

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
19 OCTOBER 2016

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, 19 October 2016

PRESENT: Councillor Ron Hampson (Chairman)

Councillors: David Cox, Paul Cunningham, Peter Curtis, Ron Davies, Rosetta Dolphin, Ian Dunbar, George Hardcastle, Ray Hughes, Hilary Isherwood, Sara Parker, Mike Reece, Gareth Roberts and David Roney

APOLOGIES: Councillor Jim Falshaw and Councillor Helen Brown, Cabinet Member for Housing

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Bernie Attridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment; Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development; Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise); Service Manager (Enterprise and Regeneration); Service Manager (Council Housing Services); and Benefits Manager

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

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

There were no declarations of interest.

18. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2016 were submitted.

Matters Arising

Minute number 11: Council Fund Revenue Budget 2017/18 - in response to Councillor Dolphin's question, the Chief Officer confirmed that the Council's own Bailiff Service was used to pursue law enforcement matters.

RESOLVED:

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

19. GROWTH VISION AND STRATEGY FOR THE ECONOMY OF NORTH WALES

Councillor Derek Butler introduced a report accompanied by 'A Growth Vision for the Economy of North Wales' which set out regional ambitions on infrastructure development, skills and employment, and business growth. Also received was the 'Growth Track 360' prospectus on rail improvement across North Wales and the Mersey Dee area, which had been developed with various key partners. The documents, which had been shared with the UK Government and Welsh Government (WG), were being submitted to all six North Wales

authorities for adoption and a further regional document on skills had been produced. In stressing the importance of Flintshire's position, Councillor Butler said that the cross-border growth bid was unique in the UK.

The Service Manager (Enterprise and Regeneration) gave an overview of the report which followed an earlier report on the Regional Economy. He described it as a realistic vision with carefully focussed aims, which had been the subject of positive discussions with Ministers. The vision was ambitious in seeking improved sustainable economic growth and employment opportunities for North Wales, with particular focus on the advanced manufacturing, energy and digital sectors. Devolved powers were being sought to deliver local priorities and the vision supported the developing strategy for the Northern Powerhouse and would link with the growth bid by Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

Councillor Ian Dunbar referred to the cost implications of the rail prospectus but supported the vision for growth and welcomed the benefits to local industry. He asked about progress of discussions with new WG Ministers and potential changes to future plans. The Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise) said that if the funding could be secured, this would be invested on early priorities to make improvements on the Wrexham to Bidston route, provide faster trains along the coast, upgrade stations and improve the overall customer experience. Whilst WG had given a commitment to support the growth vision, negotiations with the WG and UK Government would continue on priorities, investment and collaboration to deliver schemes. There would continue to be capital investment in major infrastructure programmes, for example the commitment by WG to ease congestion along the Deeside corridor through consultation on the Red and Blue routes.

Councillor Butler referred to the positive relationship and shared aspirations built up between the Council and the Mersey Dee Alliance over the years.

Whilst Councillor Rosetta Dolphin welcomed the report and understood the focus on the Deeside area, she raised concerns that other areas of the county could miss out on investment. She also suggested that a workshop on the work carried out within the Economy & Enterprise portfolio could be of use to the Committee.

Councillor Hilary Isherwood welcomed the plans and acknowledged the traffic problems along the Deeside strip, but shared concerns about the benefits to other areas of the county, particularly in more rural areas. She spoke about the WG wanting more housing developments but stated the importance of having a proper infrastructure in place first, supported by appropriate bus services giving young people access to employment.

The Chief Officer agreed to the suggested workshop. She gave assurances that the proposals were to benefit the whole of the county in terms of improving transport links and journey times, and attracting investment. The aim was for a fully integrated transport strategy, with investment to improve the infrastructure and connectivity to bus services. The request for devolved powers would provide an opportunity to develop a regional transport body and explore a

regional careers service, identifying skills and apprenticeships needed to support areas of growth.

Councillor Butler drew attention to the strategic projects to support the growth bid, including that on 'localised access to employment opportunities'.

Councillor Bernie Attridge said that the importance of adequate bus services in rural areas was recognised and that work on community transport and hubs would be paramount in helping people to access employment.

Whilst Councillor Peter Curtis supported the Deeside hub, he felt that this should not be at the expense of smaller communities. He welcomed the ambitions of the report and opportunities to improve and modernise customer experience for train users, but felt that the electrification of railway lines could be restricted along some areas of the coastal route.

Concerning a question on the WG consultation on the Deeside corridor, Councillor Attridge explained the requirement for the Council to respond. Points raised by Councillor Hardcastle included the need to address congestion issues along Aston Hill and even more so at the interchange with Mold.

