wales Region and to date has claimed for the Region £1,570,597 out of a total of £2,332,532. Flintshire's current claimed share of this resource is £526K, which is the highest claim across the region to date. This will provide loans for 22 units of accommodation across the County. Again, detailed information has proved vital in securing these resources.

2.11 The resources can only be claimed once a valid application is in place and the North Wales Region has been the most successful in making claims. Welsh government have stated that on this basis it is likely they will be able to release further resources to the Region before the end of the financial year from an under spending region. Flintshire alone now has an application waiting list totalling £360K, so any further resources would be welcomed.

2.12 Since the last update provided to Members the empty property database (built in-house) has now been established and is in use. It has given the Service the ability to easily contact the owners of all empty properties and begin work with them. Members may recall that the data previously held on empties indicated a figure in excess of 1100 vacant homes. However, through the data cleanse and subsequent discussion with property owners, the true figure is 406 as of the date this report was written. This will have a significant positive impact on the empty homes national performance indicator when it is reported for 12/13.

2.13 This enhanced data will allow the Council to more effectively target its resources going forward. It will also mean that capital through the



Houses into Homes Scheme and the Council's own resources (should there be sufficient budget) can be aligned with energy efficiency resources for maximum impact and the provision of more affordable housing in the County. This will become increasingly vital as we aim to support those individuals seeking homes who are impacted by Welfare benefit changes.

2.15 However, Housing Renewal has historically made £200K available annually through the capital programme to support empty homes. The draft budget for 2013/14 shows a £200K reduction for the service and therefore the Houses into Homes scheme is even more vital as without it supporting the reoccupation of empty homes would be a real challenge. This is a particular issue given other Service pressures such as the need to provide mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's).

## **2.16 Neighbourhood Renewal Area**

2.17 Since the last Service update, Housing Renewal have also been working to complete the first Phase of the Group Repair programme in Connah's Quay, Shotton and Queensferry.

2.18 Group Repair is the external refurbishment of a street of properties, typically a terrace and involves the repair or replacement of roofing, windows, doors, boundary walls etc. The Group Repair programme is funded via a 75% grant with a means tested contribution from the homeowner of up to 25%. Homeowners with little income or savings may qualify for a 100% grant.

2.19 Members were informed in the Quarter 2 performance report that the existing group repair contract came to an end in the summer of 2012. This allowed for a new contractor to be appointed. 8 Contractors were invited to tender, 7 were North Wales based and the 8<sup>th</sup> was drawn from an existing framework agreement to ensure the rates were comparable and competitive.

2.20 Following the tender period, 3 companies were invited to interview and one was chosen. Their appointment will be confirmed following financial checks which are taking slightly longer than usual.

2.21 Procurement have subsequently identified that the financial vetting took place using interim accounts submitted to Companies House. The contractor does not feel this is a fair reflection of their current financial status and is now submitting full accounts for procurement and finance to consider.

2.22 Given this contractors' level of experience and their very strong performance at interview stage, we have decided to allow them more time and for finance to reassess them once full and audited accounts have been submitted. A further update to Members will be provided

regarding any appointment once known.

- 2.23 The provisional budget for 2013/14 has reduced the match funding for Renewal Areas from £330K to £250K. In order to complete the outstanding commitments made for the second phase, which consists of 120 interested applicants to date, it will be necessary to make certain changes to the scheme.
- 2.24 In Phase 2 it is proposed that we do not offer the Home Improvement Loan in conjunction with the Group Repair Grant. The Home Improvement Loan was interest free and to a maximum of £5K. It was used by homeowners to address Category 1 Hazards within their homes and to replace old and defective kitchens and bathrooms. The proposed £80K reduction to this budget will no longer allow for this.
- 2.25 As part of the Councils commitment to ensuring that the most vulnerable can still access support for this work, referrals will be made to partner agencies such as Flintshire Care and Repair, who can utilise the Council supported Property Repair Fund, or the North Wales Energy Advice Centre who may be able to access support to address issues with central heating and other energy efficiency measures. They can also be considered for an interest bearing or equity loan through the arrangements with Street UK for the most serious hazards.
- 2.26 Further changes to the Scheme may be required depending upon the level of Specific Capital Grant for Renewal Areas awarded for 2013/14 and these will be discussed and agreed with Members at the earliest opportunity. A review of the governance arrangements for all Regeneration activity across Deeside is being undertaken by the Regeneration Service and the proposal is to utilise that new group as a consultative forum with Members and other key stakeholders
- 2.27 The partnership with Groundwork (an environmental social enterprise) around the delivery of small scale environmental improvements has continued successfully during 2012/13. The types of work currently being undertaken include planting schemes, rubbish clearing and restoration of benches and planters and the painting of railings. In order to manage the remaining budget the programme has been scaled back, to include more volunteers and from October 2012, the Service was reduced to 3 days per week from the previous 5 days. Volunteer hours are currently averaging at over 100 per month, thanks predominantly to the support from local schools
- 2.28 As a condition of continuing the contract, Groundwork was requested to provide an appointment through the Jobs Growth Wales Scheme. This Scheme is based upon the former Future Jobs Fund model, offering paid employment for 6 months to those who are long term unemployed and not accessing education or training. The person appointed is Flintshire based and has been a great asset to the

