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Pennaeth Gwasanaethau Cyfreithiol a Democraataidd



To: Cllr Ron Hampson (Chairman)

CS/NG

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

25 October 2012

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Dear Sir / Madam

A meeting of the **HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** will be held in the **DELYN COMMITTEE ROOM, COUNTY HALL, MOLD CH7 6NA** on **WEDNESDAY, 31ST OCTOBER, 2012** at **10.00 AM** to consider the following items.

Yours faithfully

Democracy & Governance Manager

AGENDA

- 1 **APOLOGIES**
- 2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**
- 3 **MINUTES** (Pages 1 - 8)
To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2012.
- 4 **UPDATE ON THE REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE SERVICE** (Pages 9 - 24)
Report of Head of Housing

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The Council welcomes correspondence in Welsh or English
Mae'r Cyngor yn croesawau gohebiaeth yn y Cymraeg neu'r Saesneg

- 5 **ESTATE MANAGEMENT SERVICES** (Pages 25 - 38)
Report of Director of Community Services
- 6 **SARTH** (Pages 39 - 46)
Report of Director of Community Services
- 7 **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME** (Pages 47 - 54)
Report of Member Engagement Manager

Agenda Item 3

HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 26 SEPTEMBER 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, 26 September 2012

PRESENT: Councillor Ron Hampson (Chairman)

Councillors David Cox, Peter Curtis, Ron Davies, Jim Falshaw, Alison Halford, George Hardcastle, Ray Hughes and Mike Reece

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors Ian Dunbar (for Sharon Williams), Richard Lloyd (for Rosetta Dolphin) and Paul Shotton (for Glenys Diskin)

APOLOGY: Councillor Brian Lloyd

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Bernie Attridge and Haydn Bateman

CONTRIBUTORS: Cabinet Member for Housing, Director of Community Services, Head of Housing, Head of Legal & Democratic Services for item no.21, Housing Asset Manager, Community Support Services Manager, Housing Strategy Manager and Principal Planner

IN ATTENDANCE: Member Engagement Manager and Committee Officer

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

No declarations of interest were made.

18. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2012 had been circulated with the agenda.

RESOLVED:

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

19. VARIATION OF ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman indicated that the item on secure/introductory tenancies would be considered before the Local Housing Strategy.

20. SECURE/INTRODUCTORY TENANCY AGREEMENT

The Head of Housing provided Members with an updated version of the Secure/Introductory Tenancy Agreement for consideration following earlier proposals in April 2011. She asked for Members' views on the addition of the right to defer improvements to homes that were not kept in an acceptable condition. Tenants' views on the matter would be sought at the forthcoming

Annual Tenants' Conference. If in agreement, the clause would be added to the new tenancy agreements due to come into effect on 18 February 2013.

The Head of Housing distributed specimen copies of the proposed A5 Tenant's Handbook which would contain information on tenancy agreement and policies.

Councillor G. Hardcastle asked if workshops could be arranged for elderly tenants to explain the Tenant's Handbook. The Cabinet Member for Housing responded that wardens could discuss the handbook with tenants in sheltered accommodation. She added that there were also a number of older people in general needs accommodation who would possibly need assistance with the handbook.

Councillor A.M. Halford asked if the Council could make it a condition of the tenancy agreement that tenants purchase contents insurance. She asked if any such scheme was in operation in social housing providers and other councils. The Head of Housing said that Flintshire offered a competitive insurance scheme to tenants which could be promoted more widely and that other housing providers did not insist that tenants purchase contents insurance. The Head of Legal & Democratic Services advised that tenants were not legally obliged, as part of their tenancy, to purchase contents insurance. It was agreed that this should be investigated.

Councillor P. Shotton said that he agreed with the suggestion to defer improvement schemes in houses that were not kept to an acceptable standard and was in favour of a zero tolerance approach, a view echoed by other Members.

Councillor P.J. Curtis asked about how this would impact on the Welsh Housing Standards. The Head of Housing explained that the Council would be allowed to defer improvements to tenant's homes while they resolved/improved matters with regard to their tenancy as long as the Flintshire WHQS Implementation timetable was adhered to.

Councillor G. Hardcastle spoke about succession rights for tenants and how important it was that tenants be allowed to stay in their own home, even if this would result in under occupancy. The Cabinet Member for Housing replied that each case was looked at on its own merits and that this practice would continue. Councillor Hardcastle asked about the criteria employed in such cases. The Head of Housing responded that disability, health issues and local support networks would be taken into account. She added that such cases would become more complex with the onset of welfare reform and that persons living in under occupied houses might voluntarily ask to move to smaller properties due to decreases in housing benefit.

Councillor D.L. Cox asked if contents insurance could be automatically added to the rent and tenants offered the opportunity to opt out.

Councillor R. Lloyd asked if reference could be made in the waste and recycling section of the handbook to the correct procedure for removal of clinical

waste. He cited an example whereby a tenant had been reprimanded for putting a used bandage in a black bin.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee supports the final draft of the Tenancy Agreement which will be presented to Cabinet for approval;
- (b) That the Committee supports the inclusion of a clause in the tenancy agreement that where tenants breach their tenancy, that the Council reserves the right to withhold improvements to their property until the breach is addressed; and
- (c) That the means of providing low cost home contents insurance be investigated further.

21. LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY

The Director of Community Services delivered a presentation about the draft Flintshire Local Housing Strategy 2012-17. The main features of the presentation were:

- Achievements in 2011-12
- Objectives such as more housing and choice, improving homes and communities and better services
- Next Steps

The Director then invited questions from the Committee.

Councillor P. Shotton asked about incentives to reduce under-occupancy and the possibility of using prefabricated modular housing on Flintshire owned land. The Director of Community Services said that prefabricated homes had been previously considered. The Housing Strategy Manager said that he would investigate further. The Principal Planner said that he was aware of "Ty Unos" modular buildings made from sustainable Welsh woodland materials which could be constructed in one day. He agreed that this should be explored. The Head of Housing said that areas of land for potential housing had been identified, that garage sites would be reviewed and that self build schemes would be explored. In response to the question about incentives for relocation, the Head of Housing explained that tenants who choose to downsize would be offered an incentive of up to £1000 and would receive help with removal costs.

Councillor A.M. Halford thanked the Director of Community Services for the presentation and report. She asked if the 300 proposed units for extra care identified in the strategy would be sufficient, given the projected increase in persons over 65 years of age. The Director of Community Services said that the Housing Strategy Manager had looked at the need for extra care in Flintshire and had concluded that 300 would be a modest expectation.

Councillor P.J. Curtis asked if the demolition of the Flint Maisonettes would have a detrimental effect on the housing waiting list and if applications were on hold until tenants of the maisonettes had been re-housed. The Head of Housing

said that she would investigate and asked Councillor Curtis to provide the background to his concerns. The Head of Housing said that cases that are prioritised include people with medical issues and the homeless.

Councillor Halford asked if the planning applications for Flint renewal had been submitted. The Principal Planner said that the project was at the design stage, prior to its submission to planning.

Councillor R. Hughes asked if there would be provision for older people in rural communities who wish to down size their property. He said that there was a vacant parcel of land in his ward which would be suitable for development. The Director of Community Services said that extra care could support such people and that flexible schemes in rural areas needed consideration. The Housing Strategy Manager said that there was a Rural Housing Enabler working in Flintshire who would analyse need and research various options besides the social rented sector such as affordable housing, part rent/part mortgage. The Principal Planner said that provision for local need was not in the Unitary Development Plan but would feature in the Local Development Plan Rural Development Strategy.

Councillor Halford asked if the parcel of land referred to by Councillor R. Hughes could be developed with prefabricated homes. The Principal Planner explained that if the site was on private land, the development would have to be financially viable, possibly through cross subsidisation. He added that the Council needed to be aware of all these sites in order to investigate their viability.

Councillor G. Hardcastle asked how many empty homes there were in Flintshire. The Housing Strategy Manager replied that there were 550 private sector homes. The Head of Housing said that under the Welsh Government Houses to Homes initiative, an interest free loan of up to £150,000 per applicant can be made and must be repaid within 3 years, in addition to £200,000 from the Council to bring private houses in disrepair back into use.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee endorse proposals contained within the Draft Local Housing Strategy.

22. QUARTER 1 SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORTS

The Head of Housing announced that the Council's leadership work on improving energy efficiency and Mavis Croft, the chair of the tenant's federation had been nominated for Welsh Housing Awards.

The Head of Housing introduced the report and stated that she would comment on amber and red rated items. She circulated a rental arrears update which demonstrated a reduction in arrears of £109,357.89 and 472 fewer tenants in rent arrears compared to this time last year. The Head of Housing said that the focus was on reducing the number of tenants that owed more than £1000. The Head of Housing highlighted the following areas on the report to note:

- Empty properties took 44 days to return to the housing stock, which was a reduction of 100 days since the LEAN review.
- Emergency repairs had experienced issues about data transfer and back office reporting which had affected performance sliding.
- An improvement in urgent repairs to 8.87 days, narrowly missed the 8.5 day target
- Non urgent repairs at 82.16 days missed the target of 35 days. Currently 70 jobs were in the back log.

