

COMMUNITY & ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 23 November 2016
Report Subject	Regeneration Programmes
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Housing Cabinet Member for Economic Development
Report Author	Chief Officer, Community and Enterprise
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this Report is outline the activity of the Regeneration Service over the last 12 months.

The report will include an update on the Vibrant & Viable Places Programme, including how the grant funding was spent and the outcomes achieved.

The report will also consider the broader housing improvement activity of the Service, including disabled adaptations, energy efficiency schemes, empty homes and the reduction of housing hazards through the various Council and Welsh Government Loan Schemes.

Finally the report will explore how the Service is supporting town centres, including capital improvement projects and supporting the Town Partnerships to meet their objectives in a more sustainable way.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That Members review the progress of the Regeneration Service over the last 12 months.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	
1.01	<p><u>Vibrant and Viable Places</u></p> <p>The Welsh Government Vibrant and Viable Places (VVP) programme was launched in May 2013 and all local authorities were invited to submit competitive proposals. The VVP objectives are that “everyone in Wales should live in well-connected vibrant, viable and sustainable communities with a strong local economy and good quality of life”.</p> <p>Flintshire County Council was successful after submitting a programme of work for the Deeside area, including transport improvements, housing investment, town centre regeneration and action to support business growth and skills. This success follows previous achievements; securing Communities First status, Housing Renewal Area and Enterprise Zone programmes.</p> <p>The Council was initially awarded £6.024m over a period of three years to target regeneration projects in Deeside. This was subsequently increased to £7.391m as a result of the excellent progress made and the ability of the Council to take up funds from other VVP areas where full spend could not be achieved. These funds have been supported by public and private investment and have resulted in a number of key regeneration achievements to date.</p>
1.02	<p>The current VVP programme comes to an end on 31 March 2017. The Welsh Government has not given any indication of how regeneration activity will be funded after this point.</p>
	<p><u>VVP projects</u></p>
1.02	<p>£280,000 of VVP grant funding has been allocated to the Deeside Shopfront Improvement Grant (DSIG) scheme which funds grants of up to £15,000 to improve the external appearance of shops and commercial premises within the Deeside town centres of Connah’s Quay, Garden City, Shotton and Queensferry.</p> <p>The scheme, which offers 80% of the funding needed per property and which has been running since September 2015, is currently helping 14 shop tenants and property owners.</p> <p>Actual building work on the first scheme started in September and is due to be completed by December 2016. The other schemes will all be completed by 31st March 2017.</p>
1.03	<p>The Living Over The Shops (LOTS) grant through VVP offers £20,000 towards renovating existing accommodation, or converting unused storage space above shops into residential accommodation within the designated VVP area. £60,000 per year has been available to the Council over a period of 3 years, funding 3 projects per year. Under a condition of the funding, the Council has nomination rights for tenants in the new units.</p>

1.04	<p>A total of 366 Council homes across Deeside have received solar panels, making homes more energy efficient and reducing fuel poverty. This targeted investment complements the wider energy strategy of insulating properties, both internally and externally, as well as bringing gas to communities that have previously been reliant on more expensive forms of heating.</p> <p>The benefit of the panels is that they will reduce the running costs of the properties, helping to tackle fuel poverty and reduce carbon emissions. The tenants will benefit from free electricity during daylight hours and the Council derives an income from the surplus electricity produced, that can be reinvested in the housing stock.</p>
1.05	<p>181 private homeowners have also been able to benefit from external wall insulation applied to their properties to date, with a further 70 homeowners set to benefit in this final year of the programme. External wall insulation is a relatively expensive measure to install but provides huge benefits in terms of the thermal efficiency of properties. Through the current round of funding the Council has been targeting solid walled properties on certain streets across Deeside.</p> <p>The increased thermal efficiency of these properties will act to significantly reduce fuel bills and help alleviate fuel poverty. The scheme, which asks for a £500 contribution from the homeowner, has been very popular and demand remains high. The current funding has been committed, but the Council is retaining a list of interested homeowners in the event that more funding is secured.</p>
1.06	<p>The VVP programme has also contributed to the delivery of the Council's Renewal Area programme in Deeside, specifically the Group Repair Scheme.</p> <p>The Group Repair Scheme is jointly funded by VVP, Specific Capital Grant Funding for Renewal Areas, Flintshire County Council and client contributions which are means tested. The aim of the programme is to improve older private properties in the area so that they can continue to offer good quality accommodation into the future.</p> <p>The Group Repair Scheme consists of the external refurbishment of privately owned properties within the Renewal Area which includes the renewal of slate roof coverings, fascia's, guttering, down pipes, soil stacks, windows, external doors, front boundary walls, fences, paths, gates and structural repair works.</p> <p>£200,000 of VVP funding was spent on the Group Repair Scheme on thirteen properties in Glynne Street, Queensferry during 2014/15, whilst a further £250,000 was spent on 22 Group Repair Scheme properties in Glynne Street, and Bank Road, Connah's Quay during 2015/16.</p> <p>The Welsh Government sources of funding for the Renewal Area are expected to end in March 2017. There remain considerable tranches of the original Renewal Area programme still to be delivered for which alternatives sources of funding will need to be sought.</p>

