

COMMUNITY HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
27 SEPTEMBER 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Community, Housing & Assets Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a remote attendance meeting on Tuesday, 27 September 2022

PRESENT: Councillor Helen Brown (Chair)

Councillors: Pam Banks, Gillian Brockley, Rosetta Dolphin, David Evans, Ray Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Dale Selvester and Linda Thew

APOLOGY: Councillor Tina Claydon

SUBSTITUTIONS: Councillor Ted Palmer (for Councillor Kevin Rush)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Marion Bateman attended as an observer

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Sean Bibby (Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration); Councillor Billy Mullin (Cabinet Member for Governance and Corporate Services including Health and Safety and Human Resources); Chief Executive; Chief Officer (Housing and Communities); Housing Programmes Manager; Service Manager – Housing Assets; Service Manager - Housing Management, Benefit Service including Disabled Facilities Grants and Service Manager – Housing & Prevention

IN ATTENDANCE: Community & Education Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Electoral Services Officer

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

No declarations were made.

15. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 6 July 2022, were approved as a correct record, as moved and seconded by Councillor Rosetta Dolphin and Councillor David Evans.

RESOLVED:

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

16. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme for consideration, outlining the following proposed amendments: -

- That a report on the Renting Homes Wales Act would be moved back a cycle and would be reported at the 16 November meeting;

- That the Dynamic Resource Scheduler (DRS) System Update be moved from 16 November to 8 March, 2023 meeting; and
- A report on the 2023-24 budget, following the Member portfolio budget briefing sessions, be added for consideration at the 16 November 2022 meeting.

The Facilitator reported that the Chair had asked all Members of the Council if they had items they felt that the Committee should be considering and adding to the Forward Work Programme. A list of suggested items had been compiled and were shown at Appendix 3 of the report. The Facilitator advised that following the meeting, she would liaise with officers and the Chair to identify how they could be included in the Forward Work Programme.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved and seconded by Councillor Rosetta Dolphin and Councillor David Evans.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted;
- (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; and
- (c) That the Committee notes the progress made in completing the outstanding actions.

17. STRATEGIC HOUSING AND REGENERATION PROGRAMME (SHARP)

The Housing Programmes Manager presented the report to inform the Committee of the progress of the Strategic Housing & Regeneration Programme (SHARP) and to set out the Strategy for new affordable homes within the next five years.

The Housing Programmes Manager provided detailed updates on progress under the new Welsh procurement framework partnership and also the net zero carbon working group, highlighted changes in the Welsh Government (WG) new build priorities, the new funding regime and its implications for Flintshire and NEW Homes, as outlined in the report.

In response to a question from Councillor Rosetta Dolphin, the Housing Programmes Manager advised that he was aware of the project at Greenfield and was looking to add this to the SHARP.

In response to comments from the Chair and Councillor Rosetta Dolphin on consultation with local Members and the housing needs within wards, the Housing Programmes Manager assured the Committee that local Members, along with members of the public would be consulted on future projects. He also advised that a portfolio needed to be drawn up of the building needs across the County to get an overall view of what the strategy needed to be. He informed Members that the Council would be able to influence what was needed.

The recommendations, as outlined in the report, were moved by Councillor David Evans and seconded by Councillor Rosetta Dolphin.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress with the Strategic Housing & Regeneration Programme (SHARP) to date be noted;
- (b) That the changes in Welsh Government funding for social housing be noted;
- (c) That the changes to the criterion for registration with Tai Teg for affordable rented housing be noted;
- (d) That the outline development programme SHARP 2 be noted; and
- (e) That the Committee support the re-allocation of £121K budget for scheme investigation and feasibility works to support new delivery routes.

18. VOID MANAGEMENT

The Service Manager - Housing Assets introduced a report to provide an update on voids management and delivery.

The Service Manager - Housing Assets and Service Manager - Housing Management, Benefit Service including Disabled Facilities Grants gave a presentation which covered the following areas:-

- Voids
- Voids targets and costs
- Voids turnover and backlog
- Estate Management
- End to end process
- Resources – staffing
- Resources - staffing improvement activities
- Resources – budgets
- Resources – budget improvement activities
- Resources – refurbishment
- Resources – refurb improvement activities
- Oversight and reporting

In response to a request from Councillor Rosetta Dolphin, it was agreed that a copy of the presentation slides would be circulated to Members of the Committee following the meeting. Councillor Dolphin also gave examples of void properties in her ward that had remained empty for a long time and commented on the need to turn the properties around quicker to ensure continued revenue to the Council.

In response to concerns from Councillor Pam Banks around an issue in her ward and wait for a property, the Service Manager - Housing Management, Benefit Service including Disabled Facilities Grants asked Councillor Banks to

provide her with details following the meeting so that this matter could be looked into further.