The Community Support Services Manager spoke about the current issues faced in Community Support Services such as the re-emergence of longer waiting times in B&B accommodation with all households spending an average of 26.7 days in such accommodation. She added that the Council had supported a house share with three single people who had elected to live together. The Community Support Services Manager reported that a Children's Services officer supported homeless young people and that all persons in B&B accommodation received weekly visits from a support officer. The Head of Housing said that welfare rights officers had secured, in the last quarter, £600,000 of welfare benefits for clients.

Councillor G. Hardcastle expressed concern that non urgent repairs had missed their target. The Asset Manager explained that planned maintenance such as replacement of pathways and fences featured in this category and that he was in discussion with the Cabinet Member for Housing to see how these jobs could be completed.

Councillor A.M. Halford expressed concern about the amount of time lost to staff training. The Asset Manager explained that the training in mobile technology did take a lot of time, especially for trades people who had never used such systems before. He said that the system came into effect in April 2012, but problems had still been experienced in September, despite assistance from the Council's ICT department. He added that a senior member of Capita staff would come to the Council to investigate the issues. Councillor Halford asked about redress from Capita and if they could make a presentation to the Council and set up a Civica/ICT steering group with Members. The Head of Housing said that this would be investigated. Councillor Halford asked about the difficulties experienced with the tracking devices in vehicles. The Asset Manager explained that the difficulties concerned older vehicles undertaking more frequent journeys which had caused more pressure on the battery and ultimately the tracking device. He suggested that this be resolved by the installation of larger batteries on the affected vehicles.

Councillor Hardcastle asked why some vehicle batteries had become flat. The Head of Housing said that vehicle batteries had been run down by the tracker, which drew on the battery even when the vehicle was not in use. The Head of Assets said that the tracker company had inspected vehicles and claimed the battery usage by the tracker was minimal. He added that approximately 10 out of 100 vehicles were affected.

Councillor P.J. Curtis asked if the repairs section was fully staffed. He also asked about issues which would arise with house shares and the re-designation of unsuitable sheltered housing. The Asset Manager said that there were four trades vacancies to fill. The Community Support Services Manager responded that a current house share comprised of three individuals who had lived together in a hostel and wanted to share a home. The Head of Housing said that a survey had been conducted about re-designation and that they would look at all the various options for single people under 60 years.

Councillor R. Lloyd said that he was pleased that Mavis Croft has been nominated for an award in recognition of her voluntary work. He went on to ask about how utility bills would be organised in a house share. The Community Support Services Manager said that bills would be built into the rent.

Councillor R. Davies said that a tenant had complained to him about a new gate post being installed without a catch. He asked if the tradesperson responsible would be identified and spoken to by their manager. The Head of Housing said that members should inform her of any shortcomings with standards of work.

The Chair thanked the Head of Housing for the report.

RESOLVED:

That Quarter 1 performance reports be received and the contents noted.

23. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Member Engagement Manager introduced the forward work programme which had been collated by the Committee's former facilitator, Samantha Roberts, after the recent Forward Work Programme workshop. He explained that the next meeting would include items on Repairs, Estate Management and Anti-Social Behaviour. The Member Engagement Manager reminded Members that there would be a Welfare Reform workshop on 31 October 2012 in the Council Chamber.

Councillor A.M. Halford said that she had not been made aware in advance of the departure of a number of staff which included Mike Bernard, Samantha Roberts and Brett Sadler. She asked if the Chair could send a note of thanks on behalf of the committee to them to wish them success in their new employment. The Member Engagement Manager said that Samantha Roberts was the new Clerk of Mold Town Council.

Councillor Halford commented that Telecare had disappeared from the work programme. The Member Engagement Manager replied that the Committee have the discretion to change items on the programme when it became necessary to do so. He added that items did not disappear from the work programme and that at the workshops, Members could decide which items to add or remove from the forward work programme.

Councillor P.J. Curtis expressed his concern at the number and use of workshops. The Member Engagement Manager responded that such workshops

were used in addition to formal scrutiny meetings to enable members to discuss issues such as the development of the work programme in a more informal session. He added that the work programme item, usually at the end of the agenda was important, but that its consideration was often rushed because of the constraints.

The Member Engagement Manager also asked that the Chair and Vice Chair in consultation with himself and the other officers be authorised to vary the work programme from time to time. Councillor Halford expressed a reservation, citing a specific example. The Member Engagement Manager responded and explained that he had sought the variations to add rather than remove items from the work programme.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme as submitted be approved and that the Chairman and Vice Chairman acting in concert with the Member Engagement Manager and other Officers be given authority to vary the Forward Work Programme where circumstance dictate.

24. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press and no members of the public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.50 am)

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Chairman

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FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 31ST OCTOBER 2012

REPORT BY: HEAD OF HOUSING

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE SERVICE

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 This report will update members on the progress of the repairs and maintenance service performance improvement work streams.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 The Asset Management Team have been progressing a number of service improvement work streams to improve the quality of services delivered to tenants.

The new Interim Asset Manager has taken the opportunity to review current and planned work streams in order to assess the current position and plan effectively to realise the most improvements for the service over future months and the long term. There are a significant amount of projects underway and planned for the service and the Asset Manager is keen to ensure that each project is managed and embedded effectively as it is only then that the projects will be a success and deliver the most benefits to the service. The Interim Asset Manager has also provided updates for members within the report on additional work streams that are underway that he feels will have significant impacts for the Asset Management service and provide the foundations for improved and sustained performance. The work areas currently being progressed are:

- Implementation of revised staffing structure
- Staff Development
 1. Flintshire Trades Academy
 2. Customer Service and Development Training
- Review of the vehicle fleet and trackers
 1. Fleet
 2. Tracker Investigations
 3. Track You System
- Implementation of mobile working

- Extend hours of repairs service
- Improve reputation and performance of repairs service
- Establish an in house adaptations team
- Delivery of Capital works scheme
- Further develop the stores service
- Implement new contact centre system
- Implement a new suite of financial and performance reports
- Schedule of Rates
- Job Scheduling

3.00 **CONSIDERATIONS**

3.01 **Implement revised staffing structure** (please find revised staffing structure at appendix (1))

All job evaluation questionnaires have been submitted, however due to the number of other service reviews it has not been possible for the JEQ Team to evaluate the questionnaires and these are now anticipated to be completed in October. Once evaluation has been carried out on the questionnaires the assimilation process will commence. Any remaining vacancies following assimilation will then be recruited to and this process will be internally only in the first instance. The service review only impacts on office based staff and not trades staff. It is now intended that the staffing structure will be fully implemented by the end of March 2013. The implementation of the structure is a critical project and a key priority for service improvement. The revised job roles will provide a fit for purpose structure that will support new, improved ways of working moving forwards. The new structure also re-allocates resource to key areas that significantly contribute to service performance. From a staff team perspective it is crucial that we implement and embed the structure as soon as possible as this will provide clarity and stability. Pending the implementation a number of interim measures have been introduced to progress improvements. These measures are as follows: -

- Nik Evans (Business Performance Team Manager) has assumed the role of Housing Asset Manager in the interim following the departure of Mike Bernard
- Temporary recruitment to the second Operations Manager post is being undertaken
- Key members of the team are assuming responsibility for the duties within the role of Business Performance Team Manager

- Resources are being allocated to resolve capacity issues on call handling and complaint management whilst the new telephone system is implemented and becomes fully operational

3.02 **Staff Development**

3.02.1 **Flintshire Trades Academy**

Housing Services pay rates reflect the expectation that trades staff perform additional skills to their main trade. Some staff are meeting this requirement but a significant number of staff do not yet fully meet this standard. Managers from Housing Asset Management in conjunction with the Community Services Training Manager have met with Deeside College Construction Department and agreed a programme to provide all trades staff with the required skills to become fully competent in a range of skills that will allow them to attain a Level 2 NVQ in Multi Skilling. Attainment of this qualification will assist the trade operative to:

- a) improve the quality of their work
- b) complete more work in one visit
- c) improve productivity
- d) assist in the delivery of the repairs by appointment process

This will also have a positive impact for tenants and on customer satisfaction as it will provide the platform for a higher rate of jobs completed on the first visit.

The course is provided free of charge and will take 16 weeks for the trade staff to complete, and will require their attendance at college on a day release basis with a days study leave. It will take approximately two and half years for all trades staff to complete the course and the order for staff attending the course has been established via a skills analysis carried out by Deeside College staff. The introduction of the scheme has been discussed with the trade unions and has their full support.

It should be noted that multi skilling is designed to provide the operative with additional skills to complete work in another trade without the need to send an additional trades person to perform a minor task in another trade e.g. we would not send a joiner to install a bathroom suite but we would expect a joiner to remove and replace a w.c. pan when repairing a bathroom floor.

3.02.2 **Customer Service and Development training**

Members will recall that following the completion of the Customer Service Award, 16 members of staff went on to study for the full NVQ Level 2 certificate in Customer Service. It is pleasing to note that 15 officers have fully completed the award.

The Housing Asset Manager has also completed the Senior Management Development Programme and a number of other staff are completing the Team Leader or Supervisors development programme set up by FCC training and Deeside College.

