

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
11 MARCH 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the Community & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Wednesday 11th March 2020

PRESENT: **Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)**

Councillors: Ron Davies, Rosetta Dolphin, Mared Eastwood, Ray Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Ted Palmer, Kevin Rush, Paul Shotton and David Wisinger

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Patrick Heesom (for Brian Lloyd)

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Sian Braun, Helen Brown and Derek Butler

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Christine Jones

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Carolyn Thomas, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene & Countryside; Councillor Dave Hughes, Cabinet Member for Housing; Chief Officer (Housing and Assets); Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy); Service Manager – Enterprise and Regeneration and Housing Manager

IN ATTENDANCE: Community & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Electoral Services Officer

43. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillor Ted Palmer declared a personal interest in Agenda item 5 – Tenancy Management Policy, as a Council tenant.

Councillors Paul Shotton and David Wisinger both declared a personal interest in Agenda item 8 – Quarter 3 Council Plan 2019/20 Monitoring Report, as Members of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority.

44. MINUTES

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson referred to page 4 of the minutes and thanked the Chairman and Cabinet Member for Housing for their response to his request to bring information on SARTH to a future meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin referred to the penultimate paragraph on page 5 of the minutes and asked that it be amended to include the response provided by the Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) during the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above amendment, the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

45. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Facilitator presented the latest Forward Work Programme and reported on the arrangement being made for an all Member workshop on the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB) to be held in May, 2020. Details of the date, time and venue of the workshop would be circulated to Members in due course.

The Facilitator also reported, that following consultation with the Chairman, arrangements had been made for the Committee to receive a briefing session on SARTH and the Allocations Policy prior to the start of the next Committee meeting scheduled for 29 April, 2020.

In conclusion, the Facilitator reported that the Wales Audit Office (WAO) were seeking to speak to a small number of Members of the Committee on the Rent Arrears Service. She said that she would e-mail the Committee following the meeting to seek volunteers to take part in a meeting with the WAO.

Councillor Patrick Heesom expressed his disappointment that the all Member workshop on the NWEAB was not being held until May and commented on the need for Members to scrutinise the deal as a matter of urgency. The Facilitator explained that following requests from a number of Scrutiny Committee's for a report on the NWEAB it was felt that a workshop to allow all Members to contribute would be the best way forward. The reason that May was being proposed as a date was that additional workshops to allow Members to consider the Council Plan 2020/21 and revised Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) were required first to allow consideration prior to reports being presented to County Council.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee considers the draft Forward Work Programme and approve/amend as necessary;
- (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; and
- (c) That the Committee notes the progress made in completing the outstanding actions.

46. TENANCY MANAGEMENT POLICY

The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) introduced the Tenancy Management Policy which set out how the Council managed the types of tenancies it provided under current legislation and in the discharge of its statutory obligations as a landlord. The Policy also sought to ensure that effective systems were adopted for the efficient management and administration of housing services.

The Chief Officer provided additional information on each of the sections of the Tenancy Management Policy, which was attached at Appendix 1 of the report. He drew Members attention to recent changes to communal areas, which had been introduced to comply with current fire safety regulations. This meant

that all communal areas were not to be utilised for the storage of items which could pose a risk in the event of a fire, either due to combustibility or hindering egress in the event of an evacuation.

The Chief Officer also drew Members attention to the Welsh Government (WG) changes to tenancies, as detailed within the report and suggested that further update reports on the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 as it became fully enacted, be included on the Committee's Forward Work Programme for consideration at future meetings in order to keep Members updated.

Councillor Paul Shotton thanked officers for the report and asked if Members of the Committee could take part in a visit to the Flint Offices to become acquainted with the new officers following the housing department restructure. It was suggested that a who's who of housing staff be compiled and circulated to the Committee for information in the first instance.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin asked if a tenant's right of succession could be lost following the breakdown of a relationship. She also asked what support was provided to tenants if their home had to be demolished. The Housing Manager confirmed that following a relationship breakdown a new tenancy would need to be put in place. She also confirmed that if a home needed to be demolished the tenant would be re-housed.

Following concerns raised by Councillor Ted Palmer that the section dealing with Successions within the Tenancy Management Policy was difficult to understand, the Chief Officer agreed that officers would look at this further and amend if possible.