programme.

- 2.29 It is hoped to continue the partnership with Groundwork in 2013/14, given the employment and training opportunities, plus volunteer hours the programme provides. However, this will be very much dependant upon the final Specific Capital Grant settlement from Welsh government and the level of match funding that Flintshire can provide. The existing Service Level Agreement comes to an end on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.
- 2.30 In the first year of the programme in 2010 we were anticipating an annual spend of circa £1M in the Renewal Area, comprising of the Specific Capital Grant (SCG) and match funding of £330K. However the SCG has been reduced considerably and we only expect to receive £400K this year and the match funding has now been reduced to £250K. This will severely limit our ability to fulfil the original 10 year plan and prioritisation will be required through the new governance board, represented by Members and other key stakeholders.

### **3.00 CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **3.01 Disabled Facilities Grants**

- 3.02 The provision of Disabled Facilities Grants is a statutory responsibility placed upon Council's by the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. This duty is tenure blind and anyone with a disability need assessed by an Occupational Therapist can therefore apply.
- 3.03 The system for providing disabled adaptations in Wales is currently complex. Owner Occupiers and Private Tenants make applications through the DFG process. However, Registered Social Landlord (RSL) tenants are provided with adaptations through the Physical Adaptations Grant (PAG) and there is an expectation that RSL's will top slice their Social Housing Grant (SHG) to fund these.
- 3.04 DFG applicants are means tested using a national system which examines both income and savings to determine whether an individual can afford to contribute towards their adaptation. Child applicants, under the age of 19 are excluded from the means test. The means test determines how much of a contribution is affordable to the applicant and therefore this level can be above the cost of the adaptation if significant income or savings are present. Where the assessed level of contribution is near to, or above the actual cost of the scheme, then advice is provided but a grant is not.
- 3.05 In terms of providing adaptations in Council properties, the picture across Wales is mixed. Those Council's who have transferred their housing stock no longer have responsibility for providing adaptations to former Council tenants. Those who have retained their stock deal

with adaptations in different ways. Some insist on utilising the DFG process for all Council house applicants. Others only use it for adaptations over a certain threshold e.g. £10K and many have stopped using the DFG process altogether believing it gives them more freedom to effectively manage their stock.

- 3.06 Given the need to reduce costs, particularly revenue costs, it is timely to consider whether utilising the DFG process for all Council house adaptations offers good value for money.
- 3.07 In 2011/12 we completed 155 DFG's in Council properties at a cost of circa £850K and the total value of contributions received for all these adaptations was £3,586.31. There were 7 withdrawn DFG's on the basis that the applicants failed the means test and therefore were required to fund the work themselves.
- 3.08 The process involved in approving a DFG application is complex. All DFG applicants are required to undergo a provisional means test over the phone to establish whether they are on a means tested benefit, which allows them to be passported through as a nil contribution.
- 3.09 Should the applicant need to undergo the full means test, applicants must provide details of all income and savings (including documentary evidence) and 12 months bank statements. Following on from that a member of Housing Renewal will visit to complete the application form, as it can be complex for older and vulnerable applicants.
- 3.10 The next stage in the process is that the work has to be scheduled and costed by the in-house team to provide a grant value. The grant can then be approved and the job forwarded to the in-house team for completion.
- 3.11 The cost of mileage for visiting and completing application forms during 2013/14 is estimated to be approximately £1,500. The other major cost of this process is staff time, with each of the 155 applicants personally visited.
- 3.12 If we assume that completion of each application takes an hour, including travelling time, this amounts to £2,233.45 in cost. The time taken for phone calls to undertake provisional means testing will add to this cost by a further £558.30, (based upon a 15 minute phone call). The Quantity Surveyor's input of 30 minutes per application also costs in the region of £1,610.45.
- 3.13 The result is a total cost of £5,901 in mileage and staff time or an average of £38 for each application processed. This is a very conservative estimate, as the circumstances surrounding each application will be different and often complex. These figures do not include the Occupational Therapists, Surveyors and Clerk of Works time, which would still be required going forward. On the basis of

these figures it would therefore not seem to offer good value for money to continue utilising the DFG process for all Council house applicants.

