

**COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**15 DECEMBER 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 Thursday, 15 December 2016

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

Councillors: David Cox, Paul Cunningham, Ron Davies, Rosetta Dolphin, Ray Hughes, Gareth Roberts and David Roney

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor Jim Falshaw, George Hardcastle, Sara Parker and Mike Reece; and Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Councillor Helen Brown, Cabinet Member for Housing; Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise); Interim Senior Manager (Council Housing); Service Manager (Enterprise and Regeneration); Service Manager (Customer Support); and Capital Works Team Manager

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Democratic Services Manager and Committee Officer

**31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**

There were no declarations of interest.

**32. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2016 were submitted.

In response to a query from Councillor Ron Davies on the Strategic Housing & Regeneration Project, it was explained that the proposed scheme for the Melrose Centre in Aston would be submitted for approval by Cabinet early in 2017, as stated in the report.

**RESOLVED:**

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

**33. BUY BACK OF COUNCIL RIGHT TO BUY (RTB) PROPERTIES**

The newly appointed Interim Senior Manager (Council Housing), Steve Agger, was introduced to the Committee. He presented a report seeking support on the implementation of a new policy setting out the Council's approach to the strategic acquisition of properties that become available on the open market. The new policy would include the option to purchase ex-Council properties sold under the Right to Buy scheme. The policy would help to clarify the process and criteria for purchases, ensuring value for money and opening up opportunities for acquiring additional housing stock.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin supported the introduction of the new policy, and this was endorsed by the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Committee supports the implementation of a Strategic Acquisition Policy (incorporating Right to Buy Buyback).

**34. SHELTERED HOUSING REVIEW**

The Interim Senior Manager (Council Housing) presented a report to seek support for a review of sheltered housing across the county to potentially re-model and re-designate to enable best use of the current stock to meet future local housing need. This was one of the recommendations from Member workshops held over the summer period to discuss a review of low demand sheltered housing schemes in the south of the county.

The report detailed a number of reasons for varying demand for the county's 2,613 sheltered units and highlighted the increasing demand for smaller accommodation for the under 50 age group. Over the past year, around 25% of sheltered accommodation had been let to applicants not meeting the age criteria for that stock and was allocated on a case by case basis. A recent review identified that around 60% of the total void rent loss across the Council's housing stock was attributable to sheltered accommodation, which equated to an estimated loss of £35K per annum.

The Chief Officer referred to the range of sheltered accommodation, some of which was in high demand whilst others were difficult to let. She clarified that no specific changes were proposed at this stage and that there would be consultation with local Members on a scheme by scheme basis.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin spoke about the importance of achieving the right mix of people in housing schemes, citing an example in her ward which had worked well despite her initial reservations. She also pointed out that some housing stock could be better located nearer facilities.

Councillor Gareth Roberts commented on the availability of private accommodation for younger people in his ward and asked about forthcoming changes on the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) cap. The Chief Officer explained that this would be an issue at supported housing schemes where rents may be higher than the LHA. Whilst some funding would be available from the Welsh Government to help meet that shortfall, the level of funding was not yet known. Further information would be included in the update on Welfare Reforms to be brought to the Committee in the New Year.

Following a question from Councillor Ray Hughes on the new bungalows in Leeswood, it was confirmed that the design allowed for disabled access.

In response to comments from Councillor David Cox on the benefits of using local knowledge in allocating housing, the Chief Officer confirmed that officers do engage with Local Members. She went on to ask Members to encourage people to apply for social housing.

Councillor Ron Davies agreed that a careful approach was needed to allocations, referring to an example in his ward where a particular mix of residents was not working.

Councillor Paul Cunningham welcomed the opportunity for some sheltered stock to be made available to people under 50, which could help to prevent homelessness.

Councillor Dolphin indicated her support for the proposals on the basis that Recommendation 2 was 'in principle'. Councillor Helen Brown suggested that the words 'in consultation with Ward Members' be included but said that this would not apply to the actual letting of properties. The Chief Officer stated that no further action would be taken without Cabinet approval and consultation with stakeholders including the Tenants' Federation.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Committee supports the work on the Sheltered Housing Review to date and notes that further work should take place to develop firm proposals for those schemes/ properties identified as appropriate for re-designation, re-modelling or alternative future use; and
- (b) That the Committee supports (in principle) de-commissioning of sheltered schemes which cannot be made fit for purpose, re-designating them for alternative client groups, or agreeing to redevelop the sites, subject to consultation with appropriate ward Members.

**35. QUARTER 2 IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2016/17 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 and good performance relevant to the Committee during Quarter 2.

Housing

Positive progress was reported on new schemes within the Strategic Housing & Regeneration Programme and the proactive approach to dealing with the increasing number of housing enquiries during the period. The repair/improvement of 40 private sector dwellings through the Capital Programme and Welsh Government (WG) national loan scheme was expected to be met by year end by allocating resources to processing loan applications. Despite positive performance, the completion of Disabled Facilities Grants for children and adults remained an area of focus and improvements to the process would help to further reduce timescales.

Progress on the Welsh Housing Quality Standard was mainly on target, with delays on roofing and windows as a result of unpredicted issues. When asked about the criteria for the work, the Capital Works Team Manager explained that a 'whole house' approach to work was taken where possible and that Members should report any specific issues of concern.

The team was congratulated by Councillor Gareth Roberts for positive tenant feedback on the scheme in the Holway.

Councillor David Roney commended the Custom House Lane development but questioned why solar panels had not been installed. He went on to refer to the recent announcement by the WG Environment Secretary on energy efficient measures in new homes. The Chief Officer confirmed that this had been considered and would be looked at for future schemes as the aim was to build high quality new homes with minimal running costs. However, decisions on solar panels were dependent on funding available.

### Economy and Enterprise

The Service Manager (Enterprise & Regeneration) reported overall positive performance during the period including activities on supply chain events and the development of the Ambassadors programme.

Although the number of new jobs created had fallen during the quarter, there were positive announcements on job safeguarding and potential growth. Councillor Paul Cunningham welcomed opportunities for new business investment but raised concerns about the recent announcement of job losses by Convatek in Deeside.

On the regional economy, positive discussions were taking place with WG on devolved powers with the focus on strengthening regional working. As requested by the Chairman, the Chief Officer gave an update on progress with the Northern Gateway where initial work on the road infrastructure had started, to be followed by the first phase of housing developments and job creation.

### Poverty

The Council's proactive approach was reflected in the amount of additional Social Security and Tax Credits paid to Flintshire residents which had exceeded the target. Another area highlighted was the number of individuals recording a positive outcome under the measure 'engaging in employment/ volunteering opportunities'.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin asked if there were plans to continue the 'LIFT' programme in Communities First areas which had proved successful in helping people back into work. The Service Manager (Enterprise & Regeneration) explained that the Council expected the LIFT and Communities 4 Work programmes to continue until March 2018 at least. The Council was carrying out contingency planning to try to safeguard the most important elements of the core Communities First programme.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the Committee receives the Quarter 2 Improvement Plan Monitoring Reports.

**36. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

In presenting the Forward Work Programme for consideration, the Democratic Services Manager suggested that the North East Wales (NEW) Homes Board update be moved to the February 2017 meeting due to the number of items scheduled for the January meeting.

Following remarks by Councillor Gareth Roberts on a review of business rates, the Chief Officer explained the requirement for the Council's Business Rate Policy to be approved annually. Potential changes in the sharing of redistributed rate income could form part of the national review.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be amended; 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.

**37. 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 10am and ended at 11.05am)

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**Chairman**