Councillor David Wisinger commented on the increase in tenants being contacted to make claims around disrepairs and asked how the Council responded to them. He also commented on the potential financial impacts of COVID-19 and asked whether rent payments could be deferred for tenants struggling financially. The Chief Office explained that the Council rigorously defended disrepair claims. He also explained that there were currently no proposals to defer rent payments for tenant but that each request would be considered on a case by case basis.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson welcomed the report but raised concerns around changes to allocations which had resulted in an increase in anti-social behaviour at sheltered accommodations. The Chief Officer commented on the processes in place to evict tenants causing anti-social behaviour and the reliance of evidence based information. He also reported that a review of allocations to sheltered accommodation would be undertaken.

In response to a question from Councillor Ron Davies on visits to tenants, the Housing Manager confirmed that visits to tenants were carried out by appointment. She also reported that during introductory tenancies, visits by housing officers were carried out at 3, 6 and 9 month intervals so any potential issues could be flagged up early.

Councillor Ron Davies proposed that the Tenancy Management Policy be noted and this was seconded by Councillor Patrick Heesom.

RESOLVED:

That the Tenancy Management Policy be noted.

47. TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) introduced the report which provided an update on the work undertaken since February 2019. The report also proposed an increase in the scale of action to facilitate the transition to more sustainable land uses in town centres.

The Service Manager – Enterprise and Regeneration explained that nationally, town centres were facing challenging economic circumstances due to changing behaviours by shoppers and the retail industry. The Council had always actively supported town centres with the Council, in the past, being able to regularly draw down capital funding for property and environmental improvements from Welsh Government (WG) and the Welsh Development Agency. A list of programmes and projects supported and delivered through the funding packages was summarised within the report.

The Service Manager – Enterprise and Regeneration drew Members attention to the more ambitious approach being taken by the Council to assist town councils, within the context of the strategic approach agreed by Cabinet in May 2019, as detailed within the report.

In response to a question from Councillor Ron Davies around the need for a review of traffic lights and bus lane in Shotton, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene & Countryside agreed to provide Councillor Davies with information following the meeting on the proposals to improve the junction and traffic lights in Shotton as part of the installation of junction improvements along Shotton and Queensferry.

The Chairman asked if any progress had been made in developing the land where the Council offices used to be in Connah's Quay and the Somerfield site. The Enterprise & Regeneration Manager commented that there had been active conversations with the Council on the future use of the site and whilst there was currently no clear steer, it was hoped to see a shop unit there.

Councillor Ted Palmer commented on the closure of large buildings in Holywell high street, since the health check study undertaken in 2008, such as banks, which did not lend themselves to retail buildings and asked if these buildings could be adapted to provide housing but keeping a small space for retail purposes. Councillor Dave Wisinger also commented on the number of empty retail units, on the outskirts of town centres, which remained empty for a long period of time and felt that the best use of them would be to transform them into housing, which would assist in increasing footfall in town centres. The Service Manager – Enterprise and Regeneration explained that following on from the previous health check study, town centres would be revisited and reviewed accordingly. The Chief Officer commented on changes to Planning Policy Wales which aimed to make town centres sustainable places to live, with consideration of public transport links.

Councillor Patrick Heesom commented on the Town Centre Policy which he felt had benefitted some areas of the County but not all. He said that Members needed to be mindful of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board which would dictate the future of town centres and said that there needed to be fair investment in all town centres across the County. He outlined some scepticism of the Local Development Plan (LDP) and commented on the number of homes being built at Sealand which had been a flood risk area. The Chief Officer responded that the approach being taken to address the challenges faced by town centres was in line with the work of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board. With regard to the building of houses at the Northern Gateway in Sealand, the land had been protected from flooding through an investment from WG which protected the site for 100 years.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson commented on the proposed de-pedestrianisation of Buckley town centre and asked if the public did not support the proposal would this hinder other proposed improvements continuing in the town. He also sought support to improve and re-open the historic Buckley Baths building. The Service Manager – Enterprise and Regeneration explained that other proposed schemes could continue if the de-pedestrianisation was not supported.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene & Countryside advised that a number of schemes to improve town centres were being considered and have been put in place such as improvements to linking town centres through public transport and new Active Travel routes, thus maintaining them as transport hubs. She also commented on the desire for town centres to become green with the planting of semi mature trees using tree pits that improve drainage, creating a sense of well-being and improving the natural environment.

