

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
13 APRIL 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Wednesday, 13th April, 2016

PRESENT: **Councillor George Hardcastle (Vice-Chairman)**

Councillors: Paul Cunningham, Peter Curtis, Rosetta Dolphin, Ian Dunbar, Alison Halford, Brian Lloyd, Sara Parker, Mike Reece and Gareth Roberts

SUBSTITUTION:

Councillors Paul Shotton for Ron Davies

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: Ron Hampson, Jim Falshaw and Ray Hughes.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Councillor Helen Brown - Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Derek Butler - Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise)

Councillor Bernie Attridge (Chairman of NEW Homes Board), Service Manager – Housing Programmes and Ms. Jan Lysett (Independent NEW Homes Board Member) for minute number 89

Customer Support Manager for minute number 90

Enterprise and Regeneration Manager, Cluster Manager East, Lead Officer East Cluster and LIFT Mentor for minute number 91

IN ATTENDANCE:

Environment & Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

87. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

No declarations of interest were made.

88. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16th March 2016 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

RESOLVED:

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

89. NEW HOMES BUSINESS PLAN 2016/21

The Service Manager – Housing Programmes introduced a report to update the Committee on the second full year of operation of North East Wales (NEW) Homes and the progress it had made against the 2015/20 business plan and growth strategy. He detailed the background to the report and introduced Ms. Jan Lysett who was an independent board member.

Councillor Bernie Attridge, who was the Chairman of the NEW Homes Board, commented on the exciting opportunities that had arisen for Flintshire County Council since the introduction of NEW Homes, which allowed an increase in the range of housing options for the “squeezed middle” housing market. He spoke of the realisation of the need for small steps at the beginning of the Company and the new learning experience for all concerned. He commented on approaches by other local authorities on the work undertaken by Flintshire County Council to set up the Company and to seek advice and guidance on best practice so they could also consider this as an option. . Flintshire County Council was the first in Wales to set up such a company and it was heartening to see a projected operating surplus of £33,000 for 2015/16, which he welcomed. He introduced Ms. Jan Lysett who was an Independent Board Member and asked her to explain her background and the way forward that had been agreed by the Board.

Ms. Lysett thanked the Committee for the opportunity to attend the meeting. She explained that she had been on the Board since its inception and detailed her background which had included 30 years in the area of social housing and her current work for a housing association in Cheshire. She welcomed the exciting opportunity to be part of the company and commended the Council for being forward thinking in meeting its housing obligations. Slow and steady progress had been made and the Board had recognised that this was the necessary approach. Ms. Lysett spoke of the other two independent board members (one had very recently been appointed). She also said that one of the key headlines was the opportunity to develop new homes. She added that the projected operating surplus was also to be welcomed.

The Service Manager – Housing Programmes spoke of the increase in the housing portfolio through Section 106 agreements and commented on one scheme which it had been intended would be delivered in 2015/16 but this had been delayed slightly. He also commented on the steady growth in the areas of management of properties for landlords through a management agreement and commented on the introduction of a Rent Smart Wales scheme which was a compulsory licensing and registration scheme for landlords; close working with local landlords was continuing. The introduction of the over 55’s scheme had not gone as well as had been hoped.

The Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise) spoke of the next 12 months and the consideration being given to borrowing against “gifted units” to produce more properties to let. A report was to be submitted to the Committee on The Walks scheme for 62 affordable properties being built on the site of the former council maisonettes in Flint as part of a joint development with the Council. A skills analysis had been undertaken by the Board prior to the appointment of a new member to ensure that all necessary skills were in place to give the Board confidence to take the schemes forward. Councillor Attridge advised the Committee that there were three elected member vacancies on the board that they were hoping to fill soon.

Councillor Ian Dunbar welcomed Ms. Lysett to the meeting and the information contained in the report. He sought clarification on the scheme that had not come forward in 2015/16 under a Section 106 obligation and queried how

this could be overcome in the future. The Service Manager – Housing Programmes said that there had been a delay and following a meeting on site with the developer, a more realistic timeframe had been agreed and it was now anticipated that the scheme would be delivered by November 2016. Cllr Attridge felt that there was a need to be clearer at the planning stage of when the Council expected any affordable housing gifted by a developer would be available to the Council and added that discussions would continue with planning colleagues.

Councillor Dunbar welcomed the housing standards in place and commended the work undertaken at the Connah's Quay site and the scheme at The Walks in Flint. He sought clarification on the criteria for people to move into properties and referred in particular to elderly council residents living in 3 bedroom properties that were too big for their needs which could be freed up for accommodation for families.

