

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
17 JULY 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in The Old Court House Café, Flint on Tuesday 17 July 2018

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

Councillors: Sian Braun, Jean Davies, Ron Davies, Rosetta Dolphin, Mared Eastwood, George Hardcastle, Ted Palmer, Mike Reece, Paul Shotton and David Wisinger

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor Patrick Heesom (for Ray Hughes)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Adele Davies-Cooke

CONTRIBUTORS:

Councillor Bernie Attridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing; Councillor Christine Jones, Cabinet Member for Social Services; Councillor Billy Mullin, Cabinet Member for Corporate Management; Chief Officer (Housing and Assets); Benefits Manager; Customer Support Manager; Commissioning Officer; Systems and Training Team Leader and Modern Apprentice
Mr. Robbie Davison, Can Cook was in attendance prior to the start of the meeting

IN ATTENDANCE:

Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Support Officer

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Benefits Manager introduced Mr. Robbie Davison from Can Cook to the meeting, who were currently supplying the Good Food Hubs in Flintshire. Mr. Robbie Davison thanked the Committee for the opportunity to address Members and provided a brief overview of Can Cook and a general overview of food aid/food poverty. It was proposed that Can Cook would provide between 650 and 700 free meals to children across Flintshire during the summer holidays.

Councillor George Hardcastle asked if Can Cook provided meals for homeless people and rough sleepers. Whilst the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing advised that there were no rough sleepers in Flintshire, Mr. Robbie Davison explained that the clear focus for Can Cook was to work directly with people who use food banks to ensure that they had access to fresh meals and across Liverpool 39,000 meals had been provided through this channel.

In response to a question around how the Holiday Hunger Programme was being funded, the Benefits Manager explained that the majority of the funding had been provided by Travis Perkins as part of their Legacy Fund – Community Payback. Cllr Rosetta Dolphin suggested that a letter be sent to Travis Perkins on behalf of the Committee thanking them for the funding provided. This was supported by the Committee. Councillor Paul Shotton suggested that the Deeside Business Forum be approached to request donations for future programmes.

In response to a question around food allergies, Mr Davison explained that on the first day of the playscheme children would have to submit completed consent forms which included a question on any food allergies. Once this information had been collated the food provided would be adapted to accommodate those allergies, which included the availability of vegetarian and gluten free options.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Mr Davison for the opportunity to sample the food which would be provided to children over the summer, which had been excellent and for his attendance and answering questions from Members.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

No declarations of interest were made.

18. FOOD POVERTY STRATEGY

The Benefits Manager introduced the Food Poverty Strategy report which outlined the strategic priority of working towards addressing food poverty.

The draft Strategy, as shown in Appendix 1 of the report, had recently been presented and adopted by the Public Services Board (PSB) and would be published shortly. Flintshire's Public Service Board supported the development of partnership initiatives aimed at the reduction of poverty within the County and recently endorsed the development and implementation of a Community Benefit Strategy which covered a range of strategic priorities, as detailed within the report.

As outlined within the report, there was clearly a high degree of agreement between the challenges and objectives identified by the multi-agency board and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB), as well as the positive work currently undertaken by individual organisations in the community, e.g. food banks. Given the level of work currently on going within the County and the strategic and aspirational symmetry between the Flintshire's multi-agency PSB and BCUHB, there was a need to explore and agree collective next steps and the contributions partners would make in achieving the goals associated with the reduction of food poverty.

The Benefits Manager outlined a number of key deliverables for year one, as set out within the report. One of the key deliverables was the introduction of the Holiday Hunger Programme which would be rolled out over the school summer holidays. Details of the Programme had been provided by Mr. Robbie Davison to the Committee prior to the start of the meeting.

In conclusion, the Benefits Manager reported that Flintshire had taken the lead in developing an alliance for North Wales to help better understand the regional issues around food poverty and food insecurity. It was hoped that engagement across the region in tackling these issues through sharing best practice; learning from experience and working cross sector would be considered during a food poverty conference to be held in North Wales in September, 2018.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Members for Housing thanked the Benefits Manager for the report but outlined his sadness at the need for such a report and the number of families across Flintshire who were in food poverty. He commented on the launch of the Holiday Hunger Programme which would be held on 19th July and hoped that the initiatives set out within the report would end food poverty, not just for children, but for unemployed people and pensioners in the future.

