# Public Document Pack

**Gareth Owens LL.B Barrister/Bargyfreithiwr**
Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Pennaeth Gwasanaethau Cyfreithiol a Democrataidd

To: Cllr Ron Hampson (Chairman)

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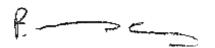Mike Reece, Gareth Roberts and Sharon Williams

CS/NG

15 February 2013

Sharon Thomas 01352 702324
sharon.b.thomas@flintshire.gov.uk

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
**THURSDAY, 21ST FEBRUARY, 2013** at **10.00 AM** to consider the following items.

Yours faithfully

Democracy & Governance Manager

# A G E N D A

1    **APOLOGIES**

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

3    **MINUTES** (Pages 1 - 10)

     To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January
     2013 (copy enclosed).

4    **RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT** (Pages 11 - 22)

     Report of Director of Community Services

County Hall, Mold. CH7 6NA
Tel. 01352 702400 DX 708591 Mold 4
www.flintshire.gov.uk
Neuadd y Sir, Yr Wyddgrug. CH7 6NR
Ffôn 01352 702400 DX 708591 Mold 4
www.siryfflint.gov.uk

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

## HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
## 23 JANUARY 2013

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, 23 January 2013

**PRESENT:** **Councillor Ron Hampson (Chairman)**
Councillors: Amanda Bragg, David Cox, Peter Curtis, Ron Davies, Rosetta Dolphin, Jim Falshaw, Alison Halford, George Hardcastle, Brian Lloyd, Mike Reece, Gareth Roberts and Sharon Williams

**SUBSTITUTIONS:** Councillors: Haydn Bateman (for Glenys Diskin) and Patrick Heesom (for Ray Hughes)

**APOLOGY:** Director of Community Services

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Cabinet Member for Housing, Head of Housing, Advice and Homelessness Team Manager, Supporting People Manager, Housing Renewal Manager, Neighbourhood Housing Manager (North) and Housing Asset Manager

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Member Engagement Manager and Committee Officer

### 41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

No declarations of interest were made.

### 42. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 January 2013 had been circulated with the agenda.

**RESOLVED:**

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

### 43. HOMELESSNESS & WELFARE REFORM

The Supporting People Manager introduced the report about the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and its implications for benefit recipients and Flintshire County Council.

The purpose of the report was two-fold in that it informed Members of the current work being undertaken to mitigate the effects of Welfare Reform and it sought comments from the Committee to key questions that would be used to develop policies within the Neighbourhood Housing Service for presentation at Cabinet.

The Advice and Homelessness Team Manager explained that in response to the Welfare Reform Act 2012, a Welfare Reform Programme Board had been

established.  He highlighted the changes to housing benefit, work undertaken by the Council and recent trends in homelessness.

- The changes to the social security system would have the potential to reduce benefit income in households across all of Flintshire's economies.

  It had been assumed by the government that the majority of households would replace lost benefit income.

- The Council expected that some of the more vulnerable households in the county would experience the most severe financial pressures and would be unable to secure employment which in turn would affect a household's ability to pay their contractual housing costs and increase the threat of homelessness.

- The Council's Advice and Homelessness Team had already seen an increase in enquiries from residents.  During the period October to December 2012, 54 formal homeless applications had been made in contrast to 34 applications made in the period October to December 2012.  This represented a 58% increase in formal homeless applications.

- Council tenants identified as under occupying their home had been contacted and offered the opportunity of meeting with a member of the housing team to discuss the Housing Benefit reforms with them.

- 1152 tenants had been contacted. 78% of these tenants had responded and were engaged with the Housing Team.  32% indicated they would pay the shortfall whilst 10% stated that they wished to move.

The Advice and Homelessness Team Manager said that Neighbourhood Housing teams were offering 12 week money management courses to those tenants already in arrears.  An increase in homeless applications was anticipated and new provision was being developed such as the lease of 17 bed sits and organised house-shares for groups of three or more young people.  Flintshire was looking at official property lettings agencies, in order that more private landlords could be engaged with the council to provide affordable homes.

A series of eight key questions outlined in paragraph 3.07 of the report were posed which related to the duty to collect rent and the duty of care as a landlord.  The Committee was asked to quantify the level of arrears that would result in legal proceedings and the financial position for bad debt over the next three years.

Councillor R. Dolphin said that council tenants in her area had received letters from the council which wrongly claimed that they were in arrears with rent payments.  She asked if future letters could be sent out two weeks after a non payment of rent, as many people still paid their rent on a weekly basis and their latest payment may not yet have been on the system.  Councillor Dolphin asked if persons wishing to downsize property would be penalised whilst waiting for a smaller property to become available.  She also asked how the Council would deal with people who stopped paying rent completely or who continued to pay the previous amount.

The Head of Housing said that the letter had not been sent out to all tenants, just those identified as being in arrears. She agreed that there were many challenges ahead regarding people wanting to downsize and the lack of available smaller properties where people wanted them. The Council was looking at a two year timescale to move those who had asked for a transfer but she anticipated that many more would come forward once they had found difficulties paying the increased rent charge. This would increase the length of time it would take to house people. The Neighbourhood Housing Manager (North) said that it was a standard letter sent to everyone shown on the system as in arrears. Therefore if the letter was posted on a Monday, persons due to pay the rent later in the week would have been classed as in arrears. She said that the next mail out would only be sent to tenants who were two weeks or more in arrears.

Councillor A. M. Halford suggested that the letter include a sentence asking the recipient to ignore it if they had already made a payment in the last seven days. She said that the Committee did not have the capacity to provide answers to the eight questions and that people making attempts to pay should be treated differently to those that had no intention of paying. There was no ready answer to the question about the financial position for bad debt.

Councillor Dolphin said that the current policy on transfers should be revised to allow tenants with rent arrears to move to smaller accommodation.

Councillor J. E. Falshaw asked if private landlords had been consulted about welfare reform. The Advice and Homelessness Team Manager said that currently, landlords would insist that housing benefit was paid directly to them. That would change with the introduction of Universal Credit. Private landlords and the Council were concerned about housing benefit being paid to the tenant. The Head of Housing said that she had a report about pilot schemes in England, Wales and Scotland and would circulate it to Committee Members. The Advice and Homelessness Team Manager said that the new regulations would allow an individual for a time limited period to have payment sent direct to landlord and would be given support to assist budgeting. The Welfare Reform Act aimed to make households more responsible for their own finances.

Councillor P.G. Heesom praised the authors of the report for their dynamic and informative report. He asked if the Council could set up its own lettings agency to help encourage private landlords to rent to benefit claimants. He asked if builders and developers had been contacted to supply more houses. The Head of Housing said that they would consider setting up an agency or working with Clwyd Alyn's Social Lettings Agency or an agency in Anglesey. A social lettings agency would manage the property and guarantee income for the landlord. They hoped to take it forward in the next few months. The possibility of new housing development for rent in the county was being explored. Officers were also looking at the investment programme to aim to lower the cost of heating in tenants' homes in the form of getting affordable heating to areas currently not on the gas network. This year, Sealand Manor had benefited from the CESP match funded gas installation.

