

**COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**9 MAY 2016**

Minutes of the meeting of the Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Monday, 9th May, 2016

**PRESENT:**     **Councillor Ron Hampson**

Councillors: David Cox, Paul Cunningham, Peter Curtis, Ron Davies, Rosetta Dolphin, Ian Dunbar, Jim Falshaw, George Hardcastle and Gareth Roberts

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor Alison Halford, Ray Hughes, Brian Lloyd and Mike Reece

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Tony Sharps

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Councillor Helen Brown, Cabinet Member for Housing; Chief Officer, Community & Enterprise; Senior Manager, Housing Programmes; Senior Manager, Council Housing Services; Senior Manager, Enterprise & Regeneration; and Finance Manager

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

**94.     DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**

There were no declarations of interest.

**95.     SHARP - THE WALKS, FLINT COUNCIL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT**

The Service Manager - Housing Programmes presented a report to seek support to develop 30 new council homes on The Walks in Flint as part of the Council's Strategic Housing & Regeneration Programme (SHARP). The development of 62 affordable properties for the site, to be managed by NEW Homes, would be dealt with separately due to the different funding streams. Whilst the NEW Homes Board had agreed the principles of the scheme, the final proposals would require Cabinet approval.

Members were reminded of the background to the scheme, linked to the aims of the Flint 2012 Master Plan, to demolish the former maisonettes on the site and replace with a new improved housing and regeneration scheme with reinforced links between the town and castle. Information was shared on the proposed property mix for the scheme and some delay due to archaeological excavations.

The Finance Manager advised that the projected total cost of the scheme for the Council was £3.95M, which averaged £131K per property. She provided explanation on the calculations used to ensure the viability of the scheme through a return after 50 years. Based on the revised Rent Policy set by Welsh Government, the total gross annual rent was set at £144K with an allowance set aside to manage the properties, based on a range of intelligence. She agreed to

respond separately to a request from Councillor Gareth Roberts for clarity on the estimated monthly and annual rent figures appended to the report.

In welcoming the report, the Chairman praised the work carried out by officers to re-house tenants from the former maisonettes.

In response to a question from Councillor George Hardcastle, it was explained that the housing scheme was due for completion in March 2018. When asked about prioritising allocations for the scheme, officers explained the intention to develop a Local Lettings Policy to give flexibility on the allocation of properties on which the Committee and local Members would be consulted nearer the time.

The Chief Officer explained that residents with a local connection were already given priority under the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) policy and that the proposal for a Local Lettings Policy for Flint would enable the Council to give due consideration to those former displaced tenants of the maisonettes who wished to live at the new scheme.

Whilst Councillor Peter Curtis agreed that higher priority should be given to displaced tenants, he questioned whether this should apply to all Flint residents as this could appear unfair to people in other areas of the county where there was no capacity for new housing developments. He also made the point that after giving priority to displaced tenants, the new homes should benefit those in need who had not already been allocated housing.

Councillor David Cox described the proposals as a marvellous opportunity for Flint and hoped that this unique approach would be recognised. Responding to queries, officers advised that building work on extra care provision in Flint was likely to start around 20 June lasting approximately 18 months. Building work on the medical centre was expected to last for a year and would start as soon after negotiations on the sale of land had concluded.

In response to a question from Councillor Paul Cunningham on the nearby archaeological excavations, it was explained that this was due to commence later in the month.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin agreed it was fair to prioritise displaced tenants of Flint ahead of those on the waiting list across the county. When asked about cost calculations, the Finance Manager explained that the interest rate was based on a consolidated rate for the Council as a whole and was currently 4.79% for this scheme. An allowance for major repairs had been set at 0.7% per annum of the build costs based on a benchmarking exercise of new build schemes and a schedule of future work.

The mix of properties was welcomed by Councillor Ian Dunbar who asked about fluctuations in rent levels. The Finance Manager explained that rent was set according to the Rent Policy where, for example, the target rent for a 3-bedroom property in Flint was the same elsewhere in the county. It had been agreed to set a target rent of 105% due to the economic benefits offered by the new properties and to ensure payback of the scheme. In response to further comments, the Chief Officer could not foresee any impact on another scheme

planned in Connah's Quay and spoke about the different elements involved in determining housing schemes such as housing demand, site capacity and consultation with local Members. This prompted discussion on the allocation of housing where 2-bedroom properties were in high demand.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Committee support the development of 30 new Council homes on The Walks, Flint House for a total cost of £3.95M; and
- (b) That the Committee supports the development of joint Marketing and Estate Management Strategies (including Local Lettings Policy) with NEW Homes for The Walks.