The Cabinet Members for Corporate Management said that as a Board Member for NEWydd who provided healthy school meals during term time he was pleased to see a scheme being provided during the school summer holidays for children to access healthy hot meals. The Cabinet Member for Social Services congratulated the Benefits Manager and her team and was pleased to see the joint working with the multi-agency PSB and BCUHB. She referred to the requirements which had been placed on Local Authorities by the Children's Commissioner to tackle child poverty and was pleased that the Council's initiatives were meeting those requirements and those within the Older People's Strategy also.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin questioned the value for money given the cost of some of the meals and said that families and pensioners may be reluctant to pay for the cost of the meals. She also asked if furniture and equipment were being provided at the Community Food Hubs. The Benefits Manager explained that she had not seen the meals in question but said that as the Council had not introduced such a scheme previously, feedback on pricing would be essential for future schemes. Pricing had been set in comparison with the largest similar food supplier and whilst the prices were comparable, the meals provided through the Council did not include additives or sugar and are not frozen but remain fresh in the fridge for 4-7 days. Also rather than the food being delivered to homes, the principle behind the scheme was to bring communities together. She also advised that opportunities were being looked into to access equipment via community funds.

Councillor Paul Shotton welcomed the report, in particular the collaborative work which had been carried out but raised concerns around reports that supplies at food banks were running low due to increased demand. He commented on a scheme which had been introduced in Yorkshire where food nearing its expiry date was distributed to those in need and also the gardens at Pen Y Llan, Connah's Quay where residents were growing their own vegetables.

Councillor Ron Davies commented on a similar provision for hot meals provided at Riverside Church, Shotton and asked if they could be contacted to expand their current scheme. The Benefits Manager advised that focus was currently on raising the profile of the Community Food Hubs and Holiday Hunger Programme but it was hoped that organisations across Flintshire would contact the Council to allow the schemes to link and grow in the future. She said that she was confident that there were many excellent schemes already in place across Flintshire, especially within the third sector.

Councillor George Hardcastle concurred with previous comments made and thanked the Benefits Manager for a positive report. He asked whether the number of meals required each day had been estimated. The Benefits Manager

explained that the Programme planned to deliver 800 hot meals per day over 20 play scheme sites over the school summer holiday period. The figures had been based on last year's play scheme attendance figures but a 30% increase had been factored in to ensure all children attended had access to a hot meal.

In response to a question from Councillor Sian Braun, the Benefits Manager confirmed that the Holiday Hunger Programme would be available to play scheme aged children but any feedback received from the Programme would be taken into consideration for next year's provision.

Councillor Mike Reece suggested a notice be placed in Member's Services asking Members for donations towards the Holiday Hunger Programme. This suggestion was supported by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee continue to support the ongoing work to address food poverty and food insecurity in Flintshire.

19. UPDATE ON THE MANAGEMENT OF THE HOMELESS LEGISLATION WITHIN THE HOUSING (WALES) ACT 2014

The Customer Support Manager introduced a report which provided an update on how the requirements of the new Homelessness Legislation within the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 were being met and some of the projected challenges that faced the Council.

In 2017/18 the Council saw an increase in the number of households presenting at risk of homelessness and increased use of temporary accommodation. The Council was committed to prevent rough sleeping and had worked to model the services and grant funding to mitigate the risk of increased temporary accommodation costs, as detailed within the report. The focus of the Housing Options Team, wherever possible, was to prevent homelessness and enable a household to remain in their home and to achieve a successful homeless prevention outcome the service needed a supply of housing options that were affordable, and could be made available to households accessing the service. The shortage of available options had been highlighted as a growing issues within the Flintshire Homeless Review and would be a focus of the action plan and the initiatives, as detailed within the report.