Councillor D. Cox asked in the case of evictions going to court if the Judge could impose repayment of arrears in weekly/monthly amounts if the person had been struggling, but trying to meet rent payments.  The Head of Housing said that they would accept repayment arrangements and that the Council never wanted to evict tenants.  If a case went to court, the Council would have to demonstrate the full case history and whether the tenants had cooperated or not.  There would be test cases under the new legislation.  The Advice and Homelessness Manager said that he had represented tenants to stop evictions. Tenants had to show that it was financially possible for them to pay arrears and judges needed to see that it was an achievable offer.

Councillor P.J. Curtis said that he believed most tenants who could pay would pay.  Despite this he said that the Council would have to be prepared to bear an amount of loss and to keep it at a minimum.  He also said that house shares were a good idea.

Councillor G. H. Bateman asked if the regulations could be ignored in terms of under occupancy.  The Head of Housing gave an example of how the regulations were affecting the waiting list.  A three bedroomed house had become available and the 23rd family on the priority list had been the first to be eligible for the tenancy if the new regulations were strictly observed.  The other 22 households in need with more points would have subsequently under-occupied the house.  Children aged up to 10 years were expected to share with siblings.  If a family had one child aged over 10 and another child of the opposite sex under ten, they would be entitled to a three bed house.  The Head of Housing said there was a shortage of two bed properties.

Councillor M. A. Reece asked if Bagillt library could be used as a residential property.  The Housing Renewal Manager said that a meeting was convened for the coming Friday to take a look at it.

Councillor Halford suggested that a workshop for all Members be arranged to discuss the questions raised in the report as she felt the Committee lacked the capacity and authority to undertake this alone.  The Neighbourhood Housing Manager (North), suggested that the report be sent to all Members in the first instance for comment.

Councillor Heesom suggested that the report be circulated, then if necessary, a workshop be organised. He proposed that three recommendations be added to the resolution.   He said that he agreed that a social lettings agency be employed, whether in-house or pre-existing.  He said he wanted to see more investment in affordable homes by the private sector to be pursued by the Council and that allocation should be based on need and not means to pay.  The Head of Housing said that a social lettings agency was a good idea and that an information gathering exercise was currently in operation.  She agreed in principle that a review of the current six year investment programme could help the Council to address the changing needs of local communities.  She suggested that improved heating systems in homes would reduce fuel consumption and enable tenants to save on their bills and to use the savings for other household costs, including any additional contributions to rent.  The Head of Housing said that the Council would engage with Housing Associations to see how they intended to approach the changes to welfare reform.  It was likely that the

Housing Associations would adhere strictly to the bedroom standards and allocate accordingly.

The Committee voted to accept the three recommendations from Councillor Heesom.

Councillor Dolphin asked if any surplus funding for additional new kitchens, over and above those agreed and budgeted for be allocated to upgrade heating systems in homes. She asked about the tenancy agreement in the case of home shares and if individual benefits were affected. She also asked if hard to let three bedroom houses could be divided into two flats. The Head of Housing said that the Council would adhere to the Choices programme in Council owned properties and any efficiency savings in the programme would be used to upgrade heating systems. The tenants undertaking the home share were all on licence as they were not permitted by law to enter into secure tenancies. The Head of Housing said that she would forward copies of a report into the "direct payments" to the Committee.

Councillor H.G. Roberts asked how private sector landlords were able to rent properties to groups of individuals. The Advice and Homelessness Team Manager in response said that the private sector could offer Assured Tenancies under the 1988 Housing Act.

The Cabinet Member had earlier suggested that the Homelessness and Welfare Reform report be sent to all elected Members for comment rather than convene a workshop. This was agreed by the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

(a)     That the Committee notes the measures outlined in the report that are being implemented to help address the impact of the Welfare Reforms;

(b)     That Flintshire County Council establish either their own social lettings agency or employ the services of an established agency;

(c)     That Flintshire County Council enter into discussion with housing construction companies to push for more investment in affordable housing;

(d)     That Council owned housing be allocated on the basis of need and not means to pay; and

(e)     That the Homelessness and Welfare Reform Report be sent to all elected Members for comment.

## 44.     SUSTAINABILITY IN HOUSING

The Housing Renewal Manager introduced the report which sought to inform Members of the changes to the energy efficiency funding streams and to outline to Members the rationale for the collection of water charges.

<u>Energy Efficiency</u>

- The cost of building social housing was higher than private sector because of a higher specification.  Government grants had been reduced in spite of more demand for this housing.

- New Building regulations for social housing would be more rigorous in terms of energy efficiency in the future.

- Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP) had delivered approximately 439 measures in over 200 council homes over past two years and 132 private homes over the same period.

- Bids had been made for Mostyn and Oakenholt to obtain "Arbed "funding from the Welsh Government.

- The need for the reduction of reliance on oil for heating.  Successful bids for mains gas funding had resulted in mains gas installations in Sealand Manor, Isabella Court and Coppa View.

<u>ECO and the Green Deal</u>

All existing UK wide energy programmes came to an end on 31 December 2012, which included CERT and CESP.  They had been replaced by the new Energy Company Obligation (ECO) from January 2013.  ECO was a levy placed on utility companies to provide funding for energy efficiency measures.

- Arrangements for the scheme were to be confirmed at the end of January 2013.

- The Green Deal was the energy efficiency programme which aimed to provide finance in the form of Green Deal loans for energy efficiency measures.  Flintshire must decide how it would be involved in Green Deal, whether as a promoter of other providers, a partner to other providers or to provide funding for loans in the form of a prudential borrowing capital programme.

The Neighbourhood Housing Manager introduced the second part of the report to review the Flintshire county Council contract with Welsh Water and Dee Valley Water which collected water charges along with the rent for Council dwellings.  The Council collected the charges which were paid to the water companies in one lump sum in exchange for commission.

- In 2011/12 the Council earned commission from the contract of £481,548 which was ring fenced to the HRA account and was re-invested to improve homes and services.  The Council could identify households struggling with water bills and refer them to The Welsh Water Assist programme.

- Disadvantages were that the Council carried arrears of water rates as "rent arrears".  It was not possible to calculate exact percentage of arrears on an account solely due to water charges.  Housing was looking at devising a solution with IT.

- It was estimated that water arrears accounted for 10% of current debt. No evictions of Council tenancies had occurred for water rate arrears alone. Water rates as opposed to water meters benefited the majority of tenants.

Councillor P.G. Heesom said that this was a good report which dealt with a diversity of issues. He said that quality housing was required at the right price and that they should aim for Code 4 standards rather than Code 3. This could be achieved by driving down costs with developers who must be prepared to narrow profit margins.

Councillor A.M. Halford agreed that Code 4 should be pushed with developers and asked if this should be a condition of planning. She asked for more information about specifications for Codes 3 and 4. The Head of Housing agreed to provide information about the costs and specifications for codes 3 and 4. The Housing Renewal Manager said that the Council could not make rules about planning subject to Code 4 as it was above the specification set out in building regulations.