**96. WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD COMPLIANCE POLICY - VERIFICATION AND MAINTAINING THE STANDARD**

The Senior Manager - Council Housing Services presented a report to seek support for the introduction of a proposed Compliance Policy and Certificate. This was a requirement from WG to verify the Council's interpretation and achievement of each element of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS). Whilst priority was given to the primary elements of the Standard, the Council had given a commitment to achieve as many secondary 'desirable' elements as possible. The certificates incorporated a range of components in order to meet the WHQS and would be used for new tenants of council homes. A shared arrangement with Wrexham County Borough Council for the independent verification of submissions would result in cost savings. The policy was due to be implemented in the first quarter of 2016/17 and would be subject to ongoing review.

As mentioned on previous occasions, Councillor George Hardcastle felt it was important to consider the option of delaying programmed works for tenants with a history of recurring rent arrears, whilst separating genuine cases of hardship. The Senior Manager said that officers were currently exploring how this could be reviewed on a case by case basis, including consideration of court orders. Details on this approach would be shared with the Committee at a later date as part of the Rent Arrears Annual Report.

Councillor Paul Cunningham commended the work which had been done and said that Flintshire was leading the way.

Following similar comments from Councillor David Cox, the Senior Manager said that progress had been made in publicising the Council's work on achieving the WHQS, including discussions with tenant groups.

In response to remarks on the need for the Council to maintain the standards of housing beyond 2020, Councillor Peter Curtis also highlighted the responsibility of tenants in looking after their properties.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin asked about the arrangements for private rentals and was informed of the requirements of the new WG initiative 'Rent Smart Wales' which applied to private landlords.

The Chairman took the opportunity to praise the team for their excellent work.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Committee support the introduction of the proposed Compliance Policy and Compliance Certificate; and
- (b) That the Committee support the proposed timescales for introduction of the Compliance Policy and review periods.

**97. IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2016/17**

The Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise) introduced a report on sections of the Improvement Plan 2016/17 which were relevant to the Committee. The Improvement Plan, to be finalised and endorsed at the Council meeting in June, had been updated to reflect the key priorities of the Council for next year and retained eight priorities and sub-priorities. Five of the eight priorities continued with a refresh of longer term projects or ambitions, whereas the remaining three had been reviewed to reflect local circumstances and priorities. A new section within each sub-priority referenced national policy issues which could potentially impact the delivery of the priorities.

The Senior Manager for Enterprise & Regeneration referred to the regional economy update given at the March meeting. He provided an overview of the main elements of the priority for 'Economy & Enterprise' which had undergone a major refresh, in particular highlighting the importance of devolution in England providing increased powers at local level which was a key risk. On the priority for 'Poverty', the Chief Officer reported on an additional area to encourage individuals to access employment, together with two risk areas on reduced funding streams and resources to help individuals to manage pressures from welfare reforms.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Committee accepts the content of the Improvement Plan and 'How we Measure Achievement' document for the 'Housing', 'Economy and Enterprise' and 'Poverty' priorities; and
- (b) That the Committee accepts the proposed targets for the national performance indicators.

**98. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

In presenting the current Forward Work Programme for consideration, the Facilitator suggested the following changes which were agreed by the Committee:

- Items on the Purchase of ex-council stock and the Deeside Plan to be deferred to the July meeting.

- Affordable Housing Scheme - The Walks to be brought to the June meeting.
- Following earlier discussion, the Rent Arrears Annual Report and Local Lettings Policy for Flint to be scheduled for a future meeting.

The Chairman thanked Councillor George Hardcastle for chairing the previous meeting in his absence and sought clarification on comments which had been made. Councillor Gareth Roberts explained that he had voiced his dissatisfaction about historic work by Communities First in his ward but had also made the point that he was in no position to judge the work currently taking place. Councillor Hardcastle expressed his disappointment about the incident and suggested that Councillor Roberts apologise to the officers who had been present at the time, to which he declined.

**RESOLVED:**

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

**99. 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 11.05 am)

.....

**Chairman**