1.07	<p>The new Deeside Leisure Centre hub has benefitted from a £250,000 investment, with major funding from VVP. The internal foyer, main entrance and play area has undergone a major refurbishment. The foyer has been transformed and redecorated to complement the new integrated Deeside Library. The entrance has been landscaped to improve its visual appeal, access and lighting. A range of new play items have been installed that has improved both the look and play value that includes picnic tables and seats. This play area is very popular with young families and leisure centre customers.</p>
1.08	<p>The VVP funding has also delivered a wide range of regeneration and environmental improvement projects:</p> <p>Purchase of the former Dairy site in Connah's Quay for redevelopment.</p> <p>Programme of environmental improvements in Garden City.</p> <p>Lighting along National Cycle Route 5 between Dock Road, Connah's Quay and Deeside Industrial Park. In 2015 approximately 65,000 cyclists and 54,000 pedestrians used this route.</p> <p>Widening and upgrading existing footpaths and footways between Sandycroft, Queensferry and Shotton to provide a shared use walking and cycling facility.</p> <p>Installation of a toucan crossing in Church Street, Connah's Quay.</p> <p>Increasing the car parking spaces in Terrig Street and Shotton Station car park.</p> <p>Welsh Road recreation ground in Sealand now has a new Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA), replacing an old kickback goal and installing a new fence along Welsh Road. A major refurbishment is also transforming the play equipment with new panels and ropes, replacement handrails and seats.</p> <p>Central Drive recreation ground, Shotton has been landscaped and includes new pedestrian link pathways within the recreation ground, new seating and fencing. A new entrance gate will also improve wheelchair and double buggy access improving the appeal of the area.</p> <p>Alexandra Street play area, Shotton been improved with the provision of a range of dynamic play equipment.</p> <p>Central Park play area, Connah's Quay now has a MUGA for informal ball sports that can be used all year.</p>
1.09	<p>Groundwork North Wales has been working in partnership with the Council and Welsh Government (through the Vibrant and Viable Regeneration Programme) to offer a better future and new opportunities to young people in Flintshire.</p> <p>The Green Team programme started in September 2014 and, to date, five phases of the traineeship programme have been delivered, providing around 90 young people who are not in education, employment or training with a 12 week practical traineeship programme. The young people receive training and employability skills and in addition get practical work experience delivering local community projects improving the appearance</p>

