

COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
4 NOVEMBER 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the Community, Housing & Assets Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a remote attendance meeting on Wednesday, 4 November 2020

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

Councillors: Helen Brown, Geoff Collett, Ron Davies, Adele Davies-Cooke, Mared Eastwood, Veronica Gay, Dennis Hutchinson, Brian Lloyd and Kevin Rush

APOLOGY: Councillor: Bernie Attridge

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor Ted Palmer (for Ray Hughes)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Patrick Heesom attended as an observer

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Dave Hughes, Cabinet Member for Housing; Councillor Billy Mullin, Cabinet Member for Corporate Management; Chief Executive; Chief Officer (Housing & Assets), Housing & Assets Senior Manager, Housing Strategy Manager, Housing & Prevention Senior Manager, Benefits Manager, Corporate Finance Manager, Principal Accountant, Strategic Finance Manager – Commercial & Housing and Business Performance Team Manager

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

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillor Ted Palmer declared a personal interest as a Council tenant.

10. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 September, 2020 were approved, and moved and seconded by Councillors Ron Davies and Kevin Rush.

RESOLVED:

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

11. EMERGENCY SITUATION BRIEFING (VERBAL)

The Chief Executive provided a short update on the emergency situation. He advised that it would take around 3 weeks from the start of the firebreak to see a full impact trend and it was hoped that the overall picture for Wales would be much improved. The First Minister had indicated that a review of the position would be taken two weeks after the end of the firebreak in order to see if the figures remained stable and avoid another intervention until the New Year at the earliest.

The Council were on track to double Test, Trace and Protect capacity, and all affected services were on track to resume on 9 November as planned. All attention was currently on