

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 DECEMBER 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Wednesday, 9 December 2015

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

Councillors: David Cox, Paul Cunningham, Ron Davies, Rosetta Dolphin, George Hardcastle, Mike Reece and Gareth Roberts

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor Nancy Matthews (for Amanda Bragg)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Peter Curtis, Ian Dunbar, Alison Halford, Ray Hughes and Brian Lloyd. Councillor Helen Brown, Cabinet Member for Housing and the Chief Officer, Community & Enterprise

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors: Haydn Bateman and Marion Bateman

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Bernie Attridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment; Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development; Service Manager for Council Housing; Service Manager for Housing Programmes; Service Manager for Customer Support; Service Manager for Enterprise & Regeneration; Housing Manager and Sheltered Housing Officer

IN ATTENDANCE: Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

51. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

There were no declarations of interest.

52. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2015 were submitted.

Matters Arising

Minute number 45: Delivery and Outcomes of Recent Regeneration Programmes - Councillor Mike Reece sought clarification on whether solid brick wall insulation would be provided in Bagillt, following comments made by the Assembly Member. Councillor Bernie Attridge said that Bagillt was not being overlooked as the Council must adhere to Welsh Government criteria on where the work could be carried out. He stressed the importance of clarifying this detail when commenting on this particular workstream.

In referring to discussion at the budget consultation meeting of the Organisational Change Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Reece asked about the Council's plans for Holywell library in the event that no interest in a community transfer was forthcoming. If the intention was to demolish the building, he suggested that the site could instead be used to provide

accommodation for pensioners. Councillor Attridge stated that no decision had been made to demolish the building as one of the options was for the library and sports centre to be located on the same site. He added that several enquiries had been received on taking over the running of the library.

RESOLVED:

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

53. SERVICE CHARGES

The Service Manager for Council Housing introduced an update of progress on the implementation of service charges, including feedback from a range of tenant consultation events held across the county during the summer. As reported to the former Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the separation of service charges from rents had been introduced from April 2015 as required by the Welsh Government (WG) and allowed greater transparency for tenants to see how much rent they paid together with charges for any additional services they received. Following Cabinet approval earlier in the year, a phased approach to the introduction of services was planned for existing or ongoing tenancies from April 2016 whereas service charges were introduced fully for new tenancies from April 2015.

The Service Manager provided an overview of the methodology for charging, as set out in the report, together with a summary of the feedback from the tenant consultation process. Members were informed that more detailed information on the feedback was available from the Sheltered Housing Officer.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin asked if the window cleaning service was mandatory for all tenants as some may prefer to opt out (eg ground floor tenants in Abbey Court), and whether tenants would be reimbursed if the service was not carried out in line with the agreed frequency. She also took the opportunity to praise the cleaning service undertaken in Greenfield.

It was explained by the Service Manager that the intention was to review and re-tender the contract for window cleaning and to agree a set of standards to share with tenants. This would address any areas of inconsistency, as indicated in the feedback, and enable tenants to raise any issues.

Councillor Gareth Roberts highlighted reference to the 63% of Council house tenants in receipt of housing benefit which covered some of the service charges, and asked about the potential for any additional housing benefit to release funds to the Housing Revenue Account. The Service Manager agreed to obtain a response on the percentage of tenants in sheltered housing. Councillor Bernie Attridge added that Councillor Roberts' suggestion would need to be verified with Legal colleagues.

In response to a question from Councillor George Hardcastle on garage charges, the Service Manager advised that these did not form part of service charges and were subject to separate arrangements. Any outcomes from the garage review would be addressed through work under the Welsh Housing Quality Standard and Strategic Housing and Regeneration Programme.

Following comments from Councillor Nancy Matthews on charging for satisfactory services, the Service Manager drew attention to the schedule in section 1.05 of the report. Some services were being subsidised in recognition of inconsistent standards across schemes and would be resolved through a comprehensive review.

The Chairman felt that service charges should be reasonable in view of the prospect of rent increases set by WG. He commented on unsatisfactory levels of communal cleaning at four blocks of flats in his ward which he hoped would be addressed and welcomed the delay in the re-introduction of assisted garden charges to make the necessary preparations.

On the latter point, Councillor Attridge said that this delay would allow for meaningful consultation to achieve the right outcomes. He pointed out that the proposed charge for communal area cleaning in 2016/17 was only £2.75 per week and that information on rental charges was awaited from WG.

In stressing the importance of value for money on service charges, Councillor Ron Davies referred to repairs needed to a boiler within pensioners' accommodation in his ward. The Service Manager agreed to look into this.

During discussion on the laundry service, Councillor Attridge spoke about a token-operated system as a possible option for communal areas.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress made to date with regard to the introduction of service charges and the feedback from the tenants' consultation be noted; and
- (b) That the delivery of an action plan, as described in section 1.25 of the report, that focuses on achieving value for money for tenant services, be supported.

54. APPROVAL TO APPLY TO WELSH GOVERNMENT FOR SUSPENSION OF THE RIGHT TO BUY IN FLINTSHIRE

The Service Manager for Housing Programmes presented a report seeking support for an application to Welsh Government (WG) to suspend the Right to Buy (RTB) of Council owned housing in Flintshire, as primary legislation to end the RTB was not due to be introduced until after the next Assembly election in 2016.

Whilst explaining the negative impact on social housing stock across Wales, it was reported that Flintshire had lost 822 Council homes to RTB since 1996 and that the demand for housing need had been identified through the recent Local Housing Market Assessment, as previously reported to the Committee. Reference was also made to the developments and re-investment in the Council's housing stock arising from the overwhelming positive response in the housing ballot. Officers were currently developing a draft application to WG and would need to engage in meaningful consultation with Council tenants to

seek their views. The key stages to the application and consultation process were appended to the report.

Councillor Gareth Roberts spoke in support of the proposal and referred to the significant loss of Council housing stock through the RTB scheme, particularly in rural areas. He welcomed the opportunity to protect the new build Council homes. This view was echoed by the Chairman and by Councillor Paul Cunningham who praised the investment in Council homes across the county.

In moving the recommendation, Councillor George Hardcastle indicated his support.

In response to a question from Councillor Ron Davies, the Service Manager for Customer Support advised that around 1,000 applicants were currently on the waiting list for Council houses.

Councillor Nancy Matthews asked how long tenants would need to live at a property to qualify for RTB and felt that the application to WG should seek suspension of RTB in Flintshire for the maximum term of ten years. The Service Manager agreed to respond separately on the first point and said that the application could be for ten years if supported by the Council. Councillor Gareth Roberts also supported the Council seeking the maximum term to take into account tenants living in more than one Council property.

Councillor Bernie Attridge pointed out that WG had granted approval to two councils in Wales to suspend RTB for five years, but that he would support the maximum ten year term if this was achievable.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee support an application to Welsh Government to suspend the Right to Buy in Flintshire.

55. QUARTER 2 IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORTS

The Service Manager for Council Housing presented the regular update report to consider progress towards the delivery of the impacts set out in the 2015/16 Improvement Plan, focussing on the areas of under-performance relevant to the Committee during the second quarter.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

56. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor George Hardcastle took the opportunity to show his support for the Council's new housing company following a recent visit with the Chairman, commenting on the good progress which had been achieved and further potential outcomes. Councillor Bernie Attridge said that meetings of the company were not open to the public but that Members were welcome to observe if they wished.

In presenting the current Forward Work Programme for consideration, the Facilitator drew attention to the budget consultation meetings arranged for 17 December 2015 and 15 January 2016.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be noted.

57. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press and one member of the public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 2.45 pm)

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Chairman