- 3.14 There would also be other advantages of moving away from the DFG regime in Council properties. The less bureaucratic system would provide equality for Council tenants with RSL tenants, who do not have to submit to a means test.
- 3.15 Provision of adaptations would be quicker, as there would be no need to wait for the completion of application forms and the means test. Council tenants would also no longer have to collate and provide documentary evidence as to their financial means. It is anticipated that this would speed up the process by up to 20 days and therefore have a positive impact on void turnaround times when a disabled tenant is identified for an easily adapted property.
- 3.16 The new system would also be simpler to administer, as there would be one system, regardless of whether something was a major or a minor adaptation and there would be no differentiation based upon the existing £1,000 threshold. This amount is the demarcation between a minor adaptation valued below £1000 (where the DFG process is not used) and anything above that level to a maximum of £36K, which is currently subject to the DFG process.
- 3.17 A more streamlined system would also support the Council's Specialised Housing Group, which comprises representatives from the Council and partner RSL's and aims to match disabled applicants with properties which are already adapted. Improved matching over the last 3 years is one of the reasons that expenditure on Council house DFG's has fallen from £1.4M in 2009/10 to £850K in 2011/12.
- 3.18 Removal of the DFG regime would also give greater control over the management of adaptations, as they would no longer be subject to reporting through the national indicator PSR/002. However, should this be implemented, it is proposed that a local PI be developed to ensure continuous improvement.
- 3.19 The only perceived disadvantage at present is that Council house adaptations tend to progress more quickly, as there is no requirement for legal input to obtain certificate of title. The result of this is that the average timescale for delivery of Council house adaptations is shorter and this reduces the overall average timescales for PSR/002.
- 3.20 However, staff time freed up through the implementation of this proposal would allow for more focus on the owner occupied and private tenant applications.
- 3.21 If the proposal to stop applying the DFG process to Council tenants is accepted, it is proposed that we exclude from this exemption those

who have moved from owner occupation in to Council accommodation within the last 12 months. This is on the basis that these are the applicants that tend to fail the means test, or be asked to contribute currently.

- 3.22 The reason for this is that these applicants are likely to have substantial resources due to the sale of their properties and should be expected to contribute. However, there are those who may not have resources due to repossession etc and these people will still benefit from the DFG following application of the means test.

#### **4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.01 The Members note the progress of the Housing Renewal Service over the last 8 months.
- 4.02 That Members support the proposal to remove the DFG regime for Council tenants from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013, excluding those that have moved from owner occupation in the previous 12 months.

#### **5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.01 There are no new financial implications at this stage.

#### **6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

- 6.01 The Service protects some of the most vulnerable households in the County through the provision of grants and loans for repairs, improvements and adaptations.

#### **7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

- 7.01 Through property improvement the Service reduces the level of carbon emissions generated by homes.

#### **8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 8.01 The Service provides for a wide range of people. An Equality impact Assessment has been undertaken on the Private Sector Housing Renewal and Improvement Policy 2012, which identifies that no protected group is disadvantaged.

#### **9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.01 There are no personnel implications arising out of this report.

#### **10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

- 10.01 No consultation is required as a result of this report.

**11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

11.01 No consultation has been undertaken as a result of this report.

**12.00 APPENDICES**

12.01 None

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985  
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

**Contact Officer: Gavin Griffith  
Telephone: 01352 703428  
Email: [Gavin\\_Griffith@flitnshire.gov.uk](mailto:Gavin_Griffith@flitnshire.gov.uk)**

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## FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**REPORT TO:** HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**DATE:** WEDNESDAY, 23 JANUARY 2013

**REPORT BY:** DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

**SUBJECT:** PDA AND CAPITA UPDATE

### **1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.01 This report will update members on the current status of mobile working in Housing Services.

### **2.00 BACKGROUND**

2.01 There have been a number of issues with the implementation of mobile working in the Asset Management service. These are as follows.