The Customer Support Manager provided a detailed update on the challenges facing the Council, as outlined within the report, which focused around:-

- The Social Housing Register;
- Increasing the Availability of Private Rented Sector Properties;
- Interim Accommodation;
- Preventing Rough Sleepers;
- Single Households; and
- Vulnerable and Complex Needs

In conclusion, the Customer Support Manager reported that in June 2016, the Heads of Housing of all six North Wales Local Authorities together with the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru, undertook a commitment to work together to develop a regional homelessness strategy. The strategic approach, as detailed in the report would be presented to Cabinet at the end of the current financial year as the Regional Homelessness Strategy and each North Wales Local Authority was developing its own local action plan based on the priorities of the regional strategy.

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) commented on the need to increase the availability of Private Rented Sector properties and advised that the Council needed to be mindful of construction works starting at Wylfa Newydd, Anglesey which could have a negative impact on private rented accommodation if there wasn't enough availability in Anglesey and Conwy. He said that it was vital that house building continued across Flintshire through the Strategic Housing and Regeneration Programme (SHARP) as the Council remained one of the few Local Authority's building new social housing accommodation.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing advised that Cabinet had considered the report in the morning but any comments from Members during the meeting would be fed back to Cabinet and taken on board. He advised that the Council provided support to people who presented themselves as homeless through the provision of temporary accommodation but it was important that Welsh Government continued to provide funding to ensure the continued use of temporary accommodation.

The Chairman welcomed the reduction in the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. Councillor George Hardcastle echoed the comments and congratulated the Customer Support Manager and her team for achieving this reduction.

Councillor Paul Shotton raised concerns around the 39% increase of people presenting themselves as homeless due to changes to the welfare system and on a recent study which had been carried out that showed that 75% of tenants were in debt due to the introduction of Universal Credit. He welcomed the work being undertaken by the Customer Support Manager and her team to mitigate these challenges and asked how many private landlords across Flintshire had registered with Rent Smart Wales. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing suggested that the Facilitator contact the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) to provide a response on the number of landlords registered with Rent Smart Wales. The Chief Officer confirmed that tenants were only placed in private accommodation where the landlords were registered with Rent Smart Wales.

Councillor Patrick Heesom said that he welcomed the comprehensive report which he felt addressed how the issues around the increase in the number of households presenting themselves at risk of homelessness. He referred to the Chief Officer's comments on ensuring the future of the SHARP which he felt was critically important and ensuring the need for an appropriate affordable housing supply, but raised concerns around developers finding loopholes which saw them providing less affordable housing than needed through submitting a number of development applications on the same site. He said that there was a need for

the Council to develop a closer working relationship with private landlords and sought an assurance that the Regional Homeless Strategy would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee prior to approval by Cabinet.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing assured the Committee that the Regional Homeless Strategy would be presented to Scrutiny prior to adoption at Cabinet. He said that he agreed with the comments around closer working relationships with private landlords and said that together with the Chief Officer, he was working on further developing the Landlord Forum.

In response to a question from Councillor Heesom around the Triage Service, the Customer Support Manager explained that all applicants were treated the same and when letters were sent out to applicants details of the appeals process were provided.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin agreed with previous comments and said that the Council needed to focus its attention on the SHARP. She referred to 'hard to let' properties in her own ward and suggested that they be re-modelled to one or two bedroomed properties which were most needed. The Chief Officer agreed with the suggestion and commented on the issues which had arisen following the introduction of the 'bedroom tax'. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing said that there was also a shortage of larger properties in some areas of the County and commented that there was a need for affordable housing developments across all communities in Flintshire.

Councillor Heesom commented on the increase in planning applications for Houses of Multiple Occupancy across Flintshire and raised concerns around private landlords housing 5/6 people but paying council tax for only one property. He said that this matter needed to be addressed. He also suggested that the Council needed to work more closely with multi-national building developers to ensure larger developments of affordable homes. The Chief Officer commented that Waites, who were delivering SHARP were a national building development company but said that it was important to acknowledge the contribution smaller building development companies made in providing good homes.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the update on the management of the new legislation within the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 be noted;
- (b) That the emerging themes within the Regional Homeless Strategy, and challenges that the Council had faced finding suitable housing options for households and the plans to mitigate further risks be supported;
- (c) That the proposals to alleviate homelessness in the County be supported; and
- (d) That the Regional Homeless Strategy and Action Plan be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee, for consideration, prior to adoption by Cabinet.

20. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.15 pm)

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Chairman