

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
13 MARCH 2019

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 Tuesday 13 March, 2019

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

Councillors: David Cox, Jean Davies Ron Davies, Rosetta Dolphin, Mared Eastwood, Ray Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Paul Shotton and David Wisinger

SUBSTITUTIONS: Councillors: Haydn Bateman (for George Hardcastle), Andy Dunbobbin (for Mike Reece) and Paul Johnson (for Ted Palmer)

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Sian Braun, Adele Davies-Cooke, and Jean Davies

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors: Christine Jones and Patrick Heesom attended as observers

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Bernie Attridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing; Chief Officer (Housing & Assets); Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy); and Benefits Manager

IN ATTENDANCE: Community & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officer

61. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None were received.

62. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 February 2019 were submitted.

Accuracy

Minute number 57: Housing Strategy and Action Plan – Councillor Paul Shotton referred to his comment on the social enterprise in Anglesey and asked that the wording be amended to read providing “timber framed buildings” not “modular buildings”.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above amendment the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

63. UPDATE REPORT FOLLOWING THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2017

The Benefits Manager presented a report to provide an update on progress in relation to the service control action plan. She provided background information and advised that a Disabled Facility Grant (DFG) was available to

owner occupiers and private tenants to help individuals living with a disability with the cost of adapting their homes to enable them to continue living at their residence. The maximum amount of grant available in Wales was £36k. Where the application was for a child, or the applicant was in receipt of appropriate qualifying benefits, there was no means test and the cost of the adaptation up to the maximum grant was awarded. For other applications the amount of the grant varied from zero to maximum depending on the cost of the approved works and the financial circumstances of the applicant.

The Benefits Manager reported that following an internal audit an oversight board had been established in July 2018 to ensure there was adequate and urgent improvement to the delivery of the DFG. Work was ongoing to address and implement the recommendations contained within the audit report and to review service delivery to make improvements. An updated action plan was appended to the report which detailed the progress made to date. The Benefits Manager reported on the improvements and changes to DFG service delivery, as detailed in the report, and advised that work would continue into 2019/20 to further improve delivery times and quality and bring the service into line with the recommendations following the Wales Audit Office Housing Adaptations Report and the Welsh Government Housing Adaptation service standards.

In response to a comment from the Chair, the Benefits Manager explained that where the adaptations required were unsuitable at the applicant's current residence a Disabled Facilities Relocation Grant was available to cover the expenses of a disabled persons' move to a more appropriate property.

Members congratulated the Benefits Manager and her team on their work and achievements to improve DFG service delivery.

Councillor Paul Shotton asked if further assistance was available if the cost of adaptations was above the £36k maximum grant payable in Wales. The Benefits Manager explained that a Disabled Facilities Discretionary Top Up Grant would be considered in exceptional circumstances, up to an amount of £39k, where the cost of the required works exceeded the statutory limit of £36k. She also advised that a DFG top up loan, which was a discretionary loan secured against the value of the property could be issued to meet the costs of the adaptation in excess of the DFG Grant and the DFG top up grant.

The Benefits Manager reiterated that the amount of DFG grant would depend on the cost of the approved works and where applicable an applicant's financial circumstances. A means test would be carried out on applications with the exception of child applicants and where the adult applicant was in receipt of Council Tax Reduction and/or Housing Benefit.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin asked if the long term needs of children were taken into account to enable them to continue living at their residence. The Benefits Manger explained that professional guidance from Social Services and Occupational Therapy teams was considered in determining an application for a DFG and she confirmed that regular reviews took place and the long term needs of the individual and their family was taken into account.

Councillor Bernie Attridge reported on the revision of processes which would further improve DFG service delivery times in the future.

Councillor Paul Johnson referred to the review of the Stannah Lift Service Framework agreement and asked whether it had been adequate. The Benefits Manager confirmed that the review had found that the agreement complied with the Council's CPR procedures.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson asked whether adaptation equipment which had been provided but was no longer in use was recycled and cited stair lifts as an example. The Benefits Manager explained that where possible adaptation equipment was recycled, subject to the necessary tests etc. being undertaken and agreed to look at whether the success rate of the equipment recycled could be measured.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee supports the content of the report and the action taken to date; and
- (b) That the Committee supports the ongoing work in the service to improve service delivery to our customers.

64. QUARTER 3 COUNCIL PLAN 2018/19 MONITORING REPORT

Councillor Bernie Attridge introduced a report to present a summary of performance for the Quarter 3 (October to December 2018) position of 2018/19 for the Council Plan priorities 'Supportive Council' and 'Ambitious Council' relevant to the Committee.

The Chief Officer advised that the Quarter 3 monitoring report was a positive report and showed that 92% of activities were making good progress with 85% likely to achieve their desired outcomes. 67% of the performance indicators had met or exceeded their targets. Risks were being managed with the majority being assessed as moderate (61%) and minor/insignificant 22%. The report was an exception based report and therefore focussed on the areas of under-performance.

Councillor Attridge reported on the following performance indicators which showed a red RAG status for current performance against target:

- average number of calendar days taken to deliver a Disabled Facility Grant (DFG)
- debt levels will rise if tenants are unable to afford to pay their rent or council tax

Councillor Paul Shotton referred to page 166 of the report and spoke of the impact of Universal Credit and the hardship caused to individuals and families due to the time taken to process applications. He said that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) needed to be made aware of the concerns.

The Benefits Manager acknowledged the points made and explained that work had commenced on the identification of the impact of Universal Credit on Council Tenants and their rent accounts. She advised that a team worked with tenants at the earliest opportunity to provide early identification and intervention (if appropriate) to prevent problems escalating and providing a greater chance of the rent account coming back under control and out of arrears. She also advised that the Council now had 'Trusted Partner' status with the DWP which meant that processes and flow of information and payments was more streamlined and automated. Council tax collection remained under pressure. The Benefits Manager advised that an update report would be provided to the meeting of the Committee to be held on 26 June 2019.

Councillor Paul Johnson commented on the difficulties experienced by people on low incomes and the need to raise awareness of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and review how it was advertised. In response the Benefits Manager agreed to review the merit of advertising the Scheme in line with the Welsh Government campaign.

RESOLVED:

That the Quarter 3 Council Plan 2018/19 Monitoring Report be noted.

65. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme for consideration. The Committee agreed the items scheduled for the next meeting to be held on 1 May, with the addition of a report on Town Centre Regeneration.

Councillor Paul Shotton referred to his previous suggestion for a report on Smart Meters to be submitted to a meeting of the Committee. He said that he had received concerns from a number of residents regarding switching of energy suppliers, installation, and incorrect meter readings. The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) suggested that a briefing note on the installation of smart meters and any challenges encountered be circulated to the Committee for information.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson referred to an incident of anti-social behaviour in his Ward and suggested a review of the SARTH was necessary. The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) reported that this had been undertaken recently and suggested that what was required was a report covering tenancy management with particular emphasis around enforcement. Councillor Hutchinson agreed that this would be helpful.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted; 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.

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

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

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 10.57 am)

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Chairman