

COMMUNITY & ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
16 MAY 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Community & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Wednesday 16 May, 2018

PRESENT:

Councillors: Sian Braun, David Cox, Jean Davies, Ron Davies, Adele Davies-Cooke, Rosetta Dolphin, George Hardcastle, Ray Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Ted Palmer, Mike Reece, Paul Shotton and David Wisinger

SUBSTITUTION: Chris Dolphin (for Mared Eastwood)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors: Helen Brown, Patrick Heesom and Paul Johnson

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Bernie Attridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing; Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development; Chief Officer (Housing & Assets), Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy), Enterprise and Regeneration Manager, Benefits Manager, Customer Support Manager and Contract Inspector

IN ATTENDANCE: Community & Enterprise Facilitator and Electoral Services Officer

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

The Facilitator advised that it had been confirmed at the Annual Meeting of the County Council that the Chair of the Committee should come from the Labour Group. As Councillor Ian Dunbar had been appointed to this role by the Group, the Committee was asked to endorse the decision.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Ian Dunbar be confirmed as the Chairman of the Committee.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Councillor David Wisinger nominated Councillor Ted Palmer as Vice-Chair of the Committee. This was seconded by Councillor Ron Davies.

On being put to the vote Councillor Ted Palmer was appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Ted Palmer be appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were received.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2018 were submitted.

Councillor George Hardcastle referred to page 3 of the minutes and commented that he had not received a response on the concerns he had raised around the unavailability of the telephone number for urgent/emergency repairs during the bad weather. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing explained that there had been technical issues as a result of the increased number of calls. These issues had now been resolved and a detailed response would be provided to Councillor Hardcastle following the meeting.

RESOLVED:

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

5. WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD (WHQS) ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME

The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) introduced the report which focussed on the development of the Environmental Programme as part of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS).

The Council has, in developing its programme of work for the whole of the WHQS, split the County into six geographical areas of broadly the same size, with each receiving a programme of work in each financial year, as shown in Appendix A. Programmes were developed using information flowing from stock condition surveys, but also by using feedback from tenants, Members and officers on the ground. Condition survey data was regularly reviewed and adjusted to reflect the revised, improved condition of properties following refurbishment.

The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) drew the Committees attention to Appendix B of the report which provided details of the matrix used by officers when assessing schemes for environmental works. Based upon this criteria, the proposed Environmental Programme was shown at Appendix C.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing asked the Committee to review the schedule and advice if they felt it adequately considered the requirements in their respective areas. Following the meeting, a copy of the proposed programme would be sent to all Members so that could be consulted on the proposals.

Councillor Paul Shotton commented on the amount of garage sites across the County which were in need of refurbishment and the difficulties with parking within his own ward. He commended the work being done as part of the WHQS and asked whether the Council had liability cover if damage was done to neighbouring properties during the renovation works. The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) explained that if any damage was done to neighbouring properties the liability would be covered as this would be included within the tender process.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson raised concerns on behalf of a tenant who was being charged for the use of a garage whilst it was being renovated. The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) agreed to speak to Councillor Hutchinson following the meeting in order to provide him with an appropriate response.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin commented that most garages across the County were no longer fit for purpose, given the size of modern vehicles and asked if an updated timetable outlining when works would be completed in which wards could be provided to Members. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing explained that as part of the garage review consideration had been given to the best use of all garage sites if it was not possible to renovate the current structures in place.

Councillor Ray Hughes asked if consideration could be given to improving the parking area in Leeswood which would assist in removing vehicles from the road and improve the bus service. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing asked Councillor Hughes to provide officers with the details following the meeting.

Councillor Ted Palmer sought clarification on the terms phase 2 and phase 3 as shown in Appendix C of the report. The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) said that he would provide Councillor Palmer with further details around the terms following the meeting.

Councillor George Hardcastle asked if consideration had been given to converting grass verges to car parking spaces. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing advised that this had been considered but that he was mindful not to remove all green spaces. The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) explained that discussions had been held around a robust surface which could be used as parking spaces but looked like green space. This could be maintained by cutting the grass through a special membrane without causing any damage to the surface.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the comments made by the Committee on the decision matrix be noted;
- (b) That the comments made by the Committee on the schedule of work, its completeness and appropriateness be noted; and
- (c) That a copy of the updated Schedule of Works be circulated to all Members.

6. REGIONAL REGENERATION STRATEGY AND WELSH GOVERNMENT TARGETED REGENERATION INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) introduced the Regional Regeneration Strategy and Welsh Government (WG) Targeted Regeneration Investment Programme (TRI). WG had launched the TRI to provide funding for regeneration projects across Wales. Funding was conditional

upon the submission of a regional regeneration strategy and upon a regionally-prioritised approach to developing investment proposals.

