

## **HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**30 MAY 2012**

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 Wednesday, 30 May 2012

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

Councillors Amanda Bragg, David Cox, Peter Curtis, Glenys Diskin, Rosetta Dolphin, Jim Falshaw, Alison Halford, Ray Hughes, Brian Lloyd, Mike Reece, Gareth Roberts and Sharon Williams

**SUBSTITUTES:** Councillors Haydn Bateman (for George Hardcastle) and Stella Jones (for Ron Davies)

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillors Bernie Attridge, Marion Bateman, Patrick Heesom, Dennis Hutchinson and Christine Jones

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Cabinet Member for Housing, Director of Community Services and Head of Housing

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Environment & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

### **1. CHANGE TO AGENDA**

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Facilitator explained that the Quarter 4 Performance report had been included on the agenda in error and would be deferred to the meeting scheduled for 27 June 2012, with the report to be re-issued with the agenda for that meeting.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR**

Nominations were sought for a Vice-Chair for the Committee. Nominations for Councillors R. Hughes and G. Hardcastle were both seconded and on being put to the vote, the proposal for Councillor G. Hardcastle to be Vice-Chair was carried.

**RESOLVED:**

That Councillor G. Hardcastle be appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee.

### **4. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2012 had been circulated with the agenda.

## Matters Arising

Update on the Repair and Maintenance Service - Councillor G.H. Bateman asked if £200,000 had been transferred from the HRA budget to address the backlog of repairs and the Cabinet Member for Housing confirmed this was the case.

Development of the Community Based Warden Support Service - Councillor P.J. Curtis asked if a meeting of the sub-committee would be convened to report on progress with the service and to receive feedback on the changes made. The Cabinet Member for Housing agreed that this would be arranged.

### **RESOLVED:**

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

## **5. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEES' TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Environment & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the report to inform the Committee of its Terms of Reference, set in the context of Terms of Reference of all of the Overview & Scrutiny Committees. She explained that the Terms of Reference would assist the Committee in determining future items for the Forward Work Programme and took the opportunity to highlight the availability of Overview & Scrutiny training sessions for Members.

Whilst providing an overview of Housing services, the Director of Community Services commented on improved performance during the past two years and suggested that the Committee may wish to consider a consultation paper produced by the Welsh Government (WG) on homes for Wales. He went on to provide information on the five main services within the Housing section:

- Housing Asset Management
- Neighbourhood Housing Management
- Community Support Services
- Housing Renewal
- Housing Strategy

The Head of Housing detailed performance improvements following changes implemented to processes and staffing structures, including work undertaken to reduce the number of empty properties and rent arrears. She also spoke about challenges in the service such as taking steps to address the 25% increase in homelessness presentations which would be further affected by welfare reforms.

The Director listed the priorities for the year ahead:

- (i) increasing the supply of affordable housing by delivering the objectives of the Housing Strategy by 2016;
- (ii) minimising homelessness by offering integrated services and ensuring that no person is placed in temporary accommodation for more than 12 months, by 2016;

- (iii) ensuring that the Housing Landlords service achieves performance in the top quartile by 2016;
- (iv) ensuring that quality standards are raised in the private sector by delivery of the revised private sector improvement policy; and
- (v) completion of the Flint Masterplan and delivery of new homes and services in Flintshire and wider areas.

In response to questions raised by Councillor A.M. Halford, the Director confirmed that the Empty Homes Working Group had been disbanded following agreement of the Members involved and he suggested that the WG paper be circulated to Members with a possible workshop arranged. Following a further query on the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS), the Leader referred to Council Priority No. 8 carried over from the former Council administration together with other Cabinet priorities. He stressed the importance of understanding subsidy changes and early discussions with officers and WG representatives on how to achieve the WHQS with involvement from Overview & Scrutiny Members.

Due to concerns about increasing pressure on services, Councillor S. Jones asked about monitoring of the Welfare Rights and Homelessness service to ensure that the workload was manageable. On Anti-Social Behaviour, she spoke of the need to involve outside bodies on issues beyond the jurisdiction of the Council. The Director gave assurance that the Welfare Rights service would continue to be monitored and that wider partners would be involved in anti-social behaviour issues.