In welcoming the report, Councillor David Roney pointed out major issues along the coast road and the need for access to train services from Mostyn, whilst Councillor Ron Davies highlighted road issues in Queensferry.

Councillor Butler said that a pragmatic approach had been taken to the proposals and that the delivery of a number of 'quick wins' could open up other opportunities.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee supports the 'Growth Vision for the Economy of North Wales' as the basis for negotiation with the UK and Welsh Governments over a Growth Bid for the region; and
- (b) That the Committee supports and endorses the prospectus for Rail Improvement 'Growth Track 360'.

20. QUARTER 1 IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORT

The Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise) introduced the regular update report to consider progress towards the delivery of the impacts set out in the 2016/17 Improvement Plan, focussing on the areas of under-performance relevant to the Committee during Quarter 1.

Housing

On the prevention of homelessness, the service was working within the budget but there were ongoing pressures to reduce the spend on bed and breakfast accommodation, particularly for young single people. The Chief Officer said that a range of housing options were being explored and that legislative changes would offer more flexibility on shared tenancies.

Councillor Bernie Attridge was pleased to report that Supporting People funding had been protected by Welsh Government (WG).

The Service Manager (Council Housing Services) reported good progress on Year 2 of the programme to meet the Welsh Quality Housing Standards, with targets exceeded on the upgrading of bathrooms and kitchens. Work was on target against the overall budget spend and progress was being maintained at the end of Quarter 2.

The Chairman paid tribute to the Service Manager (Council Housing Services) who was due to leave the Council and extended appreciation and best wishes on behalf of the Committee. The Service Manager in turn thanked the Chief Officer and Committee Members for their support.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin stressed that careful consideration should be given when allocating properties. As an option to prevent homelessness, she suggested that 2 or 3-bedroom flats, which were unsuitable for families, could be split for easier letting. Officers explained that this type of remodelling had been done in some areas and would be extended to other parts of the county.

Councillor Mike Reece referred to issues where some tenants were refusing refurbishment work and said that this could be resolved by giving them an opportunity to view completed work at other properties. The Service Manager said that the work could not be forced upon tenants but that follow-up visits were made. In response to comments about contractor performance, Councillor Attridge said that such concerns should be raised directly with Sean O'Donnell or Tony Jones for them to deal with the problem. The Service Manager agreed to arrange for those officers to contact Councillor Reece.

Councillor Peter Curtis had raised with officers an issue about the standard of cleaning at a sheltered accommodation complex in his ward. The Service Manager was aware of this and gave assurance that quality and consistency of services was being reviewed across all complexes. The importance of tenant feedback was highlighted to help inform this review.

Economy and Enterprise

Amongst a number of positive outcomes in the report, the Service Manager (Enterprise and Regeneration) advised that the completion of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) remained an area of focus with good progress made on the action plan which had been developed to improve performance and sustain targets.

On DFGs, Councillor Bernie Attridge spoke about the different approaches taken by other councils and gave assurances that in Flintshire, the exact number of days was recorded until all issues had been fully resolved and the cases were closed.

Councillor Derek Butler drew attention to good performance on the conversion of business enquiries to investment and the delivery of supply chain development events. He said that this reflected the work undertaken by the

service and took the opportunity to thank the Service Manager (Council Housing Services) for his involvement.

In response to a question, the Service Manager said that the impact of the withdrawal of Communities First funding was as yet unknown, but that any information would be shared with the Committee. The importance of this initiative to various workstreams would be highlighted to WG.

Poverty

The Benefits Manager highlighted the achievements on the support being provided to help people to access benefits and the continued promotion of the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) scheme to help people adjust to welfare reform changes. Outcomes on Housing Benefit claim processing had been affected by a staff restructure and the legal requirement for additional information to accompany claims.

Councillor Hilary Isherwood commended the work of the Welfare Rights team in helping residents and asked about changes to the service. It was explained that service delivery would continue with closer links to the Citizens' Advice Bureau. Capacity to undertake home visits was now limited and was available only to residents who were unable to attend the office, however low-level advice could be obtained through Flintshire Connects.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

21. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The current Forward Work Programme was considered and the following actions agreed:

- The Facilitator to confirm arrangements for the next meeting on 23 November 2016 to be held in Connah's Quay followed by a site visit of the Custom House Lane development.
- The Facilitator to arrange for the meeting on 1 February 2017 to be held at the Flint office incorporating a site visit to the local housing development.
- Officers to follow up Councillor Dolphin's request for a Committee workshop on the work of the Economy & Enterprise portfolio, possibly attached to a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted; and
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

22. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.40 am)

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Chairman