Councillor R. Dolphin asked if Flintshire gave out information about Water Assist. The Neighbourhood Housing Manager said staff were aware of eligibility criteria and could advise relevant tenants about the scheme. The tenant had to be in arrears to qualify. Councillor Dolphin asked about savings from solar panels and if grants would be re-started for people to upgrade boilers. The Housing Renewal manager said that lifetime savings made from the installation of solar panels could be calculated. He agreed to circulate figures concerning the panels to the Committee. He added that some properties that were unable to access CESP scheme would be passported to the ECO programme. The new arrangements would be confirmed on 28 January 2013.

Councillor J.E. Falshaw asked if the Council kept up to date with advances in technology with regards to solar panels. The Housing Renewal Manager said that the Council tried to source the most appropriate equipment.

Councillor Halford asked if heat pumps produced sustainable energy. The Housing Renewal Manager said that heat pump technology had now advanced and worked well. The Housing Assets Manager said that staff had started training to maintain heat pumps.

**RESOLVED**:

(a)    That Members support the development of a Sustainability Strategy for Housing in line with appropriate standards and consultation with planning control and that Members note the success of energy efficiency schemes to date;

(b)    That Members note changes to energy efficiency funding, with the ending of the Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP) and the introduction of the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) and the Green Deal; and

(c)    That Members support the collection of water charges based upon the rationale presented.

45. **PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL**

The Housing Renewal Manager introduced a report to update Members on the last six month's activity in the Housing Renewal Service.

Loans for Repairs and Improvements

- The transition from Grants to Loans in 2010 has resulted in a loan register to date of £768K (monies to be repaid to the Council).

- Demand for assistance remained high, with 26 loans completed in Quarter 2 and a similar forecast for Quarter 3.

Empty Homes activity and Houses into Homes Scheme

- Flintshire Housing Renewal was the lead for the North Wales region and had to date claimed for the region £1,570,597 out of a total of £2,332,532.

- Flintshire's current claimed share of this resource was £526K.  This would provide loans for 22 units of accommodation across the county.

- The empty property database was now operational and contained details of 406 properties.

Disabled Facilities Grant

The Housing Renewal Manager reported that there was a proposal to remove the Disabled Facilities Grant Regime for Council tenants from 1 April 2013, excluding those that had moved from owner occupation in the previous 12 months. It was proposed that work would instead be scheduled upon receipt, without the need for application forms, means testing and requesting applicants to evidence income and savings, which would mean less administration and greater control.

Councillor P.G. Heesom said that he agreed with the recommendations and asked for records of Council houses with disabled adaptations to be kept.

**RESOLVED:**

a)    That Members note the progress of the Housing Renewal Service over the last 8 months and that 6 monthly reports are submitted to this Committee; and

b)    That Members support the proposal to remove the DFG regime for Council Tenants from 1 April 2013, excluding those that have moved from owner occupation in the previous 12 months.

46. **PDA AND CAPITA UPDATE**

Councillor P.G. Heesom proposed that the agenda item be deferred due to outstanding issues around the report.  This was seconded by Councillor A. M.

Halford.  A vote was taken and the proposal to defer the agenda item was agreed by the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

That the item be deferred.

47.  **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Member Engagement Manager introduced the report to consider the Forward Work Programme.

Councillor P.G. Heesom asked if the papers for the 21 February 2013 meeting could be circulated one week in advance as opposed to the statutory three days.  The Member Engagement Manager said that he would see if this was possible.

Councillor A.M. Halford asked if PDA and Capita Update could be moved to the 21 February 2013 meeting.  The Member Engagement Manager informed the Committee that the PDA and Capita Update would move to the February meeting, thus negating the need for the matter to be discussed at the March meeting as previously scheduled.

Councillor Halford asked if Tracking could be included in the April meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Forward Work Programme as submitted be approved with the following inclusions outlined below;

(a)     That PDA and Capita Update be scheduled for the February meeting and removed from the March meeting;

(b)     That six monthly reports be received from the Housing Renewal Service; and

(c)     That Tracking be included in the April Meeting.

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

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


(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.35 pm)


................................................
**Chairman**

This page is intentionally left blank

**FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

REPORT TO:        HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE:              THURSDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2013

REPORT BY:        DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

SUBJECT:          RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT


1.00    **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.01    This report provides the strategic context to the Council's approach to 'customer involvement'. It aims to share with members the results of the Welsh Government's assessment of the council's Customer Involvement Strategy (also known as the Local Tenant Participation Strategy). Members are asked to consider the areas for improvement, and the proposals by Council to address these, noting both existing activities and projects, and those planned for the future. Finally, the strategy will be due for a light touch review, and members are asked to consider what should be the priorities going forward.

2.00    **BACKGROUND**

2.01    Welsh Government has adopted a national tenant participation strategy for Wales. Since 2007, it has been a requirement for social landlords to produce a local tenant participation strategy and a plan for implementation. Since then all social landlords in Wales have submitted a Local Tenant Participation Strategy (LTPS) to Welsh Government and TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) Cymru have carried out an assessment of all LTPSs with an overview report and individual reports to landlords. The assessment of Flintshire County Council's LTPS is annexed to this report for ease of reference.

2.02    It is the intention of the Council to keep the LTPS under review, and a customer involvement strategy group has been established for many years. This group which is comprised of members, tenants and officers of the council work collaboratively to improve the council's approach to customer involvement.

2.03    It is also good practice for landlords to involve customers in designing services. This is because by involving a diverse range of customers in the design and improvement of housing services, the service will be better able to meet the diverse needs of the customers it serves.

3.00    **CONSIDERATIONS**

3.01 **LOCAL TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY**

3.02 The Involvement Strategy Group has been able to consider the content of the assessment and has formulated an action plan to address the areas for improvement which have been highlighted.

3.03 The assessment considered 12 points in relation to the strategy and action plan and rated 10 of these as satisfactory or good, highlighting two areas for improvement.

The areas on which the council needs to improve are:

> Inclusion of measures and ways to evidence the outcomes which are achieved.

> Consideration of the ways in which resources and capacity will be prioritised in relation to the strategy and action plan.

3.04 In response to the assessment report highlighting these, an action plan has been produced. In reviewing the LTPS going forward, it is the aim to include the measures which will be adopted so that the council can evidence the outcomes from its customer involvement activities. In order to prioritise resources and capacity it is now intended that the development of any aspects of customer involvement will be included within the formal service plan.

3.05 **CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES, PROJECTS AND PRIORITIES**

3.06 The council offers both formal and informal ways for customers to be involved in housing services. Customers have different preferences in relation to being involved, and may only do so for example when they wish to express a view on a service they have received at the time, whereas others may wish to be part of a formal working group, or residents association. The following highlights the activities and projects that have been carried out, and those which are planned in the forthcoming financial year.

