

COMMUNITY HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 FEBRUARY 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Community, Housing & Assets Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a remote attendance meeting on Wednesday, 9 February 2022

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

Councillors: Geoff Collett, Adele Davies-Cooke, Mared Eastwood, Veronica Gay, Dennis Hutchinson Kevin Rush, Brian Lloyd, Ian Dunbar (Chair), Helen Brown

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor David Wisinger (for David Cox), Councillor Sean Bibby (for Ron Davies)

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Dave Hughes (Cabinet Member for Housing); Chief Officer (Social Services); Housing & Prevention Senior Manager; Housing Programme Services Manager; Benefits Manager and Strategic Finance Manager – Commercial & Housing

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

41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillor Sean Bibby declared an interest in Agenda item 7 (NEW Homes Business Plan) and advised that he would leave the meeting prior to discussion on this item.

42. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2022, were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillor David Wisinger and Councillor Dennis Hutchinson.

RESOLVED:

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

43. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme for consideration. She referred to the March meeting which had been cancelled due to the Local Government Elections scheduled to be held in May, 2022. She reported no changes to the items shown for the future meetings scheduled for June and July, 2022. In relation to the actions arising from the last meeting, the Facilitator confirmed that they had all been completed, as shown at Appendix 2 of the report.

The recommendations outlined within the report were moved and seconded by Councillor Mared Eastwood and Councillor Helen Brown.

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 progress made in completing the outstanding actions be noted.

44. HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRAMME (HSP)

The Housing & Prevention Senior Manager presented a report to provide an overview of the Housing Support Programme (HSP) Strategy requirements and the approach taken in Flintshire to develop and adopt the HSP Strategy by the end of March 2022. The HSP Strategy was appended to the report, together with details for delivery and monitoring and supporting Action Plan for the period 2022-2026.

The Housing & Prevention Senior Manager highlighted the following areas, as detailed in the report:

- Housing Support Programme Strategy
- Housing Support Grant
- Housing Support Grant Services
- Developing the Housing Support Programme Strategy
- HSP Strategy Vision, Principles and Priorities
- HSP Strategy Local Action Plan
- Regional Working

Whilst each Local Authority was adopting their own HSP Strategy for 2022-2026, there remained a clear commitment to joint working across the region. Partnership working through the development of the HSP Strategies had been positive and North Wales continued to be respected for its joined-up activities and collaborative working by Welsh Government (WG) and other regions.

The Chairman thanked the Housing & Prevention Senior Manager for the detailed report and asked for an update on the additional provision for homelessness in Connah's Quay. The Housing & Prevention Senior Manager provided an update and advised that refurbishment works continued to ensure 6 additional units for temporary accommodation in Connah's Quay. He also reported on sites that had been secured in Flint and Holywell for additional temporary accommodation that would become a Housing Revenue Account asset in the future.

Councillor Helen Brown asked if an alternative site to the current Homeless Hub in Queensferry had been identified. She asked whether the service was looking to provide opportunities to apprentices and asked what support was being provided for mental health as this was closely linked to homelessness and outlined the pressures being put currently on Social Care Services. The Housing & Prevention Senior Manager explained that a site had been identified and once in a position to do so, he would share this information with Members. In terms of apprenticeships, he said that they had asked for apprenticeships within their service and that discussions had started

on how this could be enhanced across Flintshire, including working in partnership with some of the commissioning services, as well funding targeted support through the communities for work programme.

The Chief Officer (Social Services) advised that mental health was a key issue for all residents across Flintshire and services were promoting positive mental health. He said that how mental health issues were reflected in the Council's Council Plan moving forward was raised at a recent Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting, with an action arising that Social Services officers meet with the Strategic Performance Advisor to ensure issues of mental health that the Council had control over was included in the Council Plan. He suggested that an invitation to this meeting be extended to Housing Service officers.

