

EXECUTIVE
3RD FEBRUARY 2009

Minutes of the special meeting of the Executive of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Tuesday, 3rd February 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor A Woolley (Chairman)

Councillors: C. Ellis, P.G. Heesom, M. Higham, H.D. Hutchinson, N. Matthews, N. Phillips, L.A. Sharps, N.R. Steele-Mortimer and H. Yale.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors: J.B. Attridge, K. Armstrong-Braun, R.C. Bithell and W.O.Thomas.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Director of Community Services, Director of Environment, Director of Lifelong Learning, Director of Environment, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Head of Finance, Assistant Director ICT and Customer Services and Head of Committee, Member and Electoral Services.

Mr David Webster (PWC) was also in attendance.

242. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors C. Ellis, N. Phillips and H. Yale declared non-prejudicial personal interests in Agenda Item No. 3 – The Future of the Council's Housing Stock.

243. THE FUTURE OF THE COUNCIL'S HOUSING STOCK

The Chief Executive presented a joint report by himself, the Director of Community Services, Head of Finance and Head of Legal and Democratic Services. The purpose of the report was to inform the Executive of the outcomes and recommendations from the work of the Local Strategic Housing Review Board and to advise the Executive to recommend to Council that it should resolve to ballot tenants on a full transfer model and inform the Welsh Assembly Government accordingly.

The Chief Executive apologised for the report being tabled at the meeting and explained that this was as a result of the phased deliberations of the Local Strategic Housing Review Board. It was also considered important that the Executive considered the recommendations prior to the County Council meeting on 17th February as housing was an Executive function.

The Executive had received previous reports over the setting up of the Local Strategic Housing Review Board and its terms of reference. In addition to completing its work under the terms of reference, the Board had also considered reports on Gap Funding, flexibility in the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, validation of the 2007 Stock Condition Survey and partial retention/transfer models. The decision to explore partial retention/transfer models had resulted in consultants being commissioned to evaluate a series of models through a competitive process. The models were based on retention to the sheltered housing stock and/or stock retention in localities

where the Council had a significant property holding. Tribal Consulting had been commissioned to complete this evaluation and reported to successive Board meetings in January.

The Chief Executive referred to the County Council deferring making a decision on whether to ballot tenants on a full transfer model pending further exploration locally and with the Assembly on the following key strategic issues:-

- Protecting the interests of its tenants post transfer to a social landlord;
- The viability and continuity of residual functions such as homelessness;
- The fitness for purpose of the management and maintenance function; and
- The future of the non-traditional housing stock.

The Local Strategic Housing Review Board had received reports on all aspects of its terms of reference and a summary of their considerations including the examination of partial retention/transfer was attached as Appendix B to the report. The full reports considered by the Board were available for inspection. The Board had provided over these meetings written reports to cover every listed part of the original terms of reference. It was, however, accepted that the Board had had limited time to discuss these reports in depth but the Board had had sufficient information to provide the Executive with at least basic information for it to advise the full Council in reaching a final decision on stock options.

The Board had been advised that the future of the non-traditional housing stock would have to be determined prior to developing any full or partial transfer offer document and that the improvement/replacement of the non-traditional housing stock in the centre of Flint could not be fully addressed within the Housing Finance system and would require a broader regeneration solution with the agreement of the Assembly. Officers had advised that whereas the Flint high rise non-traditional housing could be improved and maintained to WHQS compliance for a sufficient period to be cost effective, the maisonettes could not. This posed a significant challenge to either replace the maisonettes with comparable accommodation given the limitations of the Social Housing Grant criteria which required additionality and could not be drawn down for replacement housing. Secondly to offer the existing tenants suitable alternative accommodation given the number of family units involved and the social impacts of community displacement.

The conclusive advice of Tribal Consulting, as the independent advisors, and that of the statutory and senior officers of the Council, was that none of the partial retention/transfer models were viable within the National Housing Revenue Account Capital Finance System.