The Housing training section have also organised a specific course designed for Team Leaders on attendance management, performance, appraisals etc which all team leaders in Housing Assets will be attending.

3.03 Review of the vehicle fleet and trackers

3.03.1 Fleet

Discussions on the removal of vehicles provided to certain members of staff other than trade's staff have been ongoing with trade unions. All staff have been consulted individually and have been given three months notice of their vehicle being removed. Essential car allowance will be offered to all those affected. The implementation date will coincide with the implementation of the Housing Asset Management Restructure and this is now anticipated to be completed by March 2013. This change will achieve considerable efficiencies of around £80k each year for the service on expenditure such as lease costs, repairs and servicing and running expenses.

3.03.2 Tracker Investigations

As members will be aware a number of investigations relating to vehicles and tracker information have been ongoing and have now been concluded. There were various outcomes as a result of these investigations and there were also a number of improvements that were determined as part of the process that would aid the service moving forwards. A number of measures have already been taken including refining the tracker system and its use and benefits as a management tool, revisiting management procedures on call out and overtime and re-training on HR systems and policies.

The Housing Asset Management Team are also working closely with the Trade Unions on improving policies, practices and inconsistencies discovered throughout the investigation process. The Investigating Officer and Senior HR Advisor have proposed to compile a summary report following the investigations to cover all recommendations established throughout the process and ensure service improvements are realised for the future.

3.03.3 Track You System

The Track You system provides a number of alerts designed to draw the supervisors attention to such issues as vehicles driving at excess speed, vehicles parked at home inside core hours etc. The Lean review determined that the track you system was not being fully utilised. This was mainly due to the design of the system and the number of

unnecessary alerts supervisors had to administer. FCC has worked with Track You to completely redesign the alerts element of the system and to ensure that it is an effective, efficient management tool. Many of the alerts are now tailored to reflect the service and how it operates. The new package has been re-launched and the new version of the Track You system is fully operational in the service teams.

3.04 **Implementation of mobile working**

The implementation of this work stream has been hampered by the continued IT related technical problems; this has prevented some staff from fully utilising the mobile working system. A number of staff (gas engineers) have been unable to go live at all due to these technical issues and other unrelated software that allows the engineer to complete an electronic Landlord gas safety certificate (CP12)
The IT issues can be divided into two categories:

- a) A software problem that causes the job ticket to be suspended in the ether (freezing) and or places the job ticket at the wrong stage of the job ticket process. This can affect between 300 and 400 hundred jobs at a time and when identified the tickets have to be manually released (one at a time) with the trades person present verifying time and or materials used. When this has happened these jobs have been identified straight away and dealt with and processed appropriately. Capita are aware of this and a solution is available in the Version 10 update, which is currently in 'test' and due to be installed in the 'live' environment by the end of October. Monitoring of this should then take place for a fixed period to assess if the issue has been resolved.
- b) A proportion of the PDA devices have been subject to data clashing with the voice element of the sim card. When the device receives data it switches the phone off and fails to switch it back on and it is not possible for the trade's person to make or receive calls. This is problematic when dealing with emergency repairs and also has a detrimental affect on responsive repair related appointments and overall productivity and service performance. There has been a lot of activity to resolve this problem between Corporate ICT, Capita, device supplier and manufacturer to try and determine the cause of the problem. Every effort and possible solution for this has been made by both Housing Asset Management and Corporate IT and it has been accepted that it is a Capita software issue and they are currently looking into the cause and solution. In the interim separate mobile phones are being ordered for the trades persons in order to ease the problem and allow them to continue to effectively complete repairs.

Status

- 91 devices have been built by corporate ICT. 5 training devices

have also been set up. 79 devices have been issued to operatives with Gas Servicing the remaining group to be issued. In the last month, of those issued, 48 devices have been used operationally.

- To date, over 2000 jobs have been issued and completed using mobile devices. This will continue to be monitored.
- Training has been conducted as follows:
 - 68 staff have had full training
 - 10 have been part trained but training has been put on hold (gas operatives)
 - 12 staff require full training

As these issues have been on-going for a period of time and continue to hinder the ability to fully implement and embed mobile working. A meeting has been held with the senior account manager from Capita to stress the importance and urgency of resolving these issues. The meeting involved the Head of Housing, Housing Asset Manager and Corporate IT Services. The outcome of the meeting was that Capita would allocate additional resources at a senior level in an attempt to overcome the current issues. Capita were also instructed to return with a summary of findings, resolutions and a forward plan of action. In addition to this it is proposed to initiate a steering group involving senior officers from FCC, the Housing Cabinet member and senior officers from Capita in order to progress the mobile working project and other IT developments. Although the delays and issues are a frustration every effort is being made to resolve these and Housing Asset Management remains fully committed to successful full implementation of mobile devices.

3.05 **Introduction of extended service hours**

The compressed hours working group has been working with a group of trades staff to develop a modern shift pattern that will provide tenants with an enhanced service. It was the intention to extend working hours to provide hours of service covering an 8am to 6pm working day including one late night until 8pm and a Saturday morning. Following a pilot scheme that was conducted the evidence from customers demonstrated a limited demand for a late night and Saturday morning which does not justify making workforce available for these times at the moment. The Saturday morning and late night were also the main area of contention during workforce consultation. Therefore, the intention now is to work with the Compressed Hours Working Group to provide the extended day 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday in the first instance.

Housing Asset Management is working with colleagues in Street Scene on the development of appropriate shift patterns to deliver this important change in service delivery and arrangements are being made for the working group to visit similar organisations to see first hand how the shift patterns operate. The likelihood is that this will involve an 8 or 9

day fortnight arrangement to accommodate this service and will therefore mean a change of terms and conditions for staff involved which will need to be negotiated. The Housing Asset Management team are also starting to identify and develop options to improve and streamline the out of hour's service and incorporate gas servicing as part of these proposals so that appointments for this trade can be made available at evenings and weekends. The proposed implementation for the extended service to customers is March 2013.

3.06 **Improve reputation and performance of repairs service**

Housing Asset Management are continuously looking to improve the performance and reputation of the service and provide a first class service to our tenants. As part of this there is currently a lean review being undertaken on the repairs process which is assessing the current process of the journey of a repair being reported over the phone or e-mail through to the job being completed. This will identify areas where improvements can be made to both the quality and speed of service delivery.

The Housing Asset Manager has introduced monthly analysis of jobs being processed in each category to ensure correct recording and classification and to identify areas of concern and potential improvement. This process and the additional performance reports and measures (discussed below) should realise benefits for the department's performance.

Period	Emergency	Target	Urgent	Target	Non urgent	Target
Q1 2012/13	0.55	0.5	8.87	8.5	82.16	35
Q2 2012/2013	0.56	0.5	8.08	8.5	43.63	35

Quarter 2 overall is a positive improvement for the Housing Asset Service in terms of performance. Although well below the 1 day indicator target in the current tenancy agreement, Emergency Repairs are slightly above the 0.5 improvement target. The main reasons for this are data transfer to PDA's and additional work being raised on Emergency job tickets. These issues are being addressed as detailed above. Analysis on all data and categories is now taking place and will continue each month to audit the data and ensure that additional works are raised on separate works instructions and also to verify correct classification of jobs.

Urgent repairs demonstrate a positive improvement in the quarter from 8.87 to 8.08 days. This improvement is partly down to improved control measures being implemented and partly due again to ensuring that any additional works are not completed on the same works instruction.

Non-urgent repairs have improved significantly over the quarter reducing from 82.16 to 43.63 days. A large amount of older jobs were completed in quarter 1 as we continued to reduce the repairs backlog which resulted in a significant impact on the performance figures. As these older jobs have now been completed the results can be seen in the significant improvement during this quarter. The outturn in quarter 2 is the best performance for at least 3 years. Work now continues to effectively manage jobs in this category and to improve performance on inspections for non-urgent repairs.

3.07 In-house adaptations team

Following Members approval for an initial 12 month pilot of an in-house adaptations team, four members of the team have been appointed – one plasterer, two joiners and a plumber, and the remaining two will be appointed as the work progresses. The team have been selected from the existing Building Maintenance Team and these positions will be backfilled initially with trade staff on a temporary contract and if the team is fully established permanent posts will be offered. Performance of the team will be reported to future meetings of this committee although initial feedback received from the Housing Grants team is very positive. The type of work carried out by this team includes walk-in showers, grab rails, steps and concrete paths.

3.08 Delivery of Capital Works Scheme

The Capital Works programme for 2012-2013 consisted of replacement programmes for Heating, Kitchens, Bathrooms and Smoke Alarms. The Heating contract has been let to Rothwells this year and to date they have completed 462 properties out of a budgeted 1100 properties. The contract will complete the required number of properties as the contractors are currently completing 25/30 properties per week. Included in the Heating element of works, gas mains work to off-gas areas is also being provided which is particularly time consuming due to Legal easement processes that is required. With this in mind, next years schemes are being looked at to speed up this process ahead of next years programme. Ongoing discussions are being held with Wales and West to try and find cost effective ways of providing gas to our off-gas areas. We will be unable to provide gas to all our areas and as such we are currently investigating Air Source Heating technology to provide an alternative heating for the solid fuel and oil properties FCC currently own. One Air Source pump has been tried in a property with a view to Piloting circa 20 properties in this financial year.