Councillor Ted Palmer asked if additional in-house contractors could be used. He also asked how energy ratings would be improved for those properties which had already been allocated. The Service Manager – Housing Assets advised that there was an in-house voids team who were allocated all minor works. He also provided details of a pilot project around de-carbonisation of housing stock in Mostyn and added that this work was included within the Welsh Housing Quality Standard works.

Councillor Dave Evans suggested that the Committee visit a void property when it became empty and also a void property that had been brought back into use in order to see the standard of work carried out. He also referred to the cost of living crisis and asked what improvements were made to properties to keep costs lower for tenants. The Service Manager – Housing Assets advised that boilers, heating and loft insulation were all assessed at void stage and added that if conversion to air source heat pumps was a viable option for the property that was assessed at void stage too.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin asked if college students were employed to assist with bringing back to use void properties. The Service Manager – Housing Assets advised that the Council did liaise with the colleges and do facilitate students undertaking practical work to fulfil their courses.

Councillor Dale Selvester raised concerns around the time taken to register meters with energy companies which added to the delay in allocating a void property. The Service Manager – Housing Assets responded that the tenant had previously had to contact energy companies directly which was very time consuming. They now had a company called Energy Angels that would be assisting with that going forward.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved and seconded by Councillor David Evans and Councillor Dale Selvester.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee note the increasing pressures and challenges impacting on service delivery across the Housing and Communities Portfolio; and
- (b) That the Committee support the proposals for addressing the challenges identified.

19. RAPID REHOUSING

The Service Manager – Housing & Prevention introduced a report to provide an update on progress with developing the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan. Local Authorities were required to develop Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans to demonstrate how they would move towards a new approach to preventing and relieving homelessness.

The report identified the high level priorities contained within the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and a draft action plan that Flintshire County Council and its partners would need to deliver in order to achieve transformation in homeless prevention and statutory homelessness services and begin the transition to Rapid Rehousing.

The Service Manager – Housing & Prevention provided detailed information on the Key Principles, which were as follows:-

1. Tackling Homelessness through robust and effective partnerships
2. Remodelling our approaches to data, systems, policies and service delivery
3. Ensuring support is available to all who need it
4. Transforming our temporary housing offer
5. Increasing the supply of affordable housing and removing barriers to people accessing affordable housing promptly

The Service Manager – Housing & Prevention added that a report on the specific Challenges, Priorities and Action Plan would be presented to the Committee at the next meeting scheduled for October, 2022.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin asked for information on the demographic of people presenting themselves as homeless. The Service Manager – Housing & Prevention explained that the majority of people were single, which highlighted the demand for the need for single person accommodation in the County.

Councillor Pam Banks commented on people being housed in rural villages and she felt that there was a lack of help/support in the community. She asked if their needs were assessed prior to being housed. The Service Manager – Housing & Prevention advised that, in terms of emergency accommodation, housing was limited but added that all needs were assessed with personal action plans drawn up accordingly.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved and second by Councillor David Evans and Councillor Ted Palmer.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the report and principles of Rapid Rehousing.

20. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT

The Service Manager - Housing Management, Benefit Service including Disabled Facilities Grants) introduced a report to update on the current Discretionary Policy and changes made in the last 12 months.

The Service Manager highlighted the two main changes within the Policy, which were as follows:-

1. The value for means testing had been reviewed and had been increased from £10,000 to £20,000; and

2. The need to apply for a land charge had now been removed. If an adapted property was sold within 5 – 10 years of the adaptation, then the Council would look to re-coup the cost to provide security and assurances to the public purse.

In response to a question from Councillor David Evans around re-couping costs, the Service Manager said that this was a rare occurrence.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson asked if equipment installed in properties could be recycled and re-used when removed. The Service Manager that an effective recycling system was used for equipment and all equipment was tested before being re-installed in another property. She added that the equipment was also installed with a five year warranty.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved and seconded by Councillor David Evans and Councillor Rosetta Dolphin.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the updated DFG Policy be supported and the ongoing work to improve the service be noted;
- (b) That the amendment, shown at Appendix 2 in the Policy, for the removal of the means test for medium sized adaptations be noted; and
- (c) That the changes to Land Charges in-line with Welsh Government Revised Housing Standards, as outlined in the report, be noted.

21. COUNCIL PLAN 2022/23 TIMELINE REVIEW

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the report on the review of timelines for the Council Plan 2022/23 as requested at County Council in July.

The Chief Executive advised that the timeline related to the Council Plan for 2022-23 which included some items rolling forward beyond that period. Officers were currently focussed on developing the five year Council Plan which would incorporate more specific detail of use to Overview & Scrutiny Committees in identifying topics for their Forward Work Programmes.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved and seconded by Councillor David Evans and Councillor Ted Palmer.

RESOLVED:

That the Council Plan Part 1 reviewed and updated timelines for completion be agreed.

22. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.05 pm)

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Chair