3.07 **FORMAL CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES**

3.08 Tenants' conferences were held in April 2012 (Civic Hall), October 2012 (The Beaufort Hotel) and January 2012 (Civic Hall). These were well attended but tenants from the north area were under-represented. It is therefore intended that the demand for a similar event in the north area be established, with a view to offering another event there. The conference is beneficial to the council as it enables the authority to consult on a wide range of issues, with a large number of people in a short space of time.

In January 2013, customers were consulted on anti-social behaviour, improvement works to their homes and the draft budget as well as

providing an opportunity to explain to customers the challenging economic environment in which services are currently being delivered. Additionally the council holds an annual customer awards ceremony. In order to make better use of resources, it is proposed that both of these events are combined in 2013.

3.09   A tenant inspection regime has been established to test the services within housing and to establish the reality of the customer experience. This approach is still in its infancy and the results of the first service to be tested have not yet been made available. However it is envisaged that the next service to be tested will be anti-social behaviour in order to provide a baseline position prior to the implementation of a revised antisocial behaviour policy, IT system and specialist team.

3.10   The council provides support and advice for tenants and residents groups and associations to become established. The authority has developed a positive working relationship with the Tenant's Federation and its members work closely with the council on a wide range of housing related issues. By working with the tenant's federation, the council is able to obtain valuable input in the design and improvement of a range of services. An example of this is a member of the Tenant's Federation sits on the Housing Antisocial Behaviour (ASB) Steering Group along with members, council officers, police and other agencies who provide input into the direction of the ASB service.

3.11   The council has supported and provided a range of training opportunities to facilitate groups and individuals who wish to be formally involved.

Training undertaken in 2012 included:

- Committee skills **(12 attendees)**
- Negotiating skills for groups **( 11attendees)**
- ASB policy session **( 6 attendees)**
- Getting the best from your community house/centre **(15 attendees)**
- Interview skills **(8 attendees)** (1 tenant has gone onto participate in appointment of senior staff)

Training planned for 2013 includes:

- Basic food hygiene (January)
- Treasurer skills (February)
- Appointment of Contractors briefing session (March)
- Fundraising (April)
- Basic First Aid (June)
- Getting more of the community involved. (May)

3.12    Customers have also been involved in the appointment of contractors delivering the council's improvement works to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard. The input of tenants is positive in this respect and they have asked pressing and insightful questions of prospective contractors. Customers have told us that it is important to them to have an input into the appointment of contractors who will be working in their homes.

3.13    The authority has established a sheltered housing forum which arose from demand within sheltered housing. Customers have requested input into the issues which affect them directly, for example, the sheltered warden service, grass cutting and anti-social behaviour. The forum which currently has 26 members is still in its infancy. However, plans are being developed to involve the group in the development of services.

3.14    **INFORMAL CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES**

3.15    Housing Services hosts a 'family fun day' for customers. This is aimed at involving customers who may not participate in other more formal events. The 2012 event was held in Connah's Quay Community Centre, with over 250 attendees. The council and its contractors held information stalls incorporating an element of fun and provided bouncy castles, arts & crafts and face painters to attract young families to the free event. Community groups were also involved and were able to raise funds for their own groups or charities. Over £700 was raised for charity. In August 2013, a joint 'fun day' with Penyffordd Residents (North) Group is to be held on a Saturday and this is currently in the planning stage.

3.16    In line with the Strategy Assessment, it has already been identified that more focus needs to be given to understanding the profile of the attendees, and the outcomes from the event. This is necessary to understand whether the event provides value for money.

3.17    The Housing Service produces a Housing News magazine which has historically been published and delivered 4 times per year to all tenants. The publication has historically been A4 sized, and printed on high quality glossy paper. Whilst this makes the magazine an attractive publication, the council needs to be mindful of costs.

3.18    Some savings have already been made by having staff deliver the magazines, and reducing printing costs. In January 2013, teams of council officers, members and tenants came together to deliver the magazine, and to be a visible presence in the council's neighbourhoods. This was successful due to the amount of staff who volunteered to help which meant that the magazine was delivered in one single morning, and the council saved on postage costs, quoted at £5,300. Value was also added by familiarising officers with a variety of neighbourhoods, identifying estate management issues, such as

untidy gardens, and connecting with local residents.

3.19    The council is proposing to trial a 'newspaper' format for the Spring edition of Housing News which will cost £1300 to produce which will then be evaluated and customers asked for views. Further costs savings are being investigated, such as sharing costs with other organisations who may wish to publicise their stories or information and/or approaching external contractors or business for sponsorship. The total budget for housing news for 13/14 is £15,000 should 4 issues be produced in a similar format to recent years this would cost circa £1,800 for printing each issue; leaving a saving of £7,800 should the Council continue with hand delivery.  Should the number of issues be reduced, or formatting changed this would achieve further efficiencies.

3.20    Members are asked to consider whether the number of publications should remain at 4 per year, or be reduced to 2 or 3 issues per year. Further consideration should be given to whether the Council continues to have the publication delivered to every property, or if any of the following options might be more appropriate:

      (a)    Electronic editions of the publication which customers can opt-in to receive by email in lieu of a printed copy. With a choice of receiving either in Welsh or English.

      (b)    Printed copies which are also delivered to key public locations for customers to collect if they wish, in lieu of a hand delivered copy.

3.21

The council, through its production of the Housing News, is using this as a vehicle to involve younger residents. As an alternative to the use of stock photographs for the front cover of the publication the Spring 2013 edition will use this space as an opportunity for a young local budding photographer to get their work published.

3.22

In the same issue two teenagers from the local community will be volunteering on the team; one as a photographer and the other as a junior journalist who will be shadowing a member of staff to write an article on "A day in the life of…." The purpose of this is to highlight the work carried out by the council, to introduce local young residents to the type of careers offered in housing, particularly in relation to entry level jobs, and to give young people valuable experience working with the council on the publication.  It is then aimed to run competitions to give other local young people the chance to become involved and this will be enhanced by the provision of training.

## 4.00    RECOMMENDATIONS

The council will be reviewing the Customer Involvement Strategy and will incorporate the learning from the Welsh Government Strategy Assessment. Members are asked to consider what the priorities

should be for the service to inform a revised strategy to be considered by Scrutiny later in the year.

Members are asked to consider the recommendation that the frequency of the Housing News publication be reduced from 4 to 2 or 3.

**5.00    FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

It is envisaged that efficiency savings will be achieved through the review of the Housing News magazine and measures will be put in place to assess value for money from customer involvement activities.

**6.00    ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

No issues arising from this report.

**7.00    ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

No issues arising from this report.

**8.00    EQUALITIES IMPACT**

The customer involvement strategy aims to improve equality of opportunity for customers to participate in the design and delivery of housing services.