In response, the Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise) spoke of the Council and NEW Homes building programmes. She reminded the Committee that the scheme focused on housing options for the 'squeezed middle' and that it was important in the development of schemes to identify what was required to meet local need which could include looking at evidence on waiting lists. She added that the pressure areas were two bed homes and properties for aging residents and explained that there was also ongoing work to influence social house builders in the type of property that they developed. The Chairman suggested that further information on the issue be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee and in response, the Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise) said that she intended to bring an update report on how the Local Lettings Policy was progressing.

Councillor Paul Shotton said that this was an exciting opportunity and welcomed the projected operating surplus of £33,000 for 2015/16 to add to the surplus of £19,000 for 2014/15. He praised the scheme for NEW homes to manage properties on behalf of landlords which he felt was an exciting development and queried whether consideration had been given to identifying Council owned land to establish a retirement village which he felt would be a cost effective alternative for elderly residents. He asked if a report on this could be provided at a future date and Councillor Attridge responded that he would take the suggestion back to the Board for consideration. Ms. Lysett also said that the Board was to consider other opportunities and welcomed any suggestions of future projects that could be considered.

On the issue of New Homes not currently employing its own staff but using Council staff to setup and deliver the operational functions, Councillor Alison Halford asked how it could be calculated if the scheme was running at a profit or a loss. She referred to the first paragraph on page 21 where it was reported that the relative costs of running this service raised questions about continued investment in the service. The Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise) gave assurance that staff working on NEW homes completed time sheets and their work was charged to NEW Homes. She said that in the future the company would reach a point where there was sufficient activity for people to be employed full time by NEW homes. Currently there was a need for a wide range of skills but not on a full time basis and therefore in the short term it was best to use Council workers with the appropriate skills which was also delivering efficiencies

for the Council but in the longer term the company was keen to employ its own full time workers.

Ms. Lysett agreed that there was a need for a wide range of skills and added that directors were mindful of costs and of the need to bring in external workers with skills that were not available within the Council. It was anticipated that a report would be submitted to the Board of the required resources to deliver the schemes in place. The company could not operate at a loss and Ms. Lysett gave assurance to the Committee that the Board was mindful of how the money was spent and added that resources implications had been factored into the business plan for the company.

Councillor Halford referred to page 39 on the increase in average let days due to delays from landlords supplying the correct paperwork for the Housing into Homes scheme and sought clarification on whether this could be improved. The Service Manager – Housing Programmes spoke of the work undertaken with landlords which would continue to alleviate such issues in the future.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin felt that the confidence in the Company by the Committee should be taken back to the Board and she spoke of the importance to get it right and of the learning curve for all. She also welcomed the consideration of local need. She sought clarification on the Right To Buy scheme and whether this had been deferred and queried whether the company was considering the purchase of already built properties that could be adapted and converted to meet local needs, referring in particular to a property in Greenfield. On the issue of properties for the over 55's, she felt that they would prefer developments where they could live independently but which also had communal areas so that they could have company if they wanted it.

On this issue of the deferment of Right to Buy scheme, Councillor Attridge said that an application had been submitted to Welsh Government (WG) but a reply was still awaited. The over 55's scheme had not taken off as had been anticipated and he said that the Board was mindful of the need to give further consideration to this area. Councillor Helen Brown, said that some residents had come forward expressing an interest in the over 55's scheme but had decided for whatever reason to not progress their application.

Councillor Peter Curtis welcomed the report. He queried whether the over 55's scheme should be raised to a higher age and queried whether the scheme was attractive enough to attract interest. He also welcomed the work of the Board. Ms. Lysett advised that the Board was giving further consideration to a review of the over 55's scheme and how this could be progressed.

Councillor Gareth Roberts referred to the issue of landbanking by developers and spoke of the perception of the value of gifted units. He commented on the standards for the properties and referred to previously built Council properties in Holywell that had been developed to 'Parker Morris' standards. He welcomed the work of the Board and the frustration of a previous decision by WG to not allow Councils to build Council housing. He felt that the over 55's scheme was an excellent scheme and suggested that the programme undertaken by Clwyd Alyn Housing which allowed residents to buy the property for 70% of its value and that when they sold the property on, they would receive

70% of the value and the Council would receive the additional 30% of the value. He sought clarification on the criteria for residents who rented out their property through the Council allowing them to move into sheltered accommodation and whether their income would mean that they were below the threshold to pay for their sheltered property. The Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise) said that the idea was that the resident would use the income from renting out their property to pay for their sheltered accommodation which would mean that they would not be out of pocket.

