

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
15 JANUARY 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Friday, 15th January, 2016

PRESENT: Councillor Ron Hampson (Chair)

Councillors: David Cox, Paul Cunningham, Rosetta Dolphin, Ian Dunbar, George Hardcastle, Mike Reece and Gareth Roberts

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor Paul Shotton (for Ron Davies)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Alison Halford

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise), Senior Manager Council Housing Services, Capital Works Team Manager, and Contract Surveyor.

Mrs Mavis Croft (Representative of the Tenants Association)

IN ATTENDANCE: Community & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

67. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

No declarations of interest were made.

68. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT DRAFT BUDGET AND RENT INCREASE

The Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise) introduced a report on the draft HRA Budget for 2016/17 and HRA Business Plan. She gave a joint presentation with the Senior Manager Council Housing Services on the 2016/17 HRA Revenue Budget which covered the following areas:

- Self financing
- 30 year business plan
- Housing Revenue Account
- other income
- service charges 2016/17
- future phasing of service charges
- principles underpinning efficiencies
- HRA efficiency proposals
- HRA pressures
- funding for HRA Capital Programme 2016/17
- council house building programme

The Chair thanked the Chief Officer and Senior Manager Council Housing Services for the presentation and the verbal updates which had been given to Members. The Chief Officer thanked the Finance Manager, Community Services and Accountant for their hard work in assisting in the preparation of the report.

Councillor George Hardcastle asked that his thanks be passed to the members of staff, for their hard work and efficiency when dealing with the installation of solar panels within his ward. Councillor Mike Reece also thanked officers for dealing with the off-street parking issues within his ward and also welcomed the solar panel scheme.

The comments and questions which were raised by Members of the Committee on the presentation, together with the responses given, are detailed in Appendix 1 (attached).

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee supports and recommends to the Cabinet and Council the HRA budget for 2016/17;
- (b) That the Committee supports a rent increase of 1.4% (plus up to or minus £2) as set out in the business plan with target rents applied for new tenancies, and with the introduction of service charges for communal area cleaning, digital services and aerial maintenance for existing tenancies; and
- (c) That the proposed HRA Capital programme for 2016/17, as set out in Appendix C, be supported.

69. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.10 am)

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Chairman

2016/17 Budget Consultation – Housing Revenue Account (HRA) draft budget and rent increase**Community & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 15th January, 2016**

Member Comment/Question	Response
Concerned with the proposed rent increase of 1.4%, which doesn't seem much, but when combined with the proposed service charges may have a negative impact on tenants already struggling with the effect of welfare reform.	The rent increase proposed is 1.4% plus up to £2 per week, to work towards rent convergence. Where rents are above target, then the rent will be reduced by £2 until the weekly rent falls within the target rent band. This works towards ensuring consistent rent levels across all property types in Flintshire.
What steps are being taken to monitor the effect of service charges on tenants to ensure that they do not add additional pressure to tenants already struggling financially?	<p>The Council is required by the Welsh Government (WG) to implement service charges and has taken a prudent approach in implementing these charges. Tenants in receipt of housing benefit will have their service charges covered by this benefit.</p> <p>Cabinet agreed in December, 2015 to delay by a further year the re-introduction of service charges for the assisted gardening scheme to enable a review of the service specification and for consultation with tenants.</p> <p>The introduction of service charges aims to achieve greater transparency and fairness for tenants, to ensure that tenants not receiving a service are not subsidising the service.</p>
Could you provide an update on the proposed suspension of the Right to Buy scheme.	Following Cabinet approval, an application to the WG to seek to suspend the Right to Buy scheme in Flintshire, is currently being finalised. It is hoped to submit the application to the WG prior to the purdah period.
Why are the risk statuses for the HRA pressures showing as Green, should they not be red if they are a pressure?	The risk statuses are shown as green because the additional cost pressures will not affect the Council's ability to deliver on its promises to build council houses and meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) for council tenants.

<p>Have you seen an increase in inspection times following the previous decision to reduce the Inspection Team from 5 to 2.</p>	<p>The reduction within the Inspection Team is working very well with the Council continuing to respond to repairs within 11/12 days.</p>
<p>Could information on the benefits of solar panels be provided to tenants, who have had solar panels installed but do not understand the financial benefit to them.</p>	<p>We recognise the need to re-visit tenants who had received solar panels to provide them with the necessary information on the financial benefit to them.</p> <p>The average savings to each tenant is around £370 per annum. There are also financial benefits to the Council with savings being ring-fenced to be used on further energy efficiency programmes in the future.</p>
<p>Is the proposed introduction of a Health and Safety Officer a new post?</p>	<p>This will be a new post to ensure legislative requirements are being adhered to as part of the increased WHQS programme.</p>
<p>Are repairs to garages being considered given the rent paid for garages by some tenants?</p>	<p>Following the garage site review the garages have been listed within a number of categories; some have development opportunities, some have a high demand with a considerable waiting list which need investment to repair and others are of low demand which could be addressed through the environmental programme, looking at providing off-street parking for tenants.</p>