**9.00    PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

No issues arising from this reports

**10.00   CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

None at this stage

**11.00   CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**


**12.00   APPENDICES**

Welsh Government/TPAS Strategy Assessment Document

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


**Contact Officer:        Helen Grant**
**Telephone:               01352 301758**
**Email: Helen.grant@flintshire.gov.uk**

# LTPS Assessment Report 2011 - Flintshire County Council

## Assessment Rating

The requirements of each criterion are assessed on the simple scale below.
1 Good
2 Satisfactory
3 Scope for improvement

The ratings are primarily to allow aggregation of all social landlords' assessments to give an overall picture of the progress of participation indicated by LTPS's, and the areas of weakness or gaps. The ratings are not intended to provide a score for each assessment nor to produce a league table of any sort.

## Summary

This is a clear strategy with good assessment of the current position and what needs to be improved, and a simple explanation of what the strategy approach is and the commitments for the future. The action plan is clear but not outcome focused enough – objectives are a mix of actions with purposes about process of tenant involvement, and not enough purpose about improvement to services etc.

The assessments against criteria below include comments and advice about where improvements could be made even where the rating is 'good'.

| LTPS Assessment Criteria | Assessment Comments | Rating | What do we plan to do? |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Clear intentions:** | | | |
| 1. Includes a robust assessment of current tenant participation (TP) practice:<br>- based on tenants' views'<br><br>- clearly identifying strengths and weaknesses; | Good review of progress to date in several ways including wide scale tenant satisfaction survey, actions and developments completed from the previous LTPS, and tenants' views gathered from TP activities such as the tenant conference. Useful that tenants' priorities for home improvements are identified though actions to deliver these with tenant involvement | 1 | **To do** - Include how we will involve tenants in delivering WHQS improvements |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| - mapping the range of TP activities and levels of tenant influence. | are not followed through.   Satisfaction survey data is provided but there is no discussion and follow through about **how the LTPS will address dissatisfaction.**<br><br>Clearly laid out section summarising what works and what needs to improve, and another broad strengths and weaknesses.<br><br>TP activities are listed and described with a table indicating the time involved and the level of influence each activity could have.  **Needs some evidence and/or examples of influence that has actually happened.** | | **To do** – include within local service action plans, (Asset management and complaints)<br><br>**To do** - Include evidence/impact on services within customer and staff feedback. (Example – change to customer satisfaction forms by 'reality checkers' and outcomes of reviews by tenant auditors. |
| 2.  Clearly states the purposes of participation and the outcomes to be achieved. | The introduction has a good statement of the purposes for involving customers in terms of better decisions and services, problem solving and customer satisfaction.   However, these purposes are not all developed further through the document.   Clear aims and objectives are stated but they are a mix of actions and purposes which put the focus more on areas of action to involve tenants, rather than on the end results of improved services and accountability of the landlord.<br><u>Outcomes are stated in the action plan under each objective, most of which are genuine outcomes but about process of involvement rather than impact on quality of services, communities and accountability.</u> | 2 | **To do** - Link impact on quality of service/communities/ accountability to each outcome |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3. States how its objectives reflect corporate plans, and in turn how tenant participation is expressed in other corporate plans and policies. | Short mention of the linking between the LTPS and the Council's core objective and the directorate plan. | 2 | **To do** - Strengthen link to corporate and other strategic plans – show 'family tree' |
| 4. Gives clear commitments about which TP activities will be maintained or developed, and any new activities. | Very clear explanation of what will continue and new activities and developments.   Good strategic summary paragraph in the introduction. | 1 | |
| **Effective approach and methods:** | | | **What do we plan to do?** |
| 5. Provides effective mechanisms for the range of different tenants to participate as they prefer across the whole landlord services and organisation. | There is a good range of TP activities with a strong community activity basis and informal activities through to higher level involvements which are focused around the Tenants' Federation.   Additional higher level activities are planned such as development of the reality checkers and more involvement in performance standard setting and monitoring. There is a specific commitment to involving tenants in ways that suit them.  The satisfaction survey provided some profiling information about tenants over 60 but there is no other information about the profile of active tenants or under-represented groups, though barriers are mentioned for working tenants and carers. Also, a specific commitment to involve tenants across the whole organisation. | 1 | Need to undertake tenant profiling.

Appointment of customer involvement assistant to engage with young people and other seldom heard groups. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6. Provides effective training, support and structures for all staff to involve tenants in their area of work. | Clear commitment is stated to mainstreaming tenant involvement and the action plan includes a good set of actions to structure tenant involvement into responsibilities, appraisals and team agendas.  Action to develop training for staff on customer involvement including inputs from tenants. | 1 | Service wide customer involvement group – develop champions in each service |
| 7. Provides training and support for tenants to enable them to participate effectively and for personal skills growth and development. | Actions planned to develop an annual training plan for tenants and a 'customer learning and involvement programme'.  A range of support for tenants is listed. | 1 | To do – Include new methods of training and support – Work experience. |
| 8. Includes measures and ways to evidence what actual outcomes are achieved. | There are no measures in the action plan for outcomes stated. | 3 | PRIORITY<br><br>Change layout of action plan to include measures and evidence.<br><br>Include in local service action plans – emphasis on what changed |
| 9. Provides a range of ways to feed back to tenants, staff and Board/Committee members what has been achieved and the impact of tenant participation. | Better feedback is a strong theme through the document and recognised as an area for improvement.   The strategy and action plan include good commitments and actions to provide feedback to tenants generally and to specific participants, but there is little about feeding back to staff and elected members about impact of TP. | 1 | To do – include feedback in staff bulletins, staff conferences, learning days and member briefing events by neighbourhood offices |

| Practical action: | | | What do we plan to do? |
|---|---|---|---|
| 10. The action plan:<br>- clearly links purposes to planned actions;<br>- these actions are adequate to implement the commitments and intentions;<br>- the action plan includes timescales and activities for monitoring and evaluation, feedback and ongoing review. | The action plan is well structured but for the omission of measures for outcomes, and is clear.  Objectives, outcomes and actions are linked, but actions are not linked specifically to each outcome which makes it harder to judge whether actions adequate to achieve every outcome.   As covered above, the objectives and outcomes are more process than end result focused but the actions seem adequate to achieve the process outcomes.<br><br>The action plan includes timescales and also specific finance costs, and a good series of actions about feedback and monitoring and evaluation.   Arrangements for monitoring and review of the LTPS are stated. | 2 | **To do** – ( as stated in point 8)<br><br>Change layout of action plan to include measures and how we can evidence. |
| 11. Priorities are identified taking into account constraints of resources and capacity, and the stages of development needed. | Constraints and priorities are included in a section heading but the information is about staffing support; there is no discussion of what the limits might be in resources or staff capacity nor prioritisation of areas of development. | 3 | **PRIORITY**<br><br>Include limits for resources and prioritisation for development. |
| Outlines a breakdown of resources and support to be provided to tenants and staff which will be adequate to deliver the planned TP activities. | Good information about the resources committed both funding and staff, with a breakdown of the support provided and figures in the action plan. | 1 | |

TPAS Cymru - Jan. 2012

5

This page is intentionally left blank

**FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

REPORT TO:     HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE:            THURSDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2013

REPORT BY:    HEAD OF HOUSING

SUBJECT:       SHELTERED HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PROJECT


1.00    **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.01    To update Committee Members on the work being progressed to introduce a Community Based (Warden) Support Service and provide detail and seek views on the next developments.