Councillor Attridge spoke of the group that had been set up through Strategic Housing and Regeneration Project (SHARP) on Flintshire standards and suggested that these standards would also be applied to NEW homes properties too. On the issue of shared equity, he said that a scheme was in place and that he would put the suggestion forward to the Board for whether NEW homes could progress the scheme. On the issue of standards, Councillor Brown spoke of the significant amount of work that had been undertaken with the Tenants Federation representatives.

Councillor Paul Cunningham asked how much publicity had been given to the over 55's scheme. Councillor Attridge said that as much as possible had been done to advertise the scheme such as leaflets at the Flint fun day and added that the board were very mindful of how this could be progressed into the future. Councillor Cunningham also welcomed the work that had been ongoing to build new Council homes in Flintshire and spoke of the importance of making sure that the public were aware of the ongoing work.

Councillor Paul Shotton acknowledged that in the past there had been issues of differing standards for sizes of room and gardens in Council properties but welcomed the assurance that had been given about a Flintshire standard across all of the properties.

Councillor Halford asked if all Town & Community Councils had been made aware of the schemes available including the over 55's scheme and Councillor Attridge advised that he would raise this with the Board.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee welcomed the progress made by NEW homes to date against its business plan and the NEW homes future growth strategy projections and proposals; and
- (b) That the Committee were content that the appropriate governance arrangements were in place.

90. HOUSING (WALES) ACT 2014

The Customer Support Manager introduced a report to provide an update for Members on how the Council had met the requirements of the new homeless legislation including the focus on homeless prevention and support for more households.

She detailed the background to the report and explained that the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 had introduced new homeless legislation in April 2015. A year before the legislation had come into force, Flintshire County Council's Housing Options Team had agreed to pilot the delivery of homelessness prevention service aligned to the requirements within the new legislation. During the period April 2015 to March 2016, the Housing Options Team received 1,176 referrals of households in need of housing assistance and by the end of quarter 3 had successfully prevented or relieved homelessness in 91% of cases. The figures for the full year showed that the number of customers being referred to Housing Solutions had increased by 7% compared to 2014/15.

The Customer Support Manager provided a detailed update on the Triage & Housing Solutions. This included the launch of the new Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) allocations policy and she explained that this service was a 'gateway' for all enquiries from people who were in housing need. The triage team identified whether someone was eligible to go on the register for social housing but all also identified if someone was at risk of homelessness or requiring housing advice and assistance. NEW Homes and the Bond Scheme had made available an increased supply of private sector options for families and in 2015/16 133 households accessed private rental properties through the Bond Scheme and of these 17 households were housed by NEW Homes. The triage services was also able to promote the affordable options available in the county and the team now had a list of schemes in development to ensure they could give accurate advice.

The Customer Support Manager commented on reducing the use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation and advised that the new legislation required a Local Authority to provide a household with interim accommodation if there was reason to believe the household had a priority need; this was a lower threshold than the threshold in the previous legislation. She commented on the use of B&B accommodation for families and single households and explained that in order to reduce B&B use for single households awaiting a permanent housing solution, the service set a target to bring on line 27 leased temporary units managed by the Housing Solutions Service. There were 21 units up and running and the final six would be available by the end of April. The Offender Pathway paid particular attention to the needs of people leaving custody to prevent them from becoming homeless, thereby improving their resettlement into society and reducing their risk of reoffending. Prisoners facing homelessness received support 56 days before their release and the Pathway clarified the roles and responsibilities of all agencies and organisations involved in the process.

The Welsh Government had made available transition funding to support the implementation of the new legislation. Flintshire was awarded £228,000 in 2015/16 and this had reduced to £140,000 in 2016/17 and would reduce again in the final year of allocation. Paragraph 1.32 of the report detailed how the funding had been used in the following areas:-

- Increasing the availability of suitable and affordable private rented properties
- Homeless Prevention
- Support for the Third Sector
- Regional Services

The funding had supported the creation of posts within the Environmental Health Service (to help prevent homelessness by working with landlords to address any issues in privately rented properties) and a post in the Private Sector Team had made available additional properties through NEW Homes and the Bond Scheme. The Customer Support Manager commented on the Regional Reviewing Service which had been set up to ensure that there was a consistent approach to the interpretation of the homelessness legislation across the Local Authorities. A review report had been circulated to demonstrate patterns within reviews to improve services and to ensure regional consistency in approach.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin asked for a breakdown of the 1,176 referrals of households in need of housing assistance and spoke of a family in her ward who had been allocated a property that was unsuitable for their needs. She also referred to some hard-to-let properties in her ward. The Customer Support Manager agreed to provide the breakdown information and speak to Councillor Dolphin following the meeting about the individual case she had referred to. On the hard-to-let properties, Councillor Brown provided Members with details of a website that such properties were posted on which could be applied for.