2.02 Issues were raised regarding signal issues in July 2011 as part of training. In order to resolve this, a range of options were considered. In order to test the mobile network provider alternative SIM cards were procured. The same issue existed and so it was clear that the issue was not with the network (corporate suppliers). A specialist supplier was engaged to make an assessment of the issues and try and identify cause and solutions. No device specific issues were identified and at this point, they engaged with the PDA suppliers, who confirmed that no hardware error could be found. The corporate mobile device management software (Mobi Control) was removed from the device and this also made no difference. Activity reports were run against a number of devices where issues were being experienced.

2.03 During the period January to March 2012 it became apparent that the software was 'freezing' on the device which meant the device had to be closed down and restarted. This was reported back to the software suppliers who acknowledged this as a known fault. They indicated it had been resolved and that the fix would be available in Version 10 of the software which should be available from April 2012.

2.04 Despite assurances that voice and data should happily co-reside and should not cause problems, there continued to be issues. A device was sent to the software supplier for further investigation and we also bought an alternative make/model of device to finally eliminate concerns in the workforce that the device selection was the issue. The

same issue occurred on the alternative device which eliminated the PDA as the cause of the problem. A PDA was again sent to our device suppliers who spent considerable time at no cost in trying to replicate and eliminate the issue. A device was also sent to the software supplier who, were able to replicate the issue at their site which eliminated any local infrastructure set up at Flintshire.

- 2.05 Whilst all of the technical information from suppliers indicated that data and voice should be able to co reside on the device with no detrimental effect it was suggested by council officers, that we trial separate phone and mobile devices with a group of operatives and assess results. A decision was made to procure separate mobile phones for 30 operatives and trial this for a period of time. If it were to be successful, the net additional cost to the project would be £1800 per annum for 75 operatives. The phones were ordered mid July 2012.
- 2.06 Version 10 of Open Housing was installed in the test system week beginning 26<sup>th</sup> July 2012. This represented a major release as it included enhancements to a range of modules as well as the potential fix for Open Mobile. Some faults were found and additional fixes were received. Version 10 went fully live in October 2012.
- 2.07 Some issues are still being experienced though less frequent, where operatives have "no comms" in a good signal area. For example two operatives will be in the same area, one device will have communications and the other device will not. The operatives then have to come back into the office for the issue to be investigated. This has been reported to the software supplier and the last time this happened the technical support as the supplier indicated a need to increase the number of 'agents' against the Open Mobile module application server to 15. This was done but it does not appear to have eliminated the problem and we have recently asked the software supplier to consider if this figure needs to be increased again. An employee from the software supplier has been on site to investigate and has recommended that Flintshire consider replacing the current port forwarding solution with the Corporate VPN via Cisco. By implementing this solution Flintshire would have direct access to the LAN potentially eradicating connection issues.

### **3.00 CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **Current Position**

- 3.01 To date, over 7000 jobs have been issued and completed using mobile devices. This will continue to be monitored
- 3.02 Version 10 has been installed and is operational. It has been confirmed following a time of live use that this has eradicated the:

- problem of devices freezing as they attempt to download jobs.
  - Problems still exist with data and voice being used together but those using a separate mobile phone, (although inconvenient) are able to work effectively.
  - Resolution will not mean that there will never be any issues as with any mobile device there will on occasion be problems with downloading large files when the network is busy etc.
- 3.03 Recent evidence has been produced from two further sites with issues with mobile working- one had similar voice/data issues as Flintshire though on a different device and rather than pursue it with the software supplier bought separate mobile phones. A further organisation has been using Open Mobile successfully on a HTC device for a number of years, they have recently upgraded to a similar device to Flintshire and have started to experience issues with data and voice (not the same direct issue as Flintshire). This company has contacted the PDA supplier who advised them that the Open Mobile software could be setting the priority of data greater than voice, testing is currently being carried out by this council. This has been raised with Capita and they have advised that the issues being experienced by Flintshire and another council are not the same issue. The software supplier has since advised that Flintshire are experiencing the telephone issue because the device being used is not 3G although this was not stated in the original specification that they provided.
- 3.04 Monthly meetings have been taking place between Flintshire Housing and IT representatives and the software supplier in order to discuss and review the outstanding issues with mobile working implementation. The supplier has agreed to dedicate technical resource to work with the PDA supplier to investigate any issues between software and devices.
- 3.05 Flintshire has been very assertive with the software supplier in these meetings as issues have been hindering implementation for an unsatisfactory time now. Flintshire has followed all specifications provided by the supplier and also attempted all resolutions that have been suggested. Flintshire staff involved with the engagement with the software supplier have made it clear that if any reinvestment in equipment is required over and above that which would be expected due to hardware failure/damage/normal upgrading requirements, we will be pursuing recompense from the relevant supplier on the basis that the equipment was selected based on the original specifications provided.
- 3.06 The PDA supplier provided an alternative device for testing out on-site which is a higher specification and a 3G device. This is currently being tested by an operative to identify whether there is an improvement