	<p>of green spaces around Deeside.</p> <p>Projects that trainees have worked on have regenerated and refreshed areas around Deeside including creating new cycle paths at Wepre Park, maintaining and improving the grounds at the Connah's Quay Health Centre, and clearing up the High Street in Connah's Quay.</p> <p>Part of the programme has also been inspiring the young people about potential opportunities for local employment. Throughout all the phases of Green Team, Groundwork have been fortunate to get support from local employers including Toyota, Coleg Cambria, Wagtail Specialist Dog Services and Lend Lease - Wrexham Prison Construction Development.</p> <p>The combination of learning new skills and practical work experience has led to some very positive outcomes for the programme to date with the participants gaining 260 qualifications and over 50% of the young people going on to new employment or training.</p>
	<p><u>Disabled Facilities Grants</u></p>
1.10	<p>The Council is required by the Housing Grants, Construction & Regeneration Act 1996 to respond to applications for Disabled Facilities Grants. These mandatory grants are provided to ensure that disabled persons can have full and safe access to their accommodation.</p> <p>The types of work included as part of a disabled facilities grant is anything that costs in excess of £1,000, up to the statutory maximum of £36,000. Typical adaptations are the provision of level access showers, adapted kitchens, door widening, and the installation of ramps and grab rails. Specialist work includes the installation of stair lifts and through floor lifts. The administration of the Disabled Facilities Grant is performed by the Council's Regeneration team, following a referral from an Occupational Therapist (OT).</p> <p>It was identified in May 2016 that performance in meeting the target of 247 days average for adult adaptations was low and worsening and therefore more concentrated action and monitoring was put in place.</p>
1.11	<p><u>Performance data</u></p> <p>The performance data for 2015/16 showed that the service had achieved an average completion within 304 days compared to the target of 247 days. 94 adult DFGs were completed.</p> <p>The first two quarters of 2016/17 have seen average timescales fall. In quarter one 11 adult adaptations were completed with an average timescale of 245 days. In quarter two the average was 203 days for 25 completions.</p> <p>Although this is very positive, it is not considered to be sustainable improvement and it is important that the action plan is fully delivered to improve performance in the long term.</p>

1.12	<p data-bbox="304 123 414 156"><u>Actions</u></p> <table border="1" data-bbox="304 331 1380 2060"> <tr> <td data-bbox="304 331 603 723">Learn from more highly performing Councils</td> <td data-bbox="603 331 1380 723"> <p data-bbox="619 331 1364 701">A visit was undertaken to Conwy CBC (average time for adult DFGs around 150 days). Overall, the processes used were found to be very similar to those in Flintshire. Following up from the visit it was decided to drop the current requirement for mortgage lender consents for every DFG as this is not part of the Conwy process, can add up to 90 days or more to the timetable and offers no extra protection to the Council. This has now been implemented.</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="304 723 603 1003">Improve case management</td> <td data-bbox="603 723 1380 1003"> <p data-bbox="619 723 1364 981">Monthly case management reviews have been put in place and have been able to identify cases that have become blocked in the system. The enhanced Civica system had become stalled but since May has now been fully developed and tested and is due for staff training and adoption this month.</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="304 1003 603 1249">Recruit into vacant positions</td> <td data-bbox="603 1003 1380 1249"> <p data-bbox="619 1003 1364 1227">The service has a number of empty positions in the adaptation team which have been traditionally hard to fill. Most of them are currently covered by agency staff and, pending job evaluation, the posts are to be re-advertised as a group in more specialized channels during December 2016.</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="304 1249 603 2060">Introduce “stop the clock” protocol</td> <td data-bbox="603 1249 1380 2060"> <p data-bbox="619 1249 1364 1507">At present, the DFG timetable continues (and the Council’s performance is judged) regardless of whether it is in Council control or not. It is proposed that the counter for DFGs will be stopped when the process leaves Council control so that performance is more accurately measured. There will be two types of events that will trigger this:</p> <p data-bbox="619 1529 1364 1742">Very occasionally, there is a blockage in the DFG timetable that can’t be resolved by the Council due to external factors. It is proposed that, subject to Cabinet member consent, these cases will be placed on hold and the clock stopped until the blockage is resolved.</p> <p data-bbox="619 1753 1364 2045">More frequently, adaptations are placed on hold over short periods while the needs of the individual are reassessed and reconsidered. In these, more administrative, circumstance the case will be placed on hold whilst this adjustment is made and the reopened when the DFG can proceed again. 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	Introduce new procurement arrangements	The Council is introducing a new procurement framework for adaptations. This will speed up the process for adaptations by removing the tender process, relying instead on a rotation of companies on the framework. It will also require companies to start on site more promptly which can be a source of delay in the process currently. The contractor and supplier submissions are being evaluated currently.
	<u>Empty Homes</u>	
1.13	<p>The Houses Into Homes (H2H) interest free loan is proving to be increasingly popular. The Empty Homes Development Officer has received an increase in enquiries and demand over the last few months. The initial loans released 3 years ago at the start of the scheme are now being re-paid and will be re-issued to new applicants as soon as possible.</p> <p>In total the Council initially received £876,000 of funding, £673,000 of this has been released to applicants, with the remaining £203,000 already allocated to projects that are waiting to obtain planning permission. In addition to this, the Council also received a further £541,000 of H2H funding last year. The majority of the most recent funding is also provisionally allocated.</p> <p>In terms of overall Empty Homes activity, 33 properties received direct assistance from the service in 2015/16 financial year. The figures includes:</p> <p>5 Living Over The Shops (LOTS) grants, fully project managed from start to hand over to North East Wales Homes, the Council's housing company.</p> <p>2 Empty property grants, fully managed. One of which was Baines house, a HMO now providing accommodation for vulnerable people and is being managed by the Housing Solutions Team.</p> <p>Project management of the demolition of 9 properties owned by the local authority, including 7 terraced houses, the old dairy and former magistrates court/police station. These sites will be redeveloped through the SHARP Programme.</p> <p>5 Houses Into Homes loans processed and released.</p> <p>3 long term empty properties returned to use via the Council's empty homes match making service (owners are put in touch with developers/first time buyers wishing to purchase empty property)</p> <p>9 other long term problematic empty properties returned to use through minor enforcement and direct assistance.</p>	
1.14	<u>Town Centre regeneration</u>	
1.15	<p>The focus of the Service since the Roger Tym and Partners Town Centre health check study in 2009 has been on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. improving the image and appearance of the town centres; 2. encouraging investment; and 3. attracting customers. 	