Councillor Paul Shotton welcomed the report and in recognising that there were new arrangements in place, commended the team for the first class advice and care provided, particularly for the 91% of cases where the team had demonstrated that they had successfully prevented or relieved homelessness. He spoke of the scheme for those offenders leaving custody and understood that they would be directed more to properties owned by private landlords. The Customer Support Manager explained that under the old legislation, offenders were automatically treated as a priority need but now prisoners received support 56 days prior to their release which allowed for the most suitable type of accommodation to be found. Following a question from Councillor Ian Dunbar about where prisoners that would be released would be housed, referring in particular to the new prison that was being built in Wrexham, Councillor Brown said that she had also raised similar concerns but had been advised that consideration would be given to housing the prisoners in the area that they were from.

Councillor Mike Reece congratulated the team for their hard work and commented on the stronger duties on Housing Associations to provide co-operation and support to local authorities in carrying out homelessness duties, when requested. He asked if it was possible for Ward Members to have a list of those residents who moved into Housing Association properties, similar to the information Members received for new residents who moved into Council properties in their ward. The Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) said that she would discuss the request with the Housing Associations.

In response to a question from Councillor Paul Cunningham on whether there were properties available for single people who worked, the Community Services Support Manager provided details of a range of options that were available.

Councillor Gareth Roberts welcomed the report. He commented on an option of multiple occupancy of three bedroomed houses and whether this was

still being explored. The Customer Support Manager said that a number of options for shared housing was being considered and advised that the 27 leased temporary units managed by the Housing Solutions Service would be shared accommodation.

Councillor Dolphin asked whether the Council accommodation would be held for a Flintshire resident who had been sent to prison. In response, the Customer Support Manager said that the new Offender Pathway provided guidance on the handling of short sentences but there were specific rules of how long a property could be held for.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the Housing Solutions Service and the management of the new legislation within the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 be noted.

91. COMMUNITIES FIRST

The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager introduced a report to provide a summary of the progress made in implementing the programme in Flintshire and an update on the future direction of the programme.

The Communities First programme was launched by Welsh Government in 2001 and supported activity in 52 clusters of deprived neighbourhoods across Wales including two in Flintshire (the East Cluster in Deeside and the West Cluster incorporating parts of Mold, Holywell and Flint). Each cluster prepared an annual delivery plan and community involvement plan which summarised the projects to be delivered and how local people would be engaged in the work of the programme. There were a number of significant changes expected to the Communities First programme in 2016/17 which included a review of the structure for the Communities First team and the launch by Welsh Government of a Communities 4 Work (C4W) programme across all 52 clusters in Wales. The Team currently operated across three offices but it was intended to reduce this to one with the savings used for project delivery which would continue across all areas. The fourth change was to increase the integration of Communities First, Flying Start, Families First and Supporting People to increase joint planning and commissioning in the future.

The Lead Officer East Cluster provided a detailed presentation which covered the following areas:-

- Communities First
- Learning activities
- Health activities
- Prosperous communities
- Job clubs
- Jobs, skills & training events
- Local labour market initiative
- Financial literacy
- Business entrepreneur network
- What's next

The Lift Mentor then provided additional information on the Lift initiative, which covered the following areas:

- What is Lift?
- How we work
- Contact details

Councillor Paul Cunningham thanked the team for their presentation. He welcomed the excellent work that Communities First was doing and referred in particular to the work being undertaken in the area of Dementia Support and the dementia friendly areas of Flint and Buckley. He spoke of a play that he had seen recently on the issue of dementia which he thought was excellent and commented on the work of Communities First in Flint to encourage those with dementia to come forward and seek advice and help.

Councillor Paul Shotton congratulated the team for their work and in recognising the work of Communities First, spoke of evidence of their work in his ward. He welcomed the introduction of the Dragon's Den and Business Entrepreneur Initiatives which he felt was an exciting project and added that he had also seen the play on the issue of dementia. He commended the work of the team on the Lift initiative which he felt would provide exciting opportunities and chances for local residents. On the forthcoming jobs fair to be held later this month, he spoke of a previous event that had been extremely well attended and had been worthwhile for many. He sought clarification on how the profile of local industry was introduced into high schools in Communities First areas.

In response, the Cluster Manager East spoke of the initiatives with local schools and inspirational talks that were undertaken regularly. She commented on the work with local employers to put programmes together to create opportunities for local people as part of the Communities First programme.