In response to a question from Councillor Dennis Hutchinson around Debt Advice Services, the Benefits Manager explained that funding from WG had ended but highlighted the Winter Support Scheme which had been increased from £100 to £200 and suggested that the information on the Scheme launched on 13th December, and previously circulated to the Committee, be re-circulated following the meeting. The Housing & Prevention Senior Manager also agreed to circulate a briefing/reference paper which would assist Members in signposting residents to services, which included the Housing Gateway, to all Members following the meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor David Wisinger on possible land which could be utilised in Queensferry, the Housing & Prevention Senior Manager agreed to liaise with the Housing Programme Services Manager on the possible use of this land following the meeting and report back to Councillor Wisinger.

The recommendations as outlined within the report were moved by Councillor Dennis Hutchinson and seconded by Councillor David Wisinger.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee support the Housing Support Programme (HSP) Strategy, as attached at Appendix 1 of the report, ahead of formal consideration by Cabinet; and
- (b) That the Committee note the work undertaken to date in developing the HSP Strategy for Flintshire ahead of its adoption on 31 March, 2022.

45. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION HOMELESSNESS AUDIT 2021 FININGS REPORT

The Housing & Prevention Senior Manager introduced a report to confirm the outcome of a recent Audit of the management of temporary accommodation within Flintshire. The audit had highlighted a number of areas for improvement and was categorised as a Red Audit Report.

A number of areas for improvement and operational challenges associated with the management of the Temporary Accommodation portfolio were identified by the Service Manager who had requested an audit to test the service before focussing on

service growth plans. The audit presented an invaluable opportunity for an independent assessment of the service and an opportunity to identify areas of focus for service improvement.

A detailed Service Improvement Plan to compliment the Audit Response and pick up on all the actions required to deliver on the Audit recommendations would see a stronger focus placed on the core principles of housing management that were needed to turn the service around and offer assurance that it was run effectively.

The Chairman thanked the Housing & Prevention Senior Manager for the detailed report and welcomed the Service Improvement Plan.

Councillor Helen Brown suggested that an additional recommendation be added to that shown in the report, that the Committee receive a further update report in due course and that this be added to the Committee's Forward Work Programme. She also asked whether a Task and Finish Group made up of Members of the Committee and a representative of the Tenants Associations be established to review progress of the Improvement Plan. The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator explained that due to the Local Government Elections being held in May 2022, it would not be appropriate at the current time to set up a Task and Finish Group. If the Committee supported the suggestion that it receives an update report later in the year, the Committee could consider at this time whether the establishment of a Task and Finish Group was still needed. The Housing & Prevention Senior Manager also added that future reports would include an update on service user involvement.

Councillor Kevin Rush expressed concern around the lack of IT support and asked for an update on the number of Void properties across Flintshire. The Housing & Prevention Senior Manager advised that assurance had been given that there would be capacity within the IT service to provide the necessary support going forward. The Benefits Manager reported that there were currently 217 Void properties across Flintshire. These continued to be monitored regularly and she explained that there was a great deal of information provided on why a property was Void.

The recommendation as outlined in the report, together with the suggestion that the Committee receive an update report in due course, was moved by Councillor David Wisinger and seconded by Councillor Kevin Rush.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee support the Temporary Accommodation Improvement Plan, as attached at Appendix 2 of the report; and
- (b) That the Committee receive an update report in due course, on the progress being made to complete the Temporary Accommodation Improvement Plan.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 – TO CONSIDER THE EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded for the remainder of the meeting for the following items by virtue of exempt information under paragraph(s) 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

46. NEW HOMES BUSINESS PLAN

The Housing Programme Services Manager and Strategic Finance Manager – Commercial & Housing jointly presented the NEW Homes Business Plan 2022/2051 prior to submission to Cabinet. The Business Plan set out key elements of the company’s proposed Development Strategy to increase the number of affordable rent properties delivered over the next two years.

Councillor Mared Eastwood recommended that the Committee recommend the NEW Homes Business Plan 2022/2051 to Cabinet and this was seconded by Councillor Lloyd.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee recommend the NEW Homes Business Plan 2022/2051 be approved by Cabinet.

47. 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 11.42 a.m.)

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Chairman