	<p>The Service was successful in securing and managing over £5m in investment funds for the town centres to improve their physical appearance and tackle vacant properties. The Service also helped to establish new partnership structures in most of the towns.</p> <p>The final projects from this phase of work are currently underway: improvements to the Square outside St. Mary's Church in Flint and property improvement in Buckley town centre.</p>
1.16	<p>A review is now underway of the future approach to supporting town centres in Flintshire. Smaller town centres across the UK continue to face major challenges to their sustainability including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a decline in retail scale and viability due to changing consumer behaviour and increased retailer concentration in the larger centres; reduced retail investment since the economic downturn; rents reflecting previous economic conditions and acting as a barrier to new business and weakening current business viability; and buildings and land uses reflect historic economic conditions and are slow to adapt to changing needs. <p>The review will identify where, with limited resources, the Council can intervene to help to sustain and adapt town centres to future community needs.</p>
	<u>Service planning</u>
1.17	<p>As part of the medium term planning for the Service consideration is being given as to what priorities the Council should focus on at a time when external grants are diminishing.</p> <p>A Private Sector Housing Stock Condition and Energy Survey has been commissioned which will inform a revised Private Sector Housing Renewal and Improvement Policy. This revised Policy will be subject to public consultation and provided to Scrutiny in the new year for implementation from 1st April 2017.</p> <p>The future approach from Welsh Government to Renewal Area and Regeneration Area funding remains unclear at present and therefore the scale of resources available for regeneration projects is unknown. The service will continue to secure external funding for projects wherever possible.</p> <p>The Service staffing complement is directly linked to the size of the capital programme to be delivered.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	None arising directly from this report.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	<p>In respect of the Vibrant & Viable Places Programme the Service consults with the Deeside Forum (local elected representatives) and the Deeside Partnership who are the governing for the Programme.</p> <p>For the town centre programmes the Service works closely with local partnerships and other stakeholders.</p>

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	<p>The Service is maintains a risk log which identifies project and programme risks. All risks are present require close monitoring, but there are no risks for which action is required at this stage.</p>

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>None.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Gavin Griffith Telephone: 01352 703428 E-mail: Gavin.Griffith@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>V&VP – Vibrant & Viable Places – a Welsh Government funded Regeneration Programme across Deeside</p> <p>DFG – Disabled Facilities Grant – provision of disabled adaptations in private homes</p> <p>H2H – Houses into Homes – a loan scheme funded by Welsh Government devised to bring long term empty homes (over 6 months) back in to use.</p> <p>HIL – Home Improvement Loan - a loan scheme funded by Welsh Government devised to repair and improve owner occupied and privately rented properties.</p>