With reference to the kitchen replacement programme, the first six months of the year, Bramalls were completing the current contract and have completed 432 properties including partial properties and a further 30 have declined to date. A tender process has just been completed

and 2 Contractors have been appointed, Wates and Keepmoat-Bramalls, for the forthcoming contract. This contract can be let for 3/4 years if required and the remaining properties have been split 50/50 to each contractor. The budgeted figure for this year was 922 properties and it is on target to achieve this figure with both contractors working at the same time.

The Bathroom contract has provision for only 56 properties this year. Surveys have been completed and a tender is currently being finalised with a view to starting on site in November. This scheme will be completed ahead of the end of the financial year.

The Smoke Alarm programme has also been split into two contracts. There has been an historical problem on the sheltered accommodations in that the current systems are a mixture of Chubb and FCC systems. This provides a problem for the out of hours service when issues arise. The opportunity has been taken to place a contract with Chubb to replace all the FCC units with a Chubb unit to the sheltered accommodation blocks, so that any future call out issues will be solely a Chubb issue. All blocks will be complete with the exception of the Heights which are scheduled to be completed in next years programme. This years budgeted figure was for 884 units and Chubb have completed circa 400 to date. The DLO are also completing work to other Domestic properties and they too have completed circa 400 to date. The programme will be completed on time and will also provide additional units to those planned in the budget.

The Capital Works team send out Customer satisfaction questionnaires to Tenants when various schemes are completed. Last year questionnaires were sent out for nine different schemes. The results are collated and analysed and feedback, both positive and negative, is reviewed and then discussed with the various contractors at the monthly contractors meetings. The number of surveys sent out varies for the size of the scheme and between 27 and 355 questionnaires have been sent out with the various projects. Between 18% and 48% of the questionnaires have been returned providing satisfaction levels of between 84% and 99.1%.

FCC have commenced discussions recently Wrexham County Borough Council with a view to providing joint procurement initiatives to maximise any savings that could be shared. On going discussions and meetings have been held to look into the New Green Deal strategy and funding streams associated with CESP providers such as British Gas. The Capital Works team are also in discussion with WCBC to look at ways of improving the Contract Administration processes, forms of contract and material choices etc. Both authorities are looking at ways of providing a joint initiative for a project in the new financial year, 2013 - 2014.

3.09 Further develop the stores service

The new stores service has been up and running for six months and has proved to be a significant success and improvement for the Housing Asset service. The newly established service is progressing particularly well considering the scale of the change both culturally and operationally. The first few months have indicated potential efficiencies of approximately £10k per month when comparing against the same volume of materials purchased in the previous year. The department is now purchasing 95% of materials through the managed stores in comparison to 50% in previous years through the former stores facility. This, obviously, has substantial benefits in terms of control and audit measures and standardisation of stock. It is also encouraging to note that the workforce have embraced this change and the staff transferred to Travis Perkins from the authority are extremely positive about the change.

Work now continues to further develop the stores service with the main objectives as follows: -

- Electronic Trading – Electronic Trading allows orders and invoices to be matched electronically which will provide significant efficiencies for back office processes.
- Van Stocks – A large project in itself, a complete review of van stocks is being undertaken with the aim to phase in over a number of months a fit for purpose van stock for each operative. This will reduce visits to stores and importantly aid the objective of completing repairs on the first visit as operatives will have the required materials on the van. This be introduced in conjunction with the embedding of mobile working to enable automatic stock replenishment and will realise significant efficiencies for the service once introduced.
- Tool Hire and Purchase – It is proposed to add tool hire and purchase into the managed stores contract. This will again have major advantages in terms of control measures and value for money but also have significant benefits, both financially and operationally, on PAT testing, repairs and replacements and health and safety issues.
- Develop Management Information – Ongoing reviews of stock requirements and product specifications will take place over the next 12 months and the development of key performance indicators and management information will aid continuous improvement throughout the contract. Benchmarking exercises on cost of materials will also be carried out annually.
- Planned Programmes – In order to again realise the most benefits from the contract it is proposed to direct the materials used on the planned programme schemes through the managed stores. This will have benefits such as value for money, bulk discounts and standardisation of stock used on our properties.

3.10 **Implement a new Contact Centre system**

The Housing Asset Management Team have been working with

Corporate IT to develop the requirements for a contact centre to be implemented for the repairs call centre. The introduction of a contact centre will provide benefits for the service and more importantly significantly improve the customers experience of contacting the department. Since the move from Canton Depot to County Offices the service has experienced issues with the repairs line as we were unable to transfer the IT system previously used due to significant costs involved. The contact centre will provide a solution to these issues by managing the call process. The system will allow the service to manage periods of high call demand through call routing and by providing an overflow facility which will ensure that tenants calls are always answered within specified timeframes.

The new system will also provide visual aids for the supervisor to monitor calls and manage the contact centre and will also provide numerous management reports to aid forward planning and achieving higher levels of customer satisfaction. As part of introducing the contact centre the whole department will benefit from a new telephone system which will promote agile and mobile working by allowing the transfer of numbers to different work stations, enable connection between landlines and mobiles and provide call management facilities via Lotus Notes. The Team aims to introduce the new system by December 2012.

3.11 Financial and Performance Reporting

Since the removal of the Trading Account a large amount of work has been completed on developing a new suite of reports to monitor productivity, financial and operational performance and aid forward work and strategic planning. These reports are now in operation. Further reports are now being developed for all areas of the service to enable effective people and performance management. These reports, for example, are being designed for Team Leaders to use as a management tool to effectively manage their trades teams and individuals and will provide information on productivity, workload, appointments, absence, leave and training.

Once these additional reports have been finalised the next phase will be to roll out the reports across the service. Awareness sessions will be arranged with both office staff and operatives to introduce the new reports, raise awareness of performance and reaffirm the services aims, objectives and performance measures.

Following this the proposal is to arrange monthly performance meetings throughout the service from the Management Team to Team Leaders to 1:1's with trades staff. The aim is to further develop a performance management culture within the service, introduce some healthy competition and ultimately improve all aspects of performance throughout Housing Asset Management. It is also proposed to introduce visual displays throughout the Housing Asset offices on all Performance Indicators.

3.12 **Schedule of Rates**

The current schedule of rates contains approximately 1800 detailed rates including comprehensive descriptions of jobs and times allocated for completing repairs. Housing Asset Management are keen to explore a new schedule of rates with significantly reduced rates and descriptions that will compliment new working practices and encourage a new empowered culture when completing repairs for our customers.

The Operations Manager has been carrying out research to identify a new schedule of rates for the service which will compliment the new ways of working planned for the future. Discussions have been held with potential suppliers of schedule of rates and a working group has now been initiated including both office based staff and trades staff to discuss the project, benefits and solutions to any potential issues of implementation. With the new stores service meaning materials get accounted for on an actual cost basis, mobile working and the removal of the trading account there is a requirement to review the schedule of rates to work effectively with these improved practices. A new schedule of rates would have significantly reduced codes, amended times that would only be visible in the back office systems and encourage an improved culture different to the previous bonus scheme working practices. Through a reduced schedule of rates trades staff would be encouraged to assess significantly more jobs and carry out the work required on the same visit rather than the current practice which encourages a large amount of inspections before work is carried out. Average times for repairs would be a performance and productivity measure assessed in the background and would therefore encourage a culture of completing jobs without referring to the set times included in the current schedule of rates.

3.13 **Job Scheduling**

Job scheduling was originally planned to be implemented early in the next financial year. Following the review it is felt that in order to realise the true benefits of a job scheduling system that the implementation for this project be planned for the following financial year. In order for such a system to be implemented successfully and provide the potential efficiencies and benefits there are a number of other projects and improvements that need to be fully embedded first and working effectively. For example the job scheduling system will only provide further improvements once other improvements and practices are in place such as fully operational mobile working, van stock replenishment, revised schedule of rates, established working hours, a fit for purpose staffing structure and most importantly effective people and performance management. There are also improvements that can be learnt from other major change projects such as mobile working in terms of planning, resourcing and implementation time and phases. Job scheduling is another large IT project that will require effective planning

and project management to ensure successful implementation. To realise the full benefits of the system members are asked to support the revised date for planned implementation in order to plan effectively but more importantly allow focus to be given on successfully implementing and embedding the other improvements work streams detailed above to provide the foundations for job scheduling to present the service with further improvements when implemented.

In the meantime the Housing Interim Asset Manager has had initial meetings with procurement to begin planning work for the project well in advance and has pulled together draft business cases and a specification in preparation for tendering.

3.14 **Next Steps**

Delivery of service improvement work streams will continue and will be reported regularly to this committee.

4.00 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.01 Members are asked to note the positive progress being made to improve performance and to deliver the service improvement work streams.

5.00 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.01 None as a direct result of this report

6.00 **ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

6.01 None as a direct result of this report, though works to maintain and improve the stock and repair and maintenance services provide a direct benefit to the lives and living conditions for some of the poorest Flintshire residents.