and whether current issues such as 'no comms' and being unable to use both phone and data still occur. Flintshire has now requested a further three devices so that thorough testing of these PDA's can be undertaken in different geographical areas, by different trades and with varying amounts of data being transferred.

3.07 35 Responsive Repair staff are now using PDA's and any problems are recorded on an error log and submitted to the software supplier. Meetings have also been set-up between Housing IT, Asset Management and Corporate IT to ensure consistent and effective communication and to ensure that response times for hardware issues are reduced as much as possible. A further 15 operatives are to go live with PDA's over the next few weeks these being a mixture of more Responsive Repairs staff, Electricians and Disabled Adaptations.

3.08 **Summary of current position at 31.12.12**

- 35 Responsive Repairs staff live and using PDA's
- Job monitoring software being rolled out with supervisors
- Internal IT support allocated to Housing Asset Management to aid with day to day issues
- Monthly review and progress meetings with Operations Manager with the software supplier being held
- The software and PDA supplier to investigate infrastructure clashes between devices and software and configuration
- Operative on-site testing an alternative PDA device

3.09 **Proposed next steps**

- 15 further operatives to go live with PDA's over next two weeks
- Gas staff to be trained by 31<sup>st</sup> March and go live with job tickets on PDA's. A solution for gas certification still needs to be agreed.
- Voids team's use of mobile working to be reviewed. Due to the nature of their work there is less benefit in this group using this technology.
- An alternative device to be investigated during 2013 to enable a single device to be used medium term
- Work to continue to establish whether the original device has been wrongly supplied by or whether the software supplier has wrongly specified the type of device needed.
- Work to continue with the software supplier for some resolution over the need to upgrade to Version 10 and more recently to have a 3G device despite this not being part of the original requirements at purchase.

4.00 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.01 That Committee consider and support the action taken to resolve issues, in order to take forward mobile working in Housing Services.

**5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.01 None as a direct result of this report

**6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

6.01 None as a direct result of this report

**7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

7.01 None as a direct result of this report

**8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

8.01 None as a direct result of this report

**9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.01 None as a direct result of this report

**10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

10.01 None as a direct result of this report

**11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

11.01 None as a direct result of this report

**12.00 APPENDICES**

12.01 None

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985  
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

**Contact Officer: Nikki Evans  
Telephone: 01352 701658  
Email: [nikki.evans@flintshire.gov.uk](mailto:nikki.evans@flintshire.gov.uk)**

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## FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**REPORT TO:** **HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** **23 JANUARY 2013**

**REPORT BY:** **MEMBER ENGAGEMENT MANAGER**

**SUBJECT:** **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

### **1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

**1.01** To consider the Forward Work Programme of the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

### **2.00 BACKGROUND**

**2.01** Items feed into a Committee's Forward Work Programme from a number of sources. Members can suggest topics for review by Overview & Scrutiny Committees, members of the public can suggest topics, items can be referred by the Executive for consultation purposes, or by County Council, or Directors. Other possible items are identified from the Executive Work Programme and the Strategic Assessment of Risks & Challenges.

**2.02** In identifying topics for future consideration, it is useful or a 'test of significance' to be applied. This can be achieved by asking a range of questions as follows:

1. Will the review contribute to the Council's priorities and/or objectives?
2. Are there issues of weak or poor performance?
3. How, where and why were the issues identified?
4. Do local communities think the issues are important and is there any evidence of this? Is there evidence of public dissatisfaction?
5. Is there new Government guidance or legislation?
6. Have inspections been carried out?
7. Is this area already the subject of an ongoing review?

### **3.00 CONSIDERATIONS**

**3.01** Overview & Scrutiny presents a unique opportunity for Members to determine the Forward Work Programme of the Committees of which they are members. By reviewing and prioritising the forward work programme Members are able to ensure it is member-led and includes the right issues. A copy of the Forward Work Programme is attached at Appendix 1 for Members' consideration which has been updated following the last meeting.