The Cabinet Member for Housing remarked on a meeting on anti-social behaviour in 2011 in which different groups had signed up to a Compact and said that all parties would need to be accountable.

Councillor R. Dolphin referred to legislation recently introduced where the Police would investigate incidents of anti-social behaviour if at least five complaints had been received and suggested that the Council could adopt a similar approach. Councillor P.J Curtis commented on the need for all complaints to be acted upon. The Head of Housing reassured Members that regardless of the number of complaints, all incidents of anti-social behaviour were investigated and that Members' comments would be taken into consideration as part of improvements to the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

Councillor Dolphin also suggested that a list of meanings for abbreviations used in reports would be useful and the Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator agreed to provide this to all Members. In response to a further query, the Director said that the need to encourage more private sector property rentals would be addressed in the new policy.

In response to comments from Councillor H.G. Roberts on empty homes, the Head of Housing explained that a recent audit had identified around 500 empty properties in Flintshire. She referred to £200,000 capital funding from WG to help improve homes and the potential for this amount to double, however some properties would require significant investment. Owner contributions could be made via the Council's loan scheme, allowing the Council to have nomination rights. The aforementioned WG White Paper included a proposal to allow

Councils to increase the amount of Council Tax on properties which remained empty over the longer term.

Due to Members' comments on the WG White Paper, the Director suggested that this could be included in the Committee's Forward Work Programme at an early stage, to be discussed under the last item of the agenda. Members also requested that Anti-Social Behaviour and Empty Properties be included on the Programme.

On Anti-Social Behaviour, Councillor R. Hughes asked if nuisance noise monitoring equipment was still in use and the Head of Housing confirmed this.

The Chairman commented that the backlog of repairs had been a concern of the Committee and asked whether the intention for in-house teams to carry out work on disabled adaptations would affect this. The Head of Housing said that additional posts had been created for the Disabled Adaptations Team and therefore did not affect those working on the backlog of repairs which was expected to have ceased by August 2012.

Councillor Curtis stressed the importance of allocating a completion deadline to repair requests and for tradesmen to undertake repairs at the allotted time. In response to queries on the involvement of Members, the Head of Housing explained that local Members could not be informed of progress on repairs in their wards as a matter of course, as around 40,000 repairs were undertaken each year, however Members who had been specifically involved with a repair issue would receive feedback. Members who were aware of cases where this was not happening were encouraged to pursue with Housing officers.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be noted.

**6. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Facilitator introduced the report which gave Members the opportunity to consider and update the Committee's Forward Work Programme.

A suggestion was made by the Facilitator that the next meeting of the Committee on 27 June 2012 receive reports on the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy, the Quarterly Performance Report and the Welsh Government (WG) White Paper on homes for Wales. The Cabinet Member for Housing pointed out that the latter document was available on the WG website and the Facilitator offered to provide hard copies to Members on request.

The Facilitator also proposed that the meeting arranged for 25 July 2012 be changed to a workshop open to all Members to consider the Common Housing Register and for a workshop to be arranged to discuss the Committee's Forward Work Programme for the coming year which could be informed by the Cabinet's Priorities.

Councillor A.M. Halford referred to previous discussion by the Committee on the collection of water rates from Council tenants and asked that this be

included for consideration as a priority, together with loans/mortgages for home owners and the tracker system. Councillor R. Hughes asked that garage surveys also be included.

Following a query by Councillor R. Dolphin on the proposed changes to grass cutting collections, the Head of Housing confirmed that this service would be tendered. Councillor J.E. Falshaw asked if mulching had been discussed and the Head of Housing agreed that this would be taken into consideration.

The Facilitator said that all items listed as 'to be scheduled' in the inherited Programme, together with any new items would be considered by Members at the Forward Work Programme workshop.

**RESOLVED:**

That the draft Forward Work Programme be agreed on the basis outlined above.

**7. DURATION OF MEETING**

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and ended at 11.00am.

**8. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE**

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

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**Chairman**