In response to a question from Councillor Rosetta Dolphin around future funding, the Service Manager – Enterprise and Regeneration explained that a decision on funding would be made by Cabinet during consideration of the report in March, 2020, however he said that getting the right investment and right approach was as important as the funding. The Chief Officer commented on the setting up of a Business Improvement district for town centres, for business communities to be able to control what to improve.

Councillor Davies commented that Shotton town council was an example of a thriving town which many shops but people were not encouraged to visit due to the traffic problems which had been on-going for a number of years. He also commented on the former Bargain Stores in Connah's Quay which had been dilapidated for a number of years and asked what could be done to improve this. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene & Countryside advised that traffic in Shotton would be improved as part of the Bus Lane Improvements. The Chief Officer explained that the Council were previously looking to purchase the former Bargain Stores as part of a Compulsory Purchase Order but this had not been completed. He said that this building was an example of a neglected building having a detrimental effect on the aesthetics of an area.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the progress made in delivering regeneration in town centres in Flintshire and the refocused approach being proposed for 2020 and beyond be supported; and
- (b) That the Committee recommends to Cabinet the additional resources required for a Senior Officer post.

48. FLINTSHIRE IN BUSINESS UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) introduced the report which summarised the work of the business development team and provided an update on the Flintshire in Business programme for 2019. The report also set out how the service would focus its work in 2020 and beyond in response to changes to the economy and to corporate priorities.

The Service Manager – Enterprise and Regeneration explained that the main function of the service was business engagement which acted as a platform on which other activities were built by the service and other providers. This as a unique role which was not provided elsewhere and the feedback from stakeholders and business customers had been overwhelmingly positive with regard to the service they received from the team.

One of the flagship programmes delivered by the service was Flintshire in Business (formerly Flintshire Business Week). This had operated for 13 years and had been fully funded through sponsorship from the business community. In 2019 the decision was taken to cease to operate the programme as a week-long series of events as it was felt that this made it harder for businesses to attend all of the events. Instead, events were proposed to be spread throughout the year. The events included within the programme for 2019 were detailed within the report.

The Service Manager – Enterprise and Regeneration drew Members attention to the strategic direction for the service and how the service would be refocussing its work in 2020/21 to reflect the changing world for businesses in the County, as detailed within the report.

Councillor Paul Shotton said that it was important for Members to recognise the work of the team and congratulated the team on their work and networking being carried out across Flintshire.

Councillor Ted Palmer asked further information the on the recent announcement from Welsh Government (WG) that 7 towns across North Wales would be benefiting from free Wi-Fi. The Enterprise & Regeneration Manager agreed to provide further information on this following the meeting.

In response to concerns raised by Councillor Patrick Heesom around Mostyn Docks being by-passed for investment, the Chief Officer assured Councillor Heesom that Mostyn Docks was not being by-passed and the section of the report referring to the work stream to improve the coherence and co-

ordination of business support activity by the North Wales Economic Ambition Board would assist in a more joined up approach.

In response to a question from Councillor Dave Wisinger on how many council industrial units were occupied, the Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) reported that towards the higher end of 80% of industrial units were occupied. He explained that a review of industrial estates was due to be carried out in order to establish which needed to be re-developed in the future.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made in delivering business support in Flintshire and the refreshed priorities for the future be noted.

49. QUARTER 3 COUNCIL PLAN 2019/20 MONITORING REPORT

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) and Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) introduced a report to present a summary of the monitoring of progress for the quarter three position of 2019/20 for the Council Plan priorities 'Caring Council', 'Ambitious Council' and 'Serving Council' relevant to the Committee. The report was an exception based report and therefore focused on the areas of under-performance.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) reported that whilst the number of individuals supported through the mentoring service that enter employment, learning and volunteering was below target he and the team were confident that the full year target was achievable.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin commented on the performance of the Homelessness Team and the Team delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) for Council tenants and asked that a letter be sent to Jenni Griffiths, Homeless and Advice Manager and Sean O'Donnell, Capital Works Team Manager thanking them and their teams for their hard work within their service areas.

Councillor Dolphin also referred to performance measure 1.4.5.1 and asked why the progress was shown as green if the number of social units of accommodation delivered had reduced following the housing association not meeting its target. The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) agreed to provide a response following the meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor Dolphin around the installation of air source heat pumps, the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) agreed to provide details of the officers to the Committee following the meeting so that information could be provided to residents by Members through their newsletters.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

50. **MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE**

There were no members of the public and press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.20 pm)

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Chairman