7.00 **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

7.01 None as a direct result of this report.

8.00 **EQUALITIES IMPACT**

8.01 None as a direct result of this report.

9.00 **PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.01 There are a number of items which will require continuing negotiation and discussion with trade unions over the coming months.

10.00 **CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

10.01 Consultation will be required as detailed above.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 Consultation with trade unions is ongoing, regular meetings are held with Trade Union representatives to discuss all strands of the service.

12.00 APPENDICES

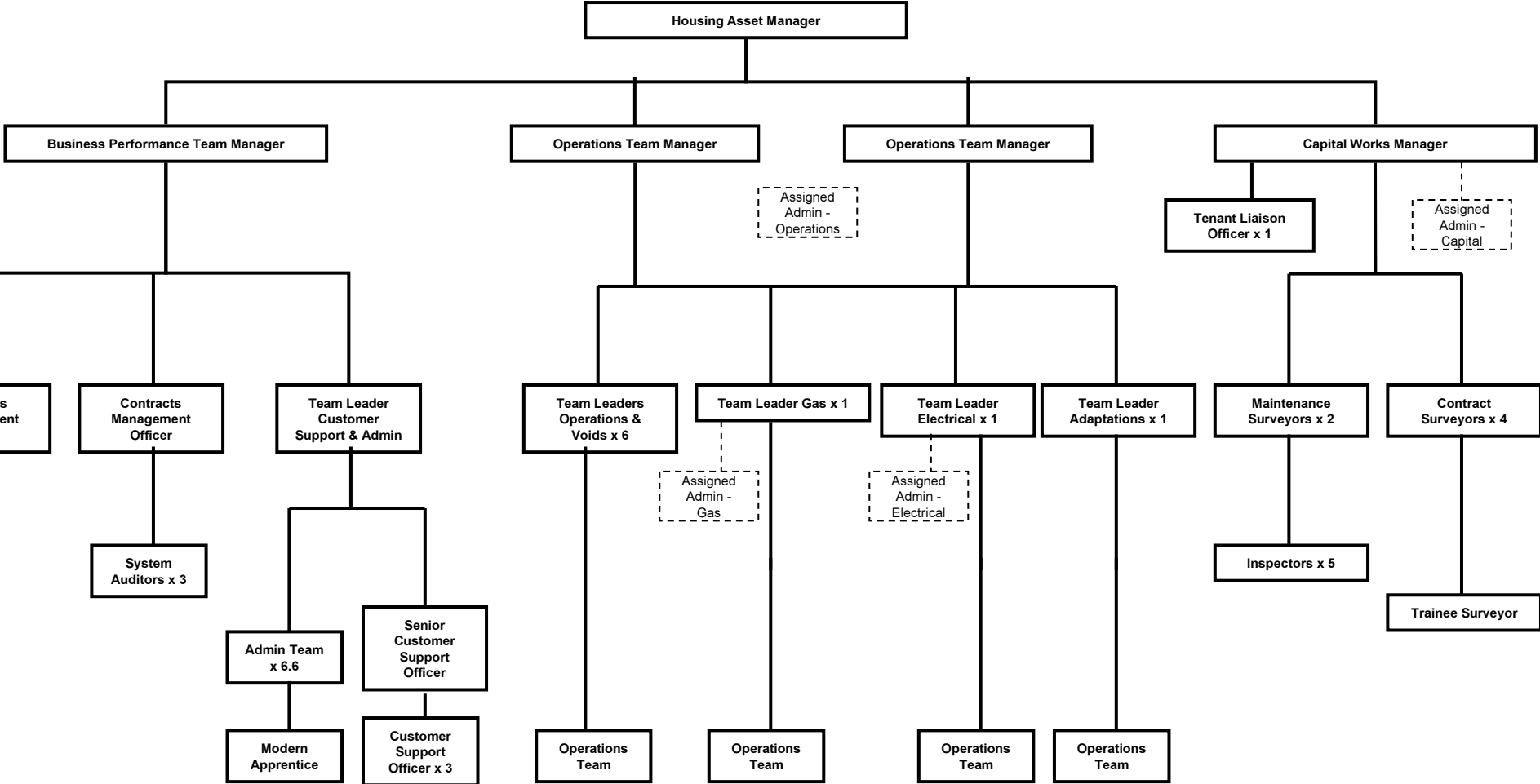
1

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

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Housing Asset Management – Draft Structure

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The Team Leader Customer Support and Admin will oversee all Admin Assistants to aid consistency and service continuity, however day to day supervision will come from the section to which they are assigned.

In the Gas and Electric operational teams there will be 1 senior operative that will provide cover for the Team Leaders in times of holidays and sickness etc

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FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: WEDNESDAY, 31 OCTOBER 2012

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

SUBJECT: ESTATE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 This Report updates members on proposals to develop an enhanced Assisted Gardening Service and seeks approval for new Qualifying Criteria.

This Report also provides an update on the following:

- Environmental Visual Audits.
- Garage Site Review.
- Maintenance of Housing Land (Street Scene).
- Allotments on Housing Land
- Estate Caretaker Review

Members are also asked to consider a range of recommendations relating to each area of work.

2.00 BACKGROUND

The Neighbourhood Housing Management Service is responsible for a range of functions relating to the day to day management of the Council's Estates.

As part of the drive towards continuous improvement, five areas of work are being considered that aim to not only improve local neighbourhoods but also enhance the customer experience in being a tenant or resident of Flintshire.

3.00 ASSISTED GARDEN SERVICE

3.01 Background

Flintshire County Council provides an Assisted Gardening Service to tenants, currently managed by Street Scene, consisting of grass and hedge cutting for both sheltered and general needs stock.

At present general needs housing tenants must be registered blind, over the age of 60 or in receipt of Disability Working Allowance, Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance to qualify for the Gardening Service; sheltered housing tenants qualify automatically.

Approximately 1,500 households (including sheltered tenants) are in receipt of the Service at an approximate cost of £250,000 per year. This cost does not include for collection of grass cuttings.

3.02 Considerations

The Assisted Gardening Service is in need of modernisation to align it with the changing needs of the population. There is no charge made for the service at present.

The new Service will be designed and operational by 1st April 2013 in time for the commencement of the spring grass cutting season.

The new Service will include typical gardening services and tenderers will also be asked to price for the collection of grass cuttings. Additionally a welfare element will be added to further support vulnerable tenants. (Research concludes that a model similar to the one proposed does not currently exist in Wales).

3.03 Welfare Support

This additional welfare element will compliment the new Community Based Accommodation Support Service (CBASS). This will ensure that the most vulnerable tenants are supported in ways which meet their needs.

At this stage two levels of intervention – low-level and high-level – are being considered:

3.04 Low Level Intervention

An example of this type of intervention would be a gardener who, upon arrival at a property, would check for evident signs of alarm, distress or unusual activity. These signs could include:

- A build up of post in the letter box.
- Swarms of flies in the window.
- An accumulation of full milk bottles outside the property.
- Signs of forced entry.

- Distressing sounds emanating from the property.

The gardener would report any signs of concern to Care Link or the Emergency Services so they could be acted upon immediately. In addition the gardener would be expected to introduce themselves to the tenant upon arrival at the property, affording the gardener a further opportunity to make a basic assessment of the tenant's wellbeing.

3.05 High Level Intervention

In addition to the above, this higher level of intervention could include well-checks, winter fuel advice, shopping services, financial advice, befriending help lines, referrals to other agencies and services tailored to the tenant's needs.

It is considered unlikely that a specialist landscape contractor alone will be able to deliver both the gardening service and high-level welfare element. However, it is considered that the majority of contractors could deliver a basic gardening service and low-level welfare provision as a single organisation.

The ability to deliver a service of this nature will depend upon a number of factors:

- The number of households that meet the proposed criteria.
- The cost of delivering the gardening and welfare services and consideration of service charges (which would be eligible for Housing benefit).
- Securing suitably skilled organisations to deliver services.

Following a market dialogue exercise it is clear that some organisations would be willing to work in partnership to enable both the gardening and high level welfare element to be delivered under a single contract.

3.06 Collection & Disposal of Grass

Many County Councillors and tenants have expressed a preference to have their grass clippings collected and disposed of following cutting.

Collection and disposal of grass clippings is currently unavailable to tenants due to the higher costs involved. These include costs of disposal and the need to change grass cutting equipment to enable collection.

The design of the new Service will need to consider the following options:

- Collecting grass clippings and funding (or charging) for additional costs for disposal.
- Do nothing – leave the grass in situ as at present.

Options for disposal of grass clippings include:

- Utilise the standard brown bin where permitted (lower cost).
- Utilise correct chargeable green waste recycling channels (would incur higher costs).

Discussions with specialist landscape contractors indicate an anticipated 20% increase in contract costs for disposal of grass clippings through the correct channels.

The ability of the Service to collect grass cuttings will therefore depend on:

- Number of households qualifying for the Service.
- Preferred method of disposal.
- Affordability of additional cost.

Members' Considerations

Members are asked to consider the financial consequences of collecting grass clippings and the implications this could have on the number of households who will be able to receive the Service or the way that the service is funded.