Housing stock transfer was a considerable undertaking and the process both up to ballot and beyond, had to comply with the Welsh Assembly Government's Guidelines. Appendix D to the report provided an indicative timescale with the key actions leading up to a ballot and there was a realistic expectation that this would be a period of up to 12 months. To facilitate this

process it would be necessary to establish a Council governance and decision making structure, with delegated authority to deal with the issues partly considered by the Local Strategic Housing Review Board and the recruitment and appointment of advisors. The consultants required to be appointed together with a brief summary of their role was set out in paragraph 3.12 of the report.

In conclusion, the Chief Executive emphasised the importance that the Welsh Assembly Government requirements to explore all possibilities had been met. He also referred to the documentation considered by the Housing Strategy Review Board which was available for all members and the press and a full copy would be filed in the Group Rooms before consideration by the County Council. He thanked everyone who had been involved in this process for their co-operation.

The Leader emphasised the importance of proper procedures to be adopted and the delivery of a result to reflect the decision of tenants and it was important that Members did not campaign for or against retention or transfer.

The Executive Member for Housing Strategy and Planning, as the Chairman of the Housing Strategy Review Board, thanked everyone involved for the help and advice received and the level of understanding and agreement. He agreed with the contents of the Chief Executive's report but there were a number of issues which needed to be addressed. He made particular reference to the number of stakeholders such as tenants, the result of the ballot being an informed outcome and also made reference to the Local Authority as a stakeholder and the keeper of a significant value of assets. It was important to recognise the views of the Deputy Minister and move forward to the meeting of the County Council with a message that the Council was striving to provide a good housing service and it was a matter for the tenants to express a view. The recommendations of the report were to proceed to a ballot of the Council's tenants.

The Executive Member for Education and Youth seconded the proposal and complemented the Executive Member on the work undertaken on this project over a long period of time.

The Executive Member for Housing Strategy and Planning responded to a question on the extent of the ballot; it was the view of the Panel to ballot tenants on the options to transfer or retention. In relation to the Flint maisonettes, the Council was constrained by the analysis and bill of costs for the WQHS and the Savilles' Stock Survey which included the maisonettes upgrade. The Board had considered that separating these issues was not possible and it would be necessary to ballot on the housing stock in its entirety.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the tenants would be balloted on a full transfer model. He referred to the non-traditional housing stock in the centre of Flint and to the high rise non-traditional housing which it was considered could be improved and maintained to the WHQS compliance for a

sufficient period to be cost effective. However, this was not possible with the maisonettes. Meetings had been held with the Minister regarding a solution which went beyond the current considerations and the need to provide a suitable alternative accommodation without dismantling a community. This needed to be treated separately by the Assembly.

The Executive Member for Corporate Governance and Strategy asked for clarification as to how the ballot would be undertaken and the Chief Executive confirmed that there were Welsh Assembly Government guidelines on this process and Members would be briefed on this in due course.

The Chief Executive answered specific questions from Members and confirmed that communication was a key issue and a workforce communication would be issued following this meeting of the Executive. Ongoing consultation would be required throughout the process particularly with tenants and staff.

RESOLVED:

That it be recommended to the County Council:-

- a) That the Executive notes the work completed by the Local Strategic Housing Review Board according to its original and extended terms of reference;
- b) That the Executive accepts the recommendation of the Board that none of the partial retention/transfer models evaluated were viable within the National Housing Revenue Account Capital Financing System;
- c) That in accordance with the agreement with the Assembly and the recommendation of the Local Housing Strategic Review Board, the Council be recommended to proceed to ballot its tenants on a full transfer model;
- d) That the Executive approves appropriate communications with the Welsh Assembly Government, tenants, Trade Unions, employees and other interested parties;
- e) That the Executive appoint an appropriate project governance and decision making structure to oversee the ballot process including a Project Board based on the Local Strategic Housing Board model; and
- f) That the Executive commence the process of appointing specialist consultants.

244. DURATION OF MEETING

The meeting commenced at 9.30 am and ended at 10.30 am.

245. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were two members of the press present.

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Chairman

SUMMARY OF DECLARATIONS MADE BY MEMBERS
IN ACCORDANCE WITH FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S
CODE OF CONDUCT

EXECUTIVE	DATE: 3rd February 2009
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MEMBER	ITEM	MIN. NO. REFERS
C. Ellis N. Phillips H. Yale	The Future of the Council's Housing Stock	