2.00    **BACKGROUND**

2.01    At the Executive meeting held on the 18 January 2011, approval was given for the model of the community based warden support service to be developed and piloted.  The Executive also approved the commencement of the decision making process that would determine the continuation/cessation of the service tenancy arrangements at individual schemes.  At the Housing Scrutiny Committee held on 7th March 2012, members resolved to receive reports on the work being progressed to develop the Community Based Support Service.

2.02    The focus of developments to date has been on developing the community hubs, implementing new working practices and assessing the support needs of all tenants.  This work has provided crucial information to steer the next stage of the project which includes implementation of a new staff structure and further developing the expansion of the service to those in most need in general needs accommodation.

3.00    **CONSIDERATIONS**

        **Progress with Implementing a 'Needs Based' Support Service**

3.01    All sheltered tenants have had their support needs assessed through the completion of a comprehensive support plan.  It has been important to ensure that the Accommodation Support Officers (wardens) approached this task with a good understanding of why effective support planning is important in order to identify needs and risks and the type of support that is required to meet these needs and minimise risks.

3.02    A key aspect of the support assessment is to be able to offer tenants the reassurance that the service is not being 'taken away' but is more flexible and responsive to when their needs change. A person who has been assessed as having no support needs at present is provided with reassurance that if their circumstances change they will have their support needs immediately reviewed and all tenants will automatically have their support needs reviewed every 6 months. Completing the needs assessments has demonstrated that there is capacity within the staffing resources to deliver support to more people outside of the sheltered schemes.

3.03    Any change process can be perceived as challenging and the changes to working practices for the staff were significant.  To help staff to understand the need and the reasons for change they all have completed an extensive training programme on the Support Planning and the Change Process in order for them to be competent in the delivery of the improved service.  Staff who were more proficient with the support planning  process  had been engaged  to act as mentors to other team members in order to provide the support they need which has enabled all staff to feel confident and capable in carrying out effective assessments of support needs.

**Progress in Developing Community Hubs**

3.04    In November 2011, Ewloe and Shotton hubs were set up as a pilot in order to assess the robustness of all aspects of the improved service delivery model and to trial the expansion of the service to council tenants in general needs housing.  The pilot was then developed across the county and now all nine community based hub offices are in operation.  A small team of between four to six staff are based in each hub office providing support to sheltered and general needs housing tenants living within the localities served by the office.

3.05    Three of the hubs have been set up in council accommodation that was selected as it was perceived to be less suitable for sheltered stock.  However, in the current environment there is huge demand for Local Authority accommodation and these properties could provide suitable accommodation to people waiting on the housing register.  In addition, Welfare Reform changes have increased demand for smaller properties.  The nine hubs are spread across the county in the following locations; Connah's Quay, Flint, Holywell, Shotton, Mold, Buckley, Caergwrle, Ewloe, Mostyn.  The service was set up around nine hubs but it is feasible for this to be delivered from six hubs. There would be a need to consult with staff and tenants to ensure the location and size of the six hubs is sufficient for support staff to carry out their duties and provide a suitable coverage of Flintshire. Members are asked to consider the potential for reducing the number of hubs to six across Flintshire.

**Progress on Expansion into General Needs Accommodation**

3.06    The expansion of the support service to tenants living in council general needs properties has been lower than anticipated. The focus of activity has been on setting up the hubs, supporting the staff through the changes and carrying out needs assessments for all tenants. There are currently 21 people receiving support in general needs properties. This will now be taken forward as a priority. The service is developing a marketing and promotion plan. Links will need to be made to identify appropriate referral routes and good information provided on the role of the accommodation support service so that the service targets those most in need and does not duplicate the work of other providers. Access to the support service will be made available to tenants already in receipt of a Carelink or Telecare service in the first instance. The roll out of the service will be easier to market when it is not limited to council tenants as information can be distributed widely to other services and agencies.

3.07    The service will provide a valuable preventative service for older people in Flintshire County Council accommodation. There will be a number of individuals who are not in council accommodation who would benefit from this service that can prevent the need for more costly care services. The long term improvement plan was to develop this service into a county wide, tenure neutral service that will provide support to those Flintshire residents who need it most irrespective of their current tenure. This will be the next phase of the improvement project.

**Progress with the Staff Restructure**

3.08    A piece of work has been carried out to assess the current level of support staff required to deliver the service taking into consideration time spent on travel, administration and other non direct support activities. This has been used to inform the staff restructure. There are reporting systems in place to closely monitor changing levels of demand for the service. In addition, the outcome reporting will provide evidence of the preventative role of the service and ensure it remains strategically relevant.

3.09    Based on good practice examples elsewhere, there is an expectation that support workers will spend 70% of their time delivering direct support to tenants. An analysis of all the needs assessments has provided an indication of the current level of support hours required across the sheltered schemes. These required support hours have then been added to the additional 30% non support time to give a total number of full time equivalent staff to deliver the service. Appendix 1 provides a breakdown of staff time and the analysis of time needed for support.

3.10    The restructure also needs to consider appropriate levels of

management to lead and oversee the service. The original staffing structure consisted of a Team Leader and a Senior Officer and thirty five full time equivalent support staff. There is a need to amend the structure to fit more appropriately within the organisational design parameters defined within the Flintshire County Council Organisational Design and Development Strategy and ensure the number of employees overseen by each designated management post fits within the recommended minimum spans of control at each level.

3.11 This proposed restructure matches the requirement of the service in terms of support hours, allows capacity for expansion and provides adequate supervisory and management roles. The new structure would consist of a Manager, 3 Senior Officers who will oversee 2 or 3 hub offices each and 29 full time equivalent Accommodation Support Workers. This amended structure delivers an efficiency saving as well as delivering support to increased numbers of vulnerable people. The posts in the structure are currently being assessed by the Job Evaluation Team. Staff will be able to deliver a flexible service including evenings and weekends as required and work is ongoing to scope a 24/7 response service which will be an additional cost.

**Consultation and Feedback**

3.12 Feedback sessions were held with sheltered tenants in the pilot areas to continue the good practice of engaging with tenants as demonstrated within the service improvement programme. They were interactive sessions which encouraged tenants to feel confident in voicing their opinions on the new service model. The outcomes demonstrated that the tenants were satisfied with the new service delivery model. They also explained that their initial fears that they would not be receiving support had been allayed and they confirmed that the flexibility of the service allowed for more support visits when they needed them. It is pleasing to note that the tenants confirmed that they are receiving the types of services which they had expressed a strong preference for during the extensive programme of consultation on the service improvements.

3.13 All staff are now working to the revised service model and carrying out support work in line with support plans. There is evidence that staff and commissioners recognise the improvement in the community based service in terms of the quality of service provided to tenants. It is also evident that there has been a key opportunity for professional development and to improve the professional reputation of the accommodation support staff. The Supporting People Review Officer spent two sessions shadowing the support staff and reported that staff felt their role was more appreciated which in turn gave them improved job satisfaction and motivation. The tenants seen spoke highly of the service and recognised the need to target staff time at those in most need.

