

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1 JUNE 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA on Monday, 1st June, 2015

PRESENT: Ron Hampson (Chairman)

Councillors: Amanda Bragg, Paul Cunningham, Peter Curtis, Jim Falshaw, George Hardcastle, Ray Hughes, Brian Lloyd, Vicky Perfect, Mike Reece and Gareth Roberts

SUBSTITUTES:

Councillors Dave Mackie (for Rosetta Dolphin) and Paul Shotton for Ian Dunbar

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Tony Sharps

CONTRIBUTORS:

Cabinet Member for Housing, Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise), Programme Manager, Senior Manager Council Housing, Community Support Services Manager, and Neighbourhood Housing Team Leader

For minute number 3 – Work of Grwp Cynefin Housing Association

Mr. Walis George , Chief Executive - Grwp Cynefin, and Mr. Rhys Davis, Regeneration Director - Grwp Cynefin

IN ATTENDANCE:

Community & Enterprise and Education & Youth Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

No declarations of interest were made.

11. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24 April 2015 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

RESOLVED:

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

12. WORK OF GRWP CYNEFIN HOUSING ASSOCIATION (PRESENTATION)

The Chairman introduced Mr. Walis George, Chief Executive - Grwp Cynefin and Mr. Rhys Davis, Regeneration Director - Grwp Cynefin, to the meeting.

Mr. George and Mr. Davis jointly provided a presentation to the Committee about the work of Grwp Cynefin Housing Association. Mr. George advised that Grwp Cynefin aimed to work with local authorities to provide a wide range of housing solutions across North Wales. The key features of the presentation were:-

- Social Rental Homes
- Affordable Homes
- Rural Development
- Services for Older People
- Other Activities

The Chair thanked Mr George and Mr. Davis for their detailed and informative presentation and invited Members to raise questions.

Councillor Paul Shotton sought clarification on the terminology “affordable homes”. Mr. Davis explained that in a general sense the term was applied to assist people on a limited income who were either unable to provide a deposit or could afford only a small deposit.

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to the Affordable Housing Register and expressed concerns that developers considering to develop in an area cited the lack of applicants on the Register as a reason not to commit to affordable housing. In his response Mr. Davis explained that the Register was more active in an area where there was development and opportunity. He advised that Grwp Cynefin was working with developers to make sure there was adequate advertising of development sites. He referred to the need for an objective assessment to be made on every location and commented on the responsibility to properly market affordable housing provision. He said discussion about that and improving the marketing strategy not just with the Authority but across all Wales was taking place. He said that as a result the number of people on the Register should improve.

Referring to future developments Mr. Davis commented on the need for due consideration of the long term investment and not just the opportunity that presented itself at the time. He said that Grwp Cynefin gave careful consideration to the site, housing needs, and trend in an area. He confirmed that Grwp Cynefin liaised with the housing department to assess local strategy needs and ensure the continuing viability of a scheme.

Councillor Dave Mackie commented that areas that were previously considered as not being available for development were now being looked at. He said there was a need to promote awareness that there was going to be development in such areas.

In response to the comments and questions raised the Chief Officer explained the difference between the Social Register and the Affordable Housing Register. She commented on the need to renew efforts to promote the Affordable Housing Register and reiterated the view that developers would use lack of evidence of applicants to justify their stance.

Councillor Amanda Bragg asked if Grwp Cynefin worked in partnership with the All Wales Credit Union. Mr. Davis confirmed that it did and also had an ongoing relationship with different lenders. He explained that Grwp Cynefin were also involved in mortgage rescue provision and could guide people to the most appropriate expert advice.

Responding to a query raised by Councillor George Hardcastle regarding the information provided to applicants on the Affordable Housing Register, Mr. George confirmed that detailed supplementary information was provided and an in depth analysis of the position of applicants was undertaken by a specialist team.

During discussion Councillor Peter Curtis raised a number of questions and concerns around the provision of Extra Care facilities. Mr. George responded to the matters raised and concurred that the rent charged had to be affordable.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be received.

13. UPDATE ON NORTH EAST WALES HOMES & PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

The Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) introduced a report to provide an update on North East Wales Homes (NEW Homes) first full year of operation and progress made against the Business Plan. She invited Mel Evans, Programme Manager, to provide an overview.

The Programme Manager provided background information and referred to the key considerations which were detailed in the report. He reported on the new build properties which had been secured through Section 106 Agreement, the landlord management offer, over 55 lease scheme, future growth strategy, Strategic Housing and Regeneration Programme (SHARP), and private borrowing.

The Chairman congratulated the Chief Officer and the Housing team on the significant work and progress achieved and invited Members to raise questions.

Councillor Paul Shotton reiterated the views which had been made by the Chairman and expressed his congratulations on progress made.

Councillor Amanda Bragg referred to the landlord management service launched by NEW Homes and queried how charges compared with the management fees charged by companies in the private sector. Officers responded to the comments made and explained that a key objective for NEW Homes was to provide access to a property that a person could not afford to rent in the private market.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress made by NEW Homes to date against Business Plan projections be noted; and
- (b) That NEW Homes future Growth Strategy projections and proposals be noted.

14. ALLOCATION OF SHELTERED ACCOMMODATION

The Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) introduced a report on the issues affecting the level of demand for some sheltered housing properties in the County and to propose the next phase to explore solutions.

The Chief Officer introduced Katie Clubb, Community Support Services Manager, Nikki Evans, Senior Manager Council Housing, Julie Gorman, Neighbourhood Housing Team Leader, Jackie Perry, Housing Manager, and Tony Jones, Capital Works Team Manager, to the Committee. She invited the Senior Manager Council Housing to report on the main considerations as detailed in the report.

Councillor Paul Shotton welcomed the growth in Extra Care accommodation and the further 143 units planned for 2017/18. He suggested that lowering of the age eligibility could be considered to meet the increased demand for smaller accommodation as a result of the Welfare Reform changes.

In response to a query from Councillor George Hardcastle, the Community Support Services Manager advised that the majority of people who applied for sheltered housing were over 60 and any exception outside the criteria would need to be agreed.

Councillor Peter Curtis expressed concerns around lowering the age eligibility for Extra Care accommodation and sheltered housing. He referred to the need to be aware of the potential for disruptive behaviour to arise if there were significant differences in age groups.

The Cabinet Member for Housing explained that to address the issues of low demand sheltered housing and future planning for the accommodation needs of an ageing population, it was proposed that an Officer led Working Group undertakes a full review and assessment of the sheltered housing stock in consultation with Local Elected Members and Cabinet Members. The Group would then make recommendations for consideration informed by local knowledge to make best use of the properties to meet housing need.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the issues raised around the demand for some sheltered properties be noted; and
- (b) That the proposal for the next phase of work to address the issues be supported.

15. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME (COMMUNITY & ENTERPRISE)

The Community and Enterprise and Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the report to consider the Forward Work Programme for the Committee.

The Facilitator advised that the Member Engagement Manager was in the process of arranging a workshop for all Overview and Scrutiny Committees to populate their Forward Work Programmes for the remainder of the year.

Members reviewed the current programme and agreed that the following items be considered at the next meeting to be held on 8 July 2015:

- Quarterly Performance Reporting
- Update on Tenant Involvement

The Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) advised that in addition to the above items she also proposed to submit a report on the Restructure of Community and Enterprise to the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be updated accordingly.

16. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.25 am)

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Chairman