**4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS**

**4.01** That the Committee considers the draft Forward Work Programme attached as Appendix 1 and approve/amend as necessary.

**5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

None as a result of this report.

**6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

None as a result of this report.

**7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

None as a result of this report.

**8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

None as a result of this report.

**9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

None as a result of this report.

**10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

N/A

**11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

Publication of this report constitutes consultation.

**12.00 APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Forward Work Programme

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985  
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None.

**Contact Officer:** Robert Robins  
**Telephone:** 01352 702320  
**Email:** Robert.Robins@Flintshire.gov.uk



**CURRENT FWP**

<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>	<b>Scrutiny Focus</b>	<b>Responsible / Contact Officer</b>	<b>Submission Deadline</b>
<b>21 Feb 2013</b>	<b>Resident Involvement</b>	To consider proposals to improve resident involvement	Policy Development	Neighbourhood Housing Manager	<b>12 Feb 2013</b>
	<b>Sheltered Housing Improvement Project</b>	To receive an update following the implementation on the new service	Service Improvement		
<b>21 March 2013</b>	<b>Quarterly Performance Reporting</b>	To consider Q3 performance outturns for improvement targets.	Performance Monitoring	Director of Community Services	<b>12 March 2013</b>
	<b>Collaborative Working within Housing Services</b>	To receive and consider current and future collaborative initiatives.	Collaboration	Head of Housing	
	<b>PDA and Capita update</b>	The committee resolved at its October and December meetings to receive an update on a regular basis			

<b>24 April 2013</b>	<b>Adopted/Un-adopted land</b>  <b>Repairs &amp; Maintenance In-House DFG's</b>	To consider HRA land that adopted and un-adopted together with management of garage sites.  To enable Members to monitor the approach and effectiveness of repairs and improvements to the Council's housing stock, to include proposals for the delivery of in-house DFG's as previously approved.	Member request  Service Improvement	Head of Housing  Head of Housing	<b>15 April 2013</b>
<b>5 June 2013</b>	<b>Quarterly Performance Reporting</b>  <b>PDA and Capita Update</b>	To consider Q4, year end outturns for improvement targets.  The committee resolved at its October and December meetings to receive an update on a regular basis	Performance Monitoring  Service improvement / progress monitoring	Director of Community Services  Head of Housing	<b>29 May 2013</b>
<b>10 July 2013</b>	<b>To be determined</b>				<b>1 July 2013</b>

**ITEMS TO BE SCHEDULED as agreed by Committee**

Item	Purpose of Report	Responsible / Contact Officer
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**REGULAR ITEMS**

Month	Item	Purpose of Report	Responsible / Contact Officer
<b>Quarterly / Annual</b>	<b>Performance Reporting</b>	To consider performance outturns for improvement targets against directorate indicators.	Director of Community
<b>Six monthly</b>	<b>Update on Repairs and Improvements</b>	To enable Members to monitor the approach and effectiveness of repairs and improvements to the Council's housing stock, to include void management.	Head of Housing
<b>Quarterly</b>	<b>Sheltered Housing Improvement Project</b>	To receive progress with the review on sheltered accommodation.	
<b>Six monthly</b>	<b>Private Sector Housing Renewal</b>	To consider progress on the delivery of Flintshire's first Renewal Area, general service development and county wide projects.	Head of Housing
<b>Quarterly</b>	<b>Collaborative Working within Housing Services</b>	To receive and consider current and future collaborative initiatives.	Head of Housing

**APPENDIX B****STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT OF RISKS AND CHALLENGES**  
**TOPICS ALLOCATED TO OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEES****SECTION 1 - COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

Category	Risk Reference	Title	Committee
Strategic Partnerships	CL04	Affordable Housing	Housing

**SECTION 2 - COUNCIL DELIVERY**

Category	Risk Reference	Title	Committee
Environment	CD08	Shotton and Deeside Renewal Area	Housing
Housing	CD12a	Housing Strategy	C&H
	CD12b	Housing Management	C&H
	CD12c	Housing Repairs & Maintenance	C&H
	CD12d	Homelessness	C&H
	CD12e	Sheltered Housing	Housing
	CD14	Housing Ballot	C&H
	CD19	Gypsies and Travellers	C&H
Social Care	CD26	Disabled Facilities Grants	S&H and Housing (joint meetings)