**4.00    RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.01    Committee notes the progress of the Sheltered Housing Improvement Project.

4.02    Committee considers the proposal to deliver the service from a reduced number of hubs (9 to 6) and/or seek alternatives to the use of council housing.

4.03    Committee notes the future expansion proposals being developed for private sector tenants and  home owners to deliver a county wide, tenure neutral service to commence April 2013.

**5.00    FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.01    It is anticipated that the restructure will deliver efficiencies through an estimated reduction of 6.8 full time equivalents with associated costs of circa £110k.  These savings will take effect from 2014-15.  The savings will be to the council fund budget as the whole service is eligible to be paid from the Supporting People Grant.

**6.00    ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

6.01    None specifically associated with the content of this report.

**7.00    ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

7.01    None specifically associated with the content of this report.

**8.00    EQUALITIES IMPACT**

8.01    None specifically associated with the content of this report.

**9.00    PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.01    The current staffing hours provides the equivalent of 35.8 full time Accommodation Support Officer posts (some staff will work full time whilst other staff work part time).  The new service model reduces the number of posts by 9.8 but provides opportunities for staff to apply for one of the 3 Team Leader roles that are being created in the new structure, leaving a net reduction of 6.8 full time equivalent posts, 3 of which are currently vacant.

9.02    The reorganisation of the service will be carried out in line with the Council's Organisational Change and Redundancy Policy and Procedure which will mean exploring opportunities for alternative work and considering opportunities for Early Retirement and Voluntary Redundancy if appropriate.

**10.00   CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

10.01   Effective consultation with tenants, staff, and local members has been carried out throughout the warden service improvement programme. This approach will continue throughout the next phase of the project.

**11.00   CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

11.01   As above.

**12.00   APPENDICES**

Appendix 1:  The Restructure Analysis

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

**Contact Officer:**
**Telephone:**
**Email:**

**Appendix One - The Restructure Analysis**

Support assessments have been carried out across all current residents to establish the level of support required across the service. In addition to the support assessments there has been some work to establish the average amount of travel, admin and other indirect support time. This has been compiled to identify the number of staff needed to run the service.

**Accommodation Support – Breakdown of hours**

The Accommodation Support Workers will be expected to spend approximately 70% of their time directly on support. The remaining 30% is broken down as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Indirect support – follow up actions** | 12% |
| **Travel time** | 5% |
| **Emergency time** | 3% |
| **Admin time** | 5% |
| **Community Involvement** | 5% |

The breakdown of support time is an estimate and will obviously change from week to week. However, this gives a good estimate of the amount of time available for supporting residents.

**Support Hours**

Support will be flexible and responsive to service user need. In order to identify the current staff requirement, we have identified the support hours needed to support the existing service users. The experience of the service is that less time is spent on the daily visits than the less frequent support sessions.

The calculated support hours assume the following support visit lengths:

| | |
|---|---|
| Daily Visit | 20 minutes |
| Weekly Visit | 45 minutes |
| Monthly Visit | 60 minutes |
| No current support needs. 6-monthly review to identify any new needs | 60 minutes |

The number of visits needed by the current tenants and the time spent on those visits requires 844 hours per week. The 30% additional time detailed above is added to this which makes the total hours needed 1089.

|  | Daily | Weekly | Monthly | 6 monthly | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Assessed tenants** | 58 | 422 | 1568 | 1012 | 3060 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Visits per week** | 5 | 1 | 0.25 | 0.04 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Total visits per week** | 290 | 422 | 392 | 39 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Estimated meeting length** | 20 | 45 | 60 | 60 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Total time per week (hours)** | 97 | 317 | 392 | 39 | **844** |

1089 hours per week requires 29.4 full time equivalent support staff to deliver the service. Assuming that three supervisors spend 50% time on management and 50% on support then there is additional capacity within this structure for expansion.

**FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

REPORT TO:        HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE:            THURSDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2013

REPORT BY:        DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

SUBJECT:        PDA AND CAPITA UPDATE

1.00    PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01    This report will update members on the current status of mobile working in Housing Services.

2.00    BACKGROUND

2.01    There have been a number of issues with the implementation of mobile working in the Asset Management service. These are as follows.

2.02    Issues were raised regarding signal issues in July 2011 as part of training. In order to resolve this, a range of options were considered. In order to test the mobile network provider alternative SIM cards were procured. The same issue existed and so it was clear that the issue was not with the network (corporate suppliers). A specialist supplier was engaged to make an assessment of the issues and try and identify cause and solutions. No device specific issues were identified and at this point, they engaged with the PDA suppliers, who confirmed that no hardware error could be found. The corporate mobile device management software (Mobi Control) was removed from the device and this also made no difference. Activity reports were run against a number of devices where issues were being experienced.

2.03    During the period January to March 2012 it became apparent that the software was 'freezing' on the device which meant the device had to be closed down and restarted. This was reported back to the software suppliers who acknowledged this as a known fault. They indicated it had been resolved and that the fix would be available in Version 10 of the software which should be available from April 2012.

2.04    Despite assurances that voice and data should happily co-reside and should not cause problems, there continued to be issues. A device was sent to the software supplier for further investigation and we also bought an alternative make/model of device to finally eliminate concerns in the workforce that the device selection was the issue. The

same issue occurred on the alternative device which eliminated the PDA as the cause of the problem. A PDA was again sent to our device suppliers who spent considerable time at no cost in trying to replicate and eliminate the issue. A device was also sent to the software supplier who, were able to replicate the issue at their site which eliminated any local infrastructure set up at Flintshire.

2.05    Whilst all of the technical information from suppliers indicated that data and voice should be able to co reside on the device with no detrimental effect it was suggested by council officers, that we trial separate phone and mobile devices with a group of operatives and assess results. A decision was made to procure separate mobile phones for 30 operatives and trial this for a period of time. If it were to be successful, the net additional cost to the project would be £1800 per annum for 75 operatives. The phones were ordered mid July 2012.

2.06    Version 10 of Open Housing was installed in the test system week beginning 26th July 2012. This represented a major release as it included enhancements to a range of modules as well as the potential fix for Open Mobile. Some faults were found and additional fixes were received. Version 10 went fully live in October 2012.

2.07    Some issues are still being experienced though less frequent, where operatives have "no comms" in a good signal area.  For example two operatives will be in the same area, one device will have communications and the other device will not.  The operatives then have to come back into the office for the issue to be investigated. This has been reported to the software supplier and the last time this happened the technical support as the supplier indicated a need to increase the number of 'agents' against the Open Mobile module application server to 15. This was done but it does not appear to have eliminated the problem and we have recently asked the software supplier to consider if this figure needs to be increased again.  An employee from the software supplier has been on site to investigate and has recommended that Flintshire consider replacing the current port forwarding solution with the Corporate VPN via Cisco.  By implementing this solution Flintshire would have direct access to the LAN potentially eradicating connection issues.


