

HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
21 FEBRUARY 2013

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA on Thursday, 21 February 2013

PRESENT: **Councillor Ron Hampson (Chairman)**

Councillors: Amanda Bragg, Peter Curtis, Ron Davies, Jim Falshaw, Ray Hughes, Brian Lloyd, Mike Reece and Gareth Roberts

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors Ian Dunbar (for Glenys Diskin) and Paul Shotton (for Sharon Williams)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Patrick Heesom

APOLOGIES: Councillors: David Cox, Alison Halford and George Hardcastle

CONTRIBUTORS: Cabinet Member for Housing, Head of Housing, Supporting People Manager, Neighbourhood Housing Manager (North) and Housing Asset Manager

IN ATTENDANCE: Member Engagement Manager, Housing & Learning Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

49. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

No declarations of interest were made.

50. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2013 had been circulated with the agenda.

Accuracy

Page 2, paragraph 5, During the period October to December 2012, 54 formal homeless applications had been made in contrast to 34 applications made in the period October to December 2012. The second reference to October to December 2012 should read 2011.

RESOLVED:

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

51. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair congratulated Nikki Evans on his permanent appointment as Housing Asset Manager.

The Chair also congratulated Ceri Owen on her new appointment as the Housing & Learning Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator.

52. RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

The Neighbourhood Housing Manager (North) introduced the report which provided the results of the Welsh Government's Assessment of the council's Customer Involvement Strategy (also known as the Local Tenant Participation Strategy). The assessment considered 12 points in relation to the strategy and action plan. Ten out of 12 points were rated as satisfactory or good.

A Customer Involvement Strategy Group had been established for many years and included representatives from Members, officers and tenants of the Council. They had considered the content of the assessment and formulated an action plan for the areas highlighted for improvement.

The Neighbourhood Housing Manager asked the Committee to consider what priorities should inform a revised strategy which would be considered by Scrutiny later in the year. She also asked Members to consider if the frequency of the Housing News publication should be reduced from four to two editions per year.

Councillor W.P. Shotton proposed that the Housing News publication be reduced to two editions per year with a spring edition to publicise the budget, changes to rents and summer play schemes, and a winter edition to publicise Christmas events, heating and winter arrangements. He added that hand delivery of the publications would allow environmental visual assessments to be made of tenants' gardens, pathways and general upkeep of the estates.

The Head of Housing said that various options for cost reductions in production and distribution of the publication had been explored. The latest edition had been hand delivered by officers and Members and it had taken just one morning to deliver 7,500 copies.

Councillor M.A. Reece asked if school pupils could help distribute the publication. The Head of Housing said that copies of the publication could be left in GP surgeries and schools.

Councillor H.G. Roberts commented on the organisation of some tenant associations and stressed the importance of having an elected and credible tenants' group. The Head of Housing in response said that in some cases a single person would be elected unopposed simply because no-one else had come forward. She said that the Council could not intervene unless there was a valid reason why a person was unfit to fulfil the duties. She said that the Council would do all it could to encourage participation.

Councillor P.J. Curtis pointed out that some residents on estates were now owner occupiers and that the Council should be mindful of disproportionate numbers of non tenants on tenant involvement groups. He agreed with Councillor Shotton that publication of the Housing News be reduced to two editions per year. Councillor Curtis also asked that anti-social behaviour in the Llywn Aled Sheltered Accommodation Area be monitored and that the Head of

Housing liaison with Inspector Dave Massey to address the issues causing distress to elderly residents.

Councillor A.M. Bragg asked how a tenant could get involved with a tenants' committee. The Head of Housing said that the formal tenants' associations had rules and a constitution. She added that people not wishing to participate in such a formal setting could help with surveys, fun days and service reviews.

The Cabinet Member for Housing said that it would be timely to review the membership of the Member and Tenant Working Group. The Committee agreed that Councillors P.J. Curtis, G. Hardcastle and R.G. Hampson serve on the group, along with the Deputy Leader and that Councillors A.M. Bragg and J.E. Falshaw be elected as substitute members of the group.

Councillor R. Hughes asked if the anti-social behaviour of neighbours would be addressed and cited the case of a tenant who had suffered with anti-social behaviour for a number of years.

Councillor Shotton said that Flintshire had an Anti-Social Behaviour Officer and that residents may not be aware of this. The Head of Housing said that the budget for an additional two Anti-Social Behaviour Officers had been approved from April 2013 onwards.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted and that the Housing News publication be reduced from four editions to two editions per year;
- (b) That Councillors P.J. Curtis, G. Hardcastle and R.G. Hampson be nominated to serve on the Member and Tenant Working Group and that Councillors A.M. Bragg and J.E. Falshaw be nominated to serve as substitute members of the group; and
- (c) That it be noted that the Deputy Leader will be continuing as a member of the Member and Tenant Working Group.