3.07 Community Benefits

The inclusion of 'community benefits' or 'social requirements' in public sector procurement is designed to ensure that wider social and economic issues are taken into account when tendering contracts. Community benefits' may focus on specific areas such as education, training and employment or community initiatives.

As well as supplying a basic gardening service, the successful contractor could offer to proactively engage with local communities to help develop gardening-related projects such as community gardens or allotments. The winning contractor might also be expected to attend the Housing Community Fun Day or support local schools undertake

environmental projects.

A 'community benefit' may also involve engaging people currently not in employment, education or training or people with learning difficulties or mental health problems. Emphasis could also be placed on developing a gardening apprentice scheme with a view to them securing employment with the organisation. The tender document will actively challenge organisations to consider how as part of their tender they will deliver 'community benefits' as part of contract delivery.

3.08 Social Enterprise

In seeking a suitable organisation to undertake this contract the benefits of employing a social enterprise are also considered. Research supports the assertion that when social enterprises tackle local social and environmental issues and reinvest their profits in the community the result is local economic growth and added social value. In other words when money from the public purse is channeled into community social enterprises that money appears to 'work harder' for those communities.

It is anticipated that organisations with an overt commitment to corporate social responsibility could provide enhanced 'community benefit' initiatives. As a result social enterprises and charitable organisations are actively encouraged to tender.

3.09 Amending Criteria

This Report seeks support from members to amend the Qualifying Criteria so that general needs tenants over the age of 65 (not 60) are eligible to receive services. This approach results from the contention that there are many able-bodied tenants who are capable not only of maintaining their own garden but also find the activity both interesting and rewarding.

New Qualifying Criteria also state that tenants of working age should be in receipt of a Personal Independence Payment (from 8 April 2013 the Government is introducing a new benefit called Personal Independence Payment (PIP) to replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for eligible working age people aged 16 to 64).

It is also proposed that a tenant would be eligible for services if they are without an active family member not only in the home but in the county of Flintshire.

3.10 The table below sets out the current and proposed Qualifying Criteria

for acceptance on to the scheme (general needs tenants):

Current criteria	Proposed criteria	Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registered blind 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registered blind 	No change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age 60 and over Blanket qualification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age 65 and over In receipt of Attendance Allowance (AA) or Disability Living Allowance (DLA) 	Revised
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disability Working Allowance Disability Living Allowance Attendance Allowance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working Age In receipt of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) 	Revised
Current disqualification	Proposed disqualification	Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able bodied person in household 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able bodied person in household 	No change
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able bodied relatives living in Flintshire 	New

3.11 Charging for Services

It is predicted that the number of people in Wales reaching statutory retirement age will increase by more than 5% over the next 20 years. It is also envisaged that an ageing population will significantly challenge the capability of councils to provide affordable, good quality services to tenants.

The Assisted Garden Service is one such service that could come under financial pressure and this report encourages debate among members as to whether tenants should be charged an appropriate sum to cover the cost of delivering services such as this.

3.12 Next Steps

An exercise to determine the number of qualifying tenants will be undertaken over the coming months, to understand whether the allocated budget will be sufficient to deliver gardening and high or low-level welfare provision.

It is envisaged that final proposals for the new Service will be completed by the end of October 2013. Tender documents will then be issued in November 2013 with an aspiration to commence the new

service in April 2013.

3.13 Members' Considerations

To consider which level of welfare provision is preferred. Views will be considered when the contract is costed and procured.

To consider charging for services and approving the new Qualifying Criteria.

3.14 Financial Implications

The Housing Revenue Account funds the existing Assisted Garden Service at a cost of £250,000 per year. Should the new service cost more than the existing then this would need to be considered as a budget pressure.

As qualifying tenants do not make a direct contribution towards the cost of providing the Service all Council tenants help fund a provision that many may not directly benefit from.

4.00 ENVIRONMENTAL VISUAL AUDITS (EVAs)

4.01 Background

An Environmental Visual Audit (EVA) produces detailed community intelligence to support crime reduction and neighbourhood improvements within a defined geographical area.

The Housing Service has provided a greater emphasis on delivering EVAs in the last 12 months and as a result 27 EVAs have been completed since the start of the year to date. An EVA's success depends on who is involved, the level of information collected and the action taken in response to the problem.

A standard EVA normally involves a Neighbourhood Housing Officer (NHO), Repair Liaison Officer (RLO), Estate Caretakers, Street Scene, Local Residents, Elected Member(s) and a range of agencies which may include North Wales Police and for example Neighbourhood Watch.

The Service uses EVAs to identify concerns such as abandoned cars, untidy gardens and graffiti, fly tipping, repair and maintenance issues, litter, dog fouling and anything else that may be regarded as detrimental to the neighbourhood.

4.02 Forthcoming EVAs

EVAs will take place in the following areas during November and December 2012.

- South – Areas in Broughton, Buckley & Leeswood.
- East – Areas in Shotton and Connah's Quay (Golftyn).
- North – Areas in Flint.

A schedule of EVA visits for the period March 2012 - March 2013 was circulated to members in August 2012.

4.03 Members' Considerations

Members will be notified of the date an EVA will take place in their ward and are encouraged to participate along with Officers, residents and other agencies.

5.00 GARAGE REVIEW

5.01 Background

The Council manages two types of garage sites:

- Council-owned garages built on Council land and charged at a cost of £4.86 per week for private residents and £4.05 per week for Council tenants.
- Private garages built on Council-owned plots and charged at a cost of £52.00 per year.

5.02 A review of private garages built on Council-owned plots has commenced. The management of these sites falls under the control of Administration; however, the need to bring the management of these sites into Housing Management has been identified.

To make the transition from Administration to Housing Management seamless a review of data integrity was undertaken. From this review it was evident that certain information required to create accurate records of the sites was missing or inaccurate.

The Council manages 25 sites with private garage plots spread evenly throughout the County. The sites are located in Abbermorddu, Broughton, Caergwrle, Connah's Quay, Ewloe, Garden City, Hope,

Mancot, Penyffordd, Saltney, Shotton, Mancot and Sychdyn.

A visual inspection of the plots reveals that while some are actively used many are not and a number of garages are in a state of disrepair. Responsibility for repair and maintenance of the garages sits with the leaseholders.

5.03 Considerations

A final report outlining recommendations for the future of these sites will be completed by the end of December 2012. However findings to date include that:

- Some sites are under utilised. For example, the site in Abermorddu consists of 16 plots yet only 1 plot supports a functioning garage.
- A number of sites house garages that are in a very poor state of repair and have subsequently been abandoned.
- Sites in Broughton contain garages that are reasonably well used but are in a poor state of repair.
- More garages are used for storage than they are for vehicles; this is likely to be due to the fact that modern cars no longer fit inside the garages.
- Asbestos is likely to be present in a number of garages due their age and it is recommended that these garages are demolished.
- Sites with a small number of plots could be disposed of and re-developed for new build housing, play areas or community orchards and gardens.
- There is evidence of land grabbing (residents have extended their gardens on to the site); this requires further investigation and legal advice.
- Some sites suffer from fly tipping, are poorly lit and attract anti-social behaviour.

Estate caretakers carry out litter picking, strimming and rubbish clearance at a number of these sites as part of normal estate management duties.

The cost of providing these services exceeds the annual income of £4,800 per year received from rent.

It would therefore seem appropriate to consider a change of use for many sites, as the majority do not add any value to the services the Council provide.

Work is due to commence on a similar review of Council-owned garages which is expected to be completed by February 2013.

5.04 Members' Considerations

Members are asked to consider private garage sites in their wards and consider their future use. Some sites are very difficult to locate, as a result Neighbourhood Housing Officers will assist members on site visits when requested.

6.00 ALLOTMENTS (HOUSING LAND)

6.01 Background

Leisure Services are responsible for the day-to-day management of the Council's allotment sites, of which there are 6.

The standard ground rent for a plot is:

- £42 per year for a full plot.
- £21 per year for a half plot.

Whilst Leisure Services generally leads in the management of allotment sites, the Housing Department manages one site (6 plots) located in Dobshill, near Buckley,

Allotments on this site are charged at a different rate to those under the management of Leisure Services (currently £1 per plot per year).

6.02 Considerations

The Council's Category Management Policy supports the grouping together of related products and services across the Council such as allotments. A recent review of allotments demonstrated the need for clear and consistent administrative and management procedures for those allotments developed on housing land.

This Report proposes that the management of the Dobshill Allotment Site is transferred to Leisure Services, as the department is skilled in the areas of horticulture and management of the County's allotments. It is recommended that the land remains a HRA Asset.

There is a difference between rental agreements for the site in Dobshill and those sites in the rest in Flintshire. It is therefore recommended that agreements for the Dobshill site are amended to

bring them into line with the others.

6.03 Members' Considerations

Members are asked to consider the development of a 'Council Tenant Preference Group' so that tenants are given priority for allotments over private residents.

If this recommendation is approved rent will rise from £1 per year to £42 for a full plot and £21 for half a plot, a modest increase from the £6 per annum income (6 plots at £1 each per year) the Service currently receives.