The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager reported that the draft regeneration strategy had been developed within the challenging time scales set for the process and a collaborative approach has been taken across North Wales to develop and prioritise investment and to concentrate limited resources into priority regeneration areas and thematic projects which will make use of the first three years of the TRI programme. The draft North Wales regeneration strategy proposed twelve towns as priority areas for regeneration for WG as shown within the report. The towns had been identified using the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation rankings for overall levels of deprivation.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development advised that the funding allocated for the two towns of Holywell and Shotton, which had been identified as priority areas in Flintshire, would have to be match funded by the Council.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin said that careful consideration would be needed to assess how the Council would meet the match funding requirements. She raised concerns around shops in Holywell that had received regeneration funding in the past but had let them fall into decline and asked whether it was possible to re-coup this funding. Councillor Ted Palmer expressed his disappointment that Holywell had been identified as a priority area due to the levels of deprivation but commented on the work of Holywell Town Council and its plans for improvement moving forward. He welcomed continued consultation and joint working between the Town Council and the Council. The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager advised that there was a 5 year period in which the Council could re-coup funding if there was a change of use to a property in a town centre.

In response to a question from Councillor Hardcastle around a large property in Connah's Quay which had remained empty for a number of years, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing advised that the owner of the property was currently selling the property through an auction process. The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager confirmed that the Council had been in discussions with the owner of the property and that development plans were in place.

Councillor Ron Davies felt it unfair that Shotton had been identified as a deprived area, as this only related to a small part of Shotton. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing commented on the need for joint working between multi-agencies and Housing Management to tackle deprived areas going forward.

Councillor Paul Shotton praised the work of Communities First in targeting pathways for employment opportunities.

RESOLVED:

That the draft Regional Regeneration Strategy for submission to Welsh Government be approved.

7. YEAR-END COUNCIL PLAN 2017/18 MONITORING REPORT

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) introduced the Year-end Council Plan Monitoring Report 2017/18. He explained that the report presented the monitoring of progress for the Council Plan priorities 'Supportive Council' and 'Ambitious Council' which were relevant to the Committee.

The Chief Officer provided background information and advised that the monitoring report for the 2017/18 Council Plan was a positive report, with 81% of activities being assessed as making good progress, and 69% likely to achieve the desired outcome. Performance Indicators showed good progress with 84% meeting or near to period target. Risks were also being successfully managed with the majority being assessed as moderate (67%) or minor (10%).

Councillor Paul Shotton asked if the impact of Universal Credit and the delayed payments to tenants was having a negative impact on rent arrears. He also asked if an increase in demand for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) was the cause for the missed performance indicator. The Benefits Manager said that it was too early at this stage to confirm if the delayed payments would have a negative impact on rent arrears. Officers continued to be pro-active in contacting tenants at an early stage to provide the necessary support. The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) advised that a report on DFG's would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

Councillor George Hardcastle asked if an update report on rent arrears and the use of bed and breakfast accommodation could be provided to the Committee at a future meeting. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Members for Housing advised that a report on rent arrears was due to be submitted to the Audit Committee and would also be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee. The Customer Support Manager advised that a report on Homelessness, which would include details of the use of bed and breakfast accommodation, would be provided to a future meeting of the Committee.

Following comments made around current rent arrears, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing said that current levels were excessive and that a zero tolerance approach was required for those tenants who were able to, but refused to pay their rent. The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) commented on tenants who required assistance and support and said that this would continue to be provided but that the Council would be more proactive over the next 12 months in tackling tenants who were able to put refused to pay their rent.

Members thanked the Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) and Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing for the approach outlined in dealing with rent arrears.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

8. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Facilitator introduced the draft Forward Work Programme (FWP) and detailed the items scheduled to be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee. She advised that following the Annual Council meeting, all future meeting dates had been added to the FWP and suggested that following the meeting, in consultation with the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Chief Officers that the FWP be populated and considered by the Committee as the first item on the agenda for the next meeting. The Committee agreed with the suggestion.

Councillor George Hardcastle asked if the Committee could receive an update on the Service Level Agreements for tenants as he had received concerns from tenants who were being charged for services that they did not use. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing advised that he recently requested a briefing note on this matter and assured the Committee that Members who had been charged for service that they did not use would be reimbursed. He agreed to provide a copy of the briefing note to all Members of the Committee following the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be amended; and
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

9. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.35 am)

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Chairman