53. SHELTERED HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

The Supporting People Manager introduced a report to update the Committee about the introduction of a Community Based (Warden) Support Service. Focus had been concentrated so far on the setting up of Community hubs, the implementation of new working practices and the assessment of support needs for all tenants which was now complete. There were nine hubs, three of which were based in Council properties. The Supporting People Manager asked the Committee if they would consider changing the three hubs based in Council properties if suitable alternative office accommodation could be secured.

It was envisaged that the service could soon be rolled out to persons in owner occupied accommodation as the Supporting People Grant was tenure neutral. The Supporting People Manager said that a new staff structure would

come into operation from April 2014. It had been agreed that 70% of staff time would be dedicated to field work in line with the findings and needs of the support assessments.

Councillor A.I. Dunbar asked if any hubs would be amalgamated. The Supporting People Manager said that three hubs would be reviewed, including one at Mostyn where there was the possibility of sharing office space with another public service provider. Staff had felt it was important to maintain hubs in Caergwrle and Mostyn which support rural areas.

Councillor P.J. Curtis asked where the Holywell hub was located and asked if staff could work out of the Flintshire Connects Office. He asked if the reduction in staff could have a negative effect on the service, particularly if the service was extended. The Supporting People Manager said it was based in Panton Place. The Head of Housing said that the Flintshire Connects Office was an option and that some wardens already worked from there. Appendix 1 detailed that the proposed staffing levels included capacity for expansion. She added that if further funding was required, if demand grew, they could approach Supporting People for more funding.

Councillor W.P. Shotton thanked the Supporting People Manager for the report and asked how often residents needs were reviewed. The Supporting People Manager said that they were reviewed every six months and on demand should their needs change.

Councillor A.M. Bragg voiced concern at possible work overload for the staff and asked if there would be a cost element for those in owner occupied accommodation. The Supporting People Manager said that the 70% fieldwork element was set realistically and capacity had been built in for owner occupier uptake. Once the scheme was tenure neutral, a request for extra funding could be considered. The Head of Housing said that there were no proposals to charge clients.

Councillor R. Davies thanked the Supporting People Manager for an excellent report and asked if the local members were aware of the hubs. The Supporting People Manager said that she was happy to arrange visits for any member and would send hub location lists out.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the committee notes the progress of the Sheltered Housing Improvement Project;
- b) That the Committee agrees to the proposals to seek alternative accommodation for three hubs currently located at Council houses; and
- c) That the Committee notes the future expansion proposals being developed for private sector tenants and home owners to deliver a county wide, tenure neutral service to commence April 2013.

54. PDA AND CAPITA UPDATE

The Housing Asset Manager introduced a report to update Committee Members on the current status of mobile working in Housing Services.

To date, over 7000 jobs had been issued and completed using mobile devices. The PDA was now used by 35 repairs staff. There had been regular meetings between Corporate ICT and PDA software suppliers and phone suppliers to discuss any ongoing issues. The Housing Department was now looking at training 15 gas operatives in the technology over the next 15 weeks. The current PDAs were now two years old and the Housing Department were researching upgraded devices and software with Corporate ICT, Software and PDA suppliers. It was proposed that the next area to undertake mobile working would be the responsive repairs section.

Councillor W.P. Shotton thanked the Housing Asset Manager for the report and asked if the trials with the 3G device had been successful. The Head of Housing said that it had, but she was also confident that the right devices had been purchased initially - 3G had not been readily available when the original devices were bought. Where there had been issues with voice and data, separate mobiles for tradesmen had been purchased.

Councillor J.E. Falshaw asked if there would be any recompense from the suppliers in relation to all the issues that had been raised and whether other Councils had reported similar problems. He also asked if 4G would be suitable. The Head of Housing said that the device that was purchased met the specification set by Capita. The voice and data issue could not be resolved on the original device. The Head of Housing said that 4G could provide an improvement but there was not good 3G coverage yet in rural areas of Flintshire. Other services had experienced similar issues but had since purchased different devices.

Councillor M.A. Reece asked if a tradesperson had a laptop if it would take the job out of the system once completed. The Housing Asset Manager said that electricians had lap tops and were able to do specification on site and email certificates back to the office.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee support the action taken to resolve issues in order to take forward mobile working in Housing Services.

55. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

That the Forward Work Programme as submitted be approved with the inclusions outlined. The Housing & Learning Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator introduced a report to enable the Committee to consider the Forward Work Programme.

At the next meeting on 21 March 2013, there would be an additional report on the Supporting People Commissioning Plan.

The meeting on 24 April 2013 would include an additional report on the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme as submitted be approved with the inclusions outlined above.

56. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.26 am)

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Chairman