Members are asked to:

- **Support the transfer the management of the Dobshill site to Leisure Services.**
- **Support the increase of rent for allotments situated on Housing Land.**
- **Support the introduction of standardised rental agreements.**
- **Support a Council Tenant Preference Group for allotments situated on Housing Service-owned land.**

7.00 MAINTENANCE OF HOUSING LAND (STREET SCENE)

7.01 Background

The customer experience in being able to report an external maintenance or repair issue (i.e damaged path, broken street light or overgrown piece of land etc) to the Council is complicated for the following reasons:

Accurate and up to date information about land ownership and responsibility is not readily available.

The customer will not be aware which Directorate within the Council owns the land. As a consequence they may request a repair from Housing when the responsibility lies with Street Scene and vice versa. This can result in the customer being referred from one department to another and becoming frustrated.

7.02 Considerations

Discussions have taken place between Housing and Street Scene to understand how a problem such as this can be resolved.

It is proposed that issues relating to HRA land could in future be managed by Street Scene in order to create a single point of contact for the customer and provide a better quality service.

In order to be able to transfer responsibility for HRA land to Street Scene a piece of work is required to gather data and intelligence on location, condition etc. This will ensure a smooth transition from one service to another and avoid future complications for both officers and customers.

At this early stage the financial implications are unclear, however further work will be carried out to understand future requirements.

7.03 Members' Considerations

Members are asked to support in principle these early proposals to transfer the management of HRA land maintenance to Street Scene with a view to improving the customer experience.

8.00 ESTATE CARETAKER REVIEW

8.01 Background

The Housing Service employs 6 full time Estate Caretakers. Their role is centred around improving the visual appearance of council estates includes duties such as:

- Litter picking
- Minor repair and maintenance
- Strimming
- General cleaning
- Waste management, fly tipping, rubbish accumulation etc

The service costs the department approximately £205,000 per year to deliver.

A review of the Estate Caretaker Service has been completed in order to understand how a more efficient, co-ordinated service can be delivered. As a result the following changes are proposed:

8.02 Considerations

- Caretaker jobs are recorded using a simple lotus notes data base that provides low level management information. The review recommends that jobs should be managed using IBS Housing System in line with the management of day to day

repairs and capital works. The introduction of a PDA would also mean that Caretakers could receive their tickets electronically thus saving time travelling to and from the office.

- Estate Caretakers are skilled in a range of areas; some have skills in tree work, others in bricklaying. The review has identified that providing caretakers a geographical location in which to work (north, south or east) has meant that not all skills are being shared equally within the county. It is therefore proposed to provide job tickets to caretakers based on their skill and not their geographical responsibility.
- It has been identified that savings could be made to the service by up-skilling caretakers in specialist work such as chain saw use and tree felling. This would reduce the amount spent on employing specialist companies and give the service more control over prioritising work.
- Caretakers are often the eyes and ears of our communities due to spending much of their time on Council estates. It is apparent that whilst much time is spent outside, local people and particularly tenants are not aware of their presence; this is likely to be because they blend in with their surrounding and drive standard Council vehicles. The review recommends that vehicles are re-branded and new uniforms are provided so Caretakers are easily identified by tenants.

8.03 Members' Considerations

Members are asked to consider the above proposals with a view to enhancing and improving the Estate Caretaker Service.

9.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

- Assisted garden service
The service seeks to support the most vulnerable tenants (Charging for services could have a financial impact on some tenants)
- Environmental Visual Audits.
(None)
- Garage Site Review.
(None)
- Maintenance of Housing Land (Street Scene).
(None)

- Allotments on Housing Land
(A modest increase in rent will have implications for allotment holders)
- Estate Caretaker Review
(None)

11.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

None directly arising from this report.

12.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

None directly arising from this report.

14.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

Consultation on the gardening service took place with tenants during the first tenants' conference this year.

15.00 APPENDICES

None

**16.00 LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None

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FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: WEDNESDAY, 31 OCTOBER 2012

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

SUBJECT: SARTH

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.01 This report updates members on the development of a Single Access Route to Housing across the North East Wales sub region and seeks Members views on progressing to the next stages of the project.

2.00 BACKGROUND

- 2.01 SARTH (Single Access Route to Housing) is a partnership project between all the major social landlords in North East Wales, covering in the local authority areas of Conwy County Borough, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham County Borough.
- 2.02 The partners are Conwy County Borough Council, Denbighshire County Council, Flintshire County Council, Wrexham County Borough Council, Cartrefi Conwy, Clwyd Alyn Housing Association, Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd, North Wales Housing and Wales and West Housing.
- 2.03 The overall aim of SARTH is to provide a common access route to a range of affordable housing options which is transparent, legal, efficient and accessible to all sections of the community.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

Progress to Date

- 3.01 This report follows on from the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Workshop held on the 25th July 2012. The successful workshop provided members with information on proposals for a Joint Register, Joint Policy and Joint Advice and Options. Members provided positive feedback about the benefits of the

proposals, in particular, the benefits to the customer.

- 3.02 Members had a number of questions about the project and its impact. These questions and the response to them are detailed in appendix 1. The two main issues that emerged from the workshop were concerns regarding the speed of the implementation and the costs to Flintshire. These two areas have been addressed and details are provided in this paper.
- 3.03 In response to the concerns about the timescales for implementation, Flintshire has asked for a more phased approach. This is outlined below:-

A Joint Register and Policy

Flintshire County Council is committed to the development of a Joint Allocation Register and a Common Allocations Policy and recognises the numerous benefits that will be obtained from the successful implementation of the SARTH. A first draft of a common allocation policy has been produced and most SARTH partner organisations have sought, and been granted, approval to undertake a public consultation exercise. However, the officers representing Flintshire's interest in the SARTH project are of the opinion that until a full impact assessment has been undertaken to ensure that the proposed policy will not have a negative impact on certain groups, the authority cannot commit to the public consultation exercise. In particular, officers are concerned how effectively the proposed policy will be aligned to the authority's aim of fulfilling its statutory homeless duties as cost effectively as possible. For example, the authority needs to be reassured that proposed bandings within the policy will not result in households, to whom the authority owes a full homeless duty, remaining in temporary accommodation for prolonged periods. The officers also suggest that it will be prudent for the authority not to sign up to the Common Allocations Policy until it is known which parts of the Welsh Housing White Paper will become legislation. For example, will legislation be introduced that enables Welsh local authorities to discharge their statutory homelessness duties by offering homeless households accommodation within the private rented sector, etc. Flintshire has senior officer representation on the various SARTH working groups who are carrying out work to assess the impact of the proposed policy and identify potential future cost efficiencies. On completion of these pieces of work, if officers are content that the proposed policy does not conflict with the authority's statutory homelessness duties, approval to move ahead to full public consultation on the Joint Register

and Common Allocations Policy could be obtained through the delegated powers of the Lead Cabinet Member.

Joint Housing Options

Work on the proposals within the SARTH project for the development of an enhanced Joint Housing Options Service will be explored at a later date and as a next stage in the project. Flintshire may choose not to progress to this part of the project. This decision will be informed by work which will be undertaken to identify the most suitable model for a Housing Options Service which will provide the best service delivery and cost efficiencies.

- 3.04 It is important to note that Flintshire, along with the other partner organisations, have **not** agreed to finally signing up to the scheme. This paper is asking for Scrutiny to support the next stages of the development project on the Common Allocations Policy so that a paper can be presented for Cabinet approval. It is planned that a further paper would be brought to Scrutiny/Cabinet for discussion/approval which will contain the results of the consultation exercise, information on potential cost efficiencies and will present a business case for signing up to all or part of the regional scheme.

Key elements of the SARTH

- 3.05 Partners share one register and so an applicant need make only one application to access the whole system. Each partner with properties in an area chosen by an applicant will be aware of the application and able to give the applicant the appropriate priority in the allocation process.
- 3.06 Housing need will be assessed uniformly across the region, providing fairness and consistency to the customer, taking into account people's individual needs and expressed preferences. The definition of housing need is based on the legal concept of reasonable preference. The approach adopted makes use of the further legal powers to prioritise within applicants entitled to reasonable preference according to local connection and urgent need.
- 3.07 The draft allocations framework adopts a banding scheme to prioritise people in housing need, following the legal principles regarding reasonable preference, additional preference and local connection.
- 3.08 When a vacancy becomes available, applicants who have expressed a preference for the area and whose household is suitable for the property type are shortlisted. Applicants are

ranked on this shortlist by their band, with those in band one given highest priority and so on. Applicants within the same band are ranked according to date of application, with those who have been waiting longest given highest priority.

- 3.09 There is not enough housing for everyone on the current register. The bandings will give priority to local people with a recognised housing need. People without a recognised housing need will be given better advice and informed about useful alternatives rather than just waiting on a register.