Councillor Ian Dunbar welcomed the presentation and expressed his significant congratulations at the work undertaken by the team. He wished them well for the forthcoming jobs fair and reiterated the comments of Councillor Shotton about the success of a previous event.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin asked for a list of contacts for the team to ensure that both members and residents were able to seek advice and guidance from the correct person. She commented on the number of community led courses and asked how many participants went on to use the skills they had gained. She spoke of the food co-ops and in commenting on the Mindfulness course, suggested that all members should attend the course, but spoke of a course which had only had 8 participants. Councillor Dolphin indicated that she had not been aware of the job, skills and training events held by Communities First and suggested that further promotion of such events was required. In reply to a question from Councillor Dolphin about where the two Lift clusters were in North Wales, the Cluster Manager East advised that they were in Anglesey and Flintshire. She added that the jobs events were well advertised with leaflets promoting the event being available in jobcentres and in other suitable locations. She also spoke of a new role that was to be created as part of the structure review so that the issue of publicity could be fully addressed including the use of

social media. She added that the list of contacts would be circulated by email to all Members following this meeting.

Councillor Gareth Roberts said that he would like to express his significant disappointment and spoke of the long experience with Communities First in Holywell. He commented on experiences of lack of resources and the poor conduct of officers and said that it had not been a case of 'once bitten twice shy' but there had been many bad experiences for those in the area and patience had finally run out. He spoke of unmitigating disasters and added that in the Holway, Communities First had done their damage.

Councillor Alison Halford congratulated the team for their work and the presentation and sought clarification on the course referred to by Councillor Dolphin which had only been attended by eight people. The Cluster Manager East said that this had only been for one event and the overall numbers for attended at mindfulness courses had been much higher and added that she could provide information on the numbers that had attended, if required. Councillor Halford asked if issues such as diabetes and obesity would be covered and the Cluster Manager East advised that this would be included under the area of health and added that courses had been run in both clusters. She also spoke of the ongoing work with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) including GPs and pharmacies. Councillor Halford asked whether 29 people into full time employment through the Lift programme out of the 114 on the scheme was a good return. The Cluster Manager East confirmed that this was a success and spoke of the intense mentoring for those on the Lift initiative and advised that for some this was a longer process than for others as the scheme was adapted to ensure that each individual's needs were met. In response to a further query from Councillor Halford, the Cluster Manager East spoke of the links with local businesses through the business team and the close work undertaken with the job centre.

The Chairman expressed his significant disappointment at the comments of Councillor Roberts and spoke of the fantastic work that the team had achieved. Councillor Derek Butler also expressed his significant disappointment at the comments made by Councillor Roberts and said that he was disgusted at his attitude towards the team. He acknowledged that there had been problems in the past but things had moved on and the scheme was progressing well. He spoke of the many positives of Communities First which had been welcomed by the committee and spoke of the very intensive programme undertaken as part of the Lift programme and the achievement of some people to gain employment following their inclusion on the scheme. He commended the team for their work and the recognition by WG of the work undertaken in the area.

Councillor Peter Curtis said that in the 21 years that he had been a Councillor, he had never witnessed such a vicious attack on members of staff whilst they were in the room. He felt that Councillor Roberts had bullied and harassed members of Communities First over a number of years. He added that he was disgusted at Councillor Roberts' behaviour and that he should be ashamed of himself. On the issue of reducing three offices to one, Councillor Curtis suggested that a location in Mold would be the most central area. The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager advised that each location would be considered and the outcome reported back to a future meeting of the committee.

RESOLVED:

That the progress in implementing the Communities First programme in Flintshire be noted.

92. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Environment and Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the report to consider the Forward Work Programme for the Committee.

The Facilitator detailed the items for consideration at the 9th May 2016 meeting of the Committee and advised that it had been suggested that the Review of the Fair Debt Policy be deferred to a future meeting to allow consideration of the Draft Improvement Plan at the 9th May 2016 meeting.

Councillor Alison Halford queried whether the Committee could receive an update on the issue of repairs to Council properties and times taken for such repairs. The Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise) advised that information on repairs could be circulated to the Members and that a report could be submitted to the Committee if further information was required. She added that the issue of repairs was a good news story.

The Facilitator also detailed the items for consideration at the 8th June and 13th July 2016 meetings of the Committee and added that during earlier discussions, it had been suggested that the Allocations Policy and Local Lettings Policy also be considered at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme, as amended at the meeting, be approved; and
- (b) That the Environment and Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair, Vice-Chair and officers, be authorised to vary the work programme between meetings.

93. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the public and no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.26 pm)

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Chairman