3.00    **CONSIDERATIONS**

        **Current Position**

3.01    To date, over 7000 jobs have been issued and completed using mobile devices. This will continue to be monitored

3.02    Version 10 has been installed and is operational. It has been confirmed following a time of live use that this has eradicated the:

- problem of devices freezing as they attempt to download jobs.

- Problems still exist with data and voice being used together but those using a separate mobile phone, (although inconvenient) are able to work effectively.

- Resolution will not mean that there will never be any issues as with any mobile device there will on occasion be problems with downloading large files when the network is busy etc.

3.03    Recent evidence has been produced from two further sites with issues with mobile working- one had similar voice/data issues as Flintshire though on a different device and rather than pursue it with the software supplier bought separate mobile phones. A further organisation has been using Open Mobile successfully on a HTC device for a number of years, they have recently upgraded to a similar device to Flintshire and have started to experience issues with data and voice (not the same direct issue as Flintshire). This company has contacted the PDA supplier who advised them that the Open Mobile software could be setting the priority of data greater than voice, testing is currently being carried out by this council. This has been raised with Capita and they have advised that the issues being experienced by Flintshire and another council are not the same issue. The software supplier has since advised that Flintshire are experiencing the telephone issue because the device being used is not 3G although this was not stated in the original specification that they provided.

3.04    Monthly meetings have been taking place between Flintshire Housing and IT representatives and the software supplier in order to discuss and review the outstanding issues with mobile working implementation. The supplier has agreed to dedicate technical resource to work with the PDA supplier to investigate any issues between software and devices.

3.05    Flintshire has been very assertive with the software supplier in these meetings as issues have been hindering implementation for an unsatisfactory time now. Flintshire has followed all specifications provided by the supplier and also attempted all resolutions that have been suggested. Flintshire staff involved with the engagement with the software supplier have made it clear that if any reinvestment in equipment is required over and above that which would be expected due to hardware failure/damage/normal upgrading requirements, we will be pursuing recompense from the relevant supplier on the basis that the equipment was selected based on the original specifications provided.

3.06    The PDA supplier provided an alternative device for testing out on-site which is a higher specification and a 3G device. This is currently being tested by an operative to identify whether there is an improvement

and whether current issues such as 'no comms' and being unable to use both phone and data still occur. Flintshire has now requested a further three devices so that thorough testing of these PDA's can be undertaken in different geographical areas, by different trades and with varying amounts of data being transferred.

3.07    35 Responsive Repair staff are now using PDA's and any problems are recorded on an error log and submitted to the software supplier. Meetings have also been set-up between Housing IT, Asset Management and Corporate IT to ensure consistent and effective communication and to ensure that response times for hardware issues are reduced as much as possible. A further 15 operatives are to go live with PDA's over the next few weeks these being a mixture of more Responsive Repairs staff, Electricians and Disabled Adaptations.

3.08    **Summary of current position**

- 35 Responsive Repairs staff live and using PDA's
- Job monitoring software being rolled out with supervisors
- Internal IT support allocated to Housing Asset Management to aid with day to day issues
- Monthly review and progress meetings with Operations Manager with the software supplier being held
- The software and PDA supplier to investigate infrastructure clashes between devices and software and configuration
- Operative on-site testing an alternative PDA device

3.09    **Proposed next steps**

- 15 further operatives to go live with PDA's over next two weeks
- Gas staff to be trained by 31st March and go live with job tickets on PDA's. A solution for gas certification still needs to be agreed.
- Voids team's use of mobile working to be reviewed. Due to the nature of their work there is less benefit in this group using this technology.
- An alternative device to be investigated during 2013 to enable a single device to be used medium term
- Work to continue to establish whether the original device has been wrongly supplied by or whether the software supplier has wrongly specified the type of device needed.
- Work to continue with the software supplier for some resolution over the need to upgrade to Version 10 and more recently to have a 3G device despite this not being part of the original requirements at purchase.


**4.00    RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.01    That Committee consider and support the action taken to resolve issues, in order to take forward mobile working in Housing Services.


**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

**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    None as a direct result of this report

**10.00    CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

10.01    None as a direct result of this report

**11.00    CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

11.01    None as a direct result of this report

**12.00    APPENDICES**

12.01    None

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


**Contact Officer:  Nikki Evans**
**Telephone:    01352 701658**
**Email: nikki.evans@flintshire.gov.uk**

This page is intentionally left blank

**FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

REPORT TO:        **HOUSING  OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

DATE:        **21ST FEBRUARY 2013**

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        Items feed into a Committee's Forward Work Programme from a number of sources.  Members can suggest topics for review by Overview & Scrutiny Committees, members of the public can suggest topics, items can be referred by the Executive for consultation purposes, or by County Council, or Directors.  Other possible items are identified from the Executive Work Programme and the Strategic Assessment of Risks & Challenges.

2.02        In identifying topics for future consideration, it is useful or 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 Programme of the Committees of which they are members.  By reviewing and prioritising the forward work programme Members are able to ensure it is member-led and includes the right issues. A copy of the Forward Work Programme is attached at Appendix 1 for Members' consideration which has been updated following the last meeting.

**4.00    RECOMMENDATIONS**

**4.01**    That the Committee considers the draft Forward Work Programme attached as Appendix 1  and approve/amend as necessary.

**5.00    FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

None as a result of this report.

**6.00    ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

None as a result of this report.

**7.00    ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

None as a result of this report.

**8.00    EQUALITIES IMPACT**

None as a result of this report.

**9.00    PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

None as a result of this report.

**10.00    CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

N/A

**11.00    CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

Publication of this report constitutes consultation.

**12.00    APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Forward Work Programme

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

None.

**Contact Officer:**    **Robert Robins**
**Telephone:**    **01352 702320**
**Email:**    **Robert.robins@Flintshire.gov.uk**

## CURRENT FWP

| Date of meeting | Subject | Purpose of Report | Scrutiny Focus | Responsible / Contact Officer | Submission Deadline |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **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 Council's housing stock, to include proposals for the delivery of in-house DFG's as previously approved. | Service Improvement | Head of Housing | |
| **5 June 2013** | **Quarterly Performance Reporting** | To consider Q4, year end outturns for improvement targets. | Performance Monitoring | Director of Community Services | **29 May 2013** |

|  | PDA and Capita Update | The committee resolved at its October and December meetings to receive an update on a regular basis | Service improvement / progress monitoring | Head of Housing |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 July 2013 | To be determined |  |  |  | 1 July 2013 |

## ITEMS TO BE SCHEDULED as agreed by Committee

| Item | Purpose of Report | Responsible / Contact Officer |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |

## 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 |

| Month | Item | Purpose of Report | Responsible / Contact Officer |
|-------|------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| **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 |

3

| Category | Risk Reference | Title | Committee |
|---|---|---|---|
| | CD14 | Housing Ballot | C&H |
| | CD19 | Gypsies and Travellers | C&H |
| Social Care | CD26 | Disabled Facilities Grants | S&H and Housing (joint meetings) |