Funding

- 3.09 The development costs for the project are £394,000 in total. The project has secured £197,000 in Social Housing Management Grant from the Welsh Government.
- 3.10 The remaining costs will be apportioned between the partners. In other examples of partnerships, the costs are apportioned based on stock size and council partners contribute more to reflect their strategic role and duties. The apportioned costs have not been finalised but Flintshire's contribution based on previous examples is likely to be £23,000 for 2013-14. This cost will be included in the draft budget for 2013.14 subject to Member approval.
- 3.11 The project represents a significant opportunity to gain efficiencies in terms of sharing the costs for maintaining a register with the other SARTH partner organisations in the longer term. The exact level of savings is being worked out through the business case. The level of savings will depend on whether Flintshire signs up for all or part of the project. Some of the benefits achieved will be improved service delivery as well as cost savings.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 To note the development of the project to date and the responses to the questions from the Member Workshop.
- 4.02 To seek support for Flintshire to continue with the SARTH project and contribute to the development costs, subject to budget approval.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.01 Development costs to be included in the budget for 2013/14 subject to Member approval. Development costs for 2013-14 approximately £23,000.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 There are no specific anti-poverty implications within this report.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 There are no specific environmental implications within this report.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 A full project wide Equality Impact Assessment is currently being undertaken with assistance from Tai Pawb, an organisation specifically dedicated to promoting equality in housing.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 As the Neighbourhood Housing Teams will still be responsible for allocating Flintshire County Council housing properties that become vacant, there are no personnel implications at this stage.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 Full Public Consultation Required in 2013

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 None undertaken to date

12.00 APPENDICES

Appendix One - Questions from the Workshop and Answers

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

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APPENDIX ONE

Questions from the Workshop and Answers

October 2012

What will be the potential impact on the policy if “intentionality” is removed as proposed in the White Paper?

Intentionality will be dealt with in the same manner irrespective of the implementation of the Single Access Route to Housing.

Conwy have gone through stock transfer, will this have any impact on the policy?

This does not have an impact on the policy as the Housing Associations are part of the partnership so individuals in Conwy would go through the same process

It could be more difficult to make amendments to the policy because of the number of organisations involved, and the need to seek approval for amendments from each organisation.

It is true that with more partners involved, it may take longer to make amendments. This must be weighed up against the long term benefits of the Single Access Route for customers.

Has the criteria for prioritising cases been agreed, (including local connection criteria)?

The bandings have been drafted and include detail on local connection requirements. There are some further discussions ongoing about the detail to be worked through with regional partners.

Will the new policy help alleviate problems faced with Welfare Reform?

There will be no direct impact but the policy will aim to make best use of available stock and assist people to make realistic choices.

Will “Homeswap” still be available to applicants?

Yes

Will applicants seeking sheltered accommodation go through the same process?

Yes

How many choices of area will applicants be asked to provide? It was suggested that the current 10 options is too many.

This has not been finalised and feedback has been passed on that ten is too many.

How will issues of domestic violence be covered?

Individuals fleeing domestic abuse are given a high priority in the policy.

Will funding be provided by WAG? Is it match funded? If so how much will FCC contribute?

Welsh Government has provided 50% of the project costs. The total development costs are £394,000. This leaves £197,000 to be shared amongst the nine partners. The partner contributions are not finalised and will give consideration to stock size and the council's strategic role and duties.

There are no ongoing costs, the project will work within existing budgets and aim to make efficiencies by pooling resources.

What are the projected savings?

The SARTH working group are currently taking forward some work on a cost/benefit analysis. A detailed business case will be developed and taken to Cabinet for approval before Flintshire signs up to any part of the scheme.

Will each local authority/ RSL area have their own central hub or will there be one to cover the whole 4 counties?

There are no plans for centralised regional offices. The development of hubs and sharing resources will be the next stage of the project to develop. Flintshire has not signed up to this part of the scheme at this stage and will only do so based on a clear business case that demonstrates improved service deliver and/or efficiency savings.

Will this result is a loss of employees?

There may be an opportunity for efficiencies in the future or for staff resources to be focused in different areas.

If it results in employing more staff, will FCC have to contribute towards the cost?

There are no plans for additional staff and the ongoing costs will be within the existing budget.

What are the costs involved in training new staff & converting existing applications.

These costs are included in the project costs that are detailed above.

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: WEDNESDAY, 31 OCTOBER 2012

REPORT BY: MEMBER ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

SUBJECT: FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To consider the Forward Work Programme of the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 Experienced Overview & Scrutiny Members will be aware that items feed into a committee's Forward Work Programme from a number of sources. Individual Members can suggest topics for review by Overview & Scrutiny committees; members of the public can suggest topics; items can be referred by the Cabinet for consultation purposes; items can be referred by the County Council, or Directors can request that a committee gives a view on a particular topic. Other possible items are identified from the Cabinet Work Programme and the Strategic Assessment of Risks & Challenges.

2.02 In identifying topics for future consideration, it is useful for a 'test of significance' to be applied. This can be achieved by asking a range of questions as follows:

1. Will the review contribute to the Council's priorities and/or objectives?
2. Are there issues of weak or poor performance?
3. How, where and why were the issues identified?
4. Do local communities think the issues are important and is there any evidence of this? Is there evidence of public dissatisfaction?
5. Is there new Government guidance or legislation?
6. Have inspections been carried out?
7. Is this area already the subject of an ongoing review?

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 Overview & Scrutiny presents a unique opportunity for Members to determine the Forward Work Programmes of the committees of which they are Members

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.02 That the Committee considers its Forward Work Programme (attached as Appendix 1) and approve/amend as necessary.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

Not applicable

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Not applicable

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

Not applicable

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

Not applicable

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

Not applicable

12.00 APPENDICES

Draft Forward Work Programme (Appendix 1)

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Contact Officer: Robert Robins
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CURRENT FWP

Date of meeting	Subject	Purpose of Report	Scrutiny Focus	Responsible / Contact Officer	Submission Deadline
5 Dec 2012	Quarterly Performance Reporting	To consider Q2 performance outturns for improvement targets	Performance Monitoring	Director of Community Services	26 Nov 2012
	HRA Subsidy	To receive an update on the potential amendments to the HRA subsidy, to include proposals to meet the WHQS	Service Delivery	Head of Housing	
	Gypsy/Travellers Needs Assessment	To consider the needs assessment that will inform the development of the Strategy	Strategic	Housing Strategy Manager	
23 Jan 2013	Homelessness & Welfare Reform	To consider the implications of Welfare Reform on Homelessness, and the proposals to mitigate the impact.		Head of Housing	14 Jan 2013
	Sustainability in Housing	To consider work undertaken within Housing Services, and future proposals including the potential use of water meters.	Service Improvement	Head of Housing	

	Private Sector Housing Renewal	To consider progress on the delivery of Flintshire’s first Renewal Area, general service development and county wide projects, to include work on empty homes.	Strategic	Housing Renewal Manager	
21 Feb 2013	Resident Involvement	To consider proposals to improve resident involvement	Policy Development	Neighbourhood Housing Manager	12 Feb 2013
	Sheltered Housing Improvement Project	To receive an update following the implementation on the new service	Service Improvement		
21 March 2013	Quarterly Performance Reporting	To consider Q3 performance outturns for improvement targets.	Performance Monitoring	Director of Community Services	12 March 2013
	Collaborative Working within Housing Services	To receive and consider current and future collaborative initiatives.	Collaboration	Head of Housing	
24 April 2013	Adopted/Un-adopted land	To consider HRA land that adopted and un-adopted together with management of garage sites.	Member request	Head of Housing	15 April 2013
	Repairs & Maintenance In-House DFG’s	To enable Members to monitor the approach and effectiveness of repairs and improvements to the	Service Improvement	Head of Housing	

		Council's housing stock, to include proposals for the delivery of in-house DFG's as previously approved.			
5 June 2013	Quarterly Performance Reporting	To consider Q4, year end outturns for improvement targets.	Performance Monitoring	Director of Community Services	29 May 2013
10 July 2013	To be determined				1 July 2013

ITEMS TO BE SCHEDULED as agreed by Committee

Item	Purpose of Report	Responsible / Contact Officer
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REGULAR ITEMS

Month	Item	Purpose of Report	Responsible / Contact Officer
Quarterly / Annual	Performance Reporting	To consider performance outturns for improvement targets against directorate indicators.	Director of Community
Six monthly	Update on Repairs and Improvements	To enable Members to monitor the approach and effectiveness of repairs and improvements to the Council's housing stock, to include void management.	Head of Housing
Quarterly	Sheltered Housing Improvement Project	To receive progress with the review on sheltered accommodation.	
Six monthly	Private Sector Housing Renewal	To consider progress on the delivery of Flintshire's first Renewal Area, general service development and county wide projects.	Head of Housing
Quarterly	Collaborative Working within Housing Services	To receive and consider current and future collaborative initiatives.	Head of Housing

APPENDIX B**STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT OF RISKS AND CHALLENGES**
TOPICS ALLOCATED TO OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**SECTION 1 - COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

Category	Risk Reference	Title	Committee
Strategic Partnerships	CL04	Affordable Housing	Housing

SECTION 2 - COUNCIL DELIVERY

Category	Risk Reference	Title	Committee
Environment	CD08	Shotton and Deeside Renewal Area	Housing
Housing	CD12a	Housing Strategy	C&H
	CD12b	Housing Management	C&H
	CD12c	Housing Repairs & Maintenance	C&H
	CD12d	Homelessness	C&H
	CD12e	Sheltered Housing	Housing
	CD14	Housing Ballot	C&H
	CD19	Gypsies and Travellers	C&H
Social Care	CD26	Disabled Facilities Grants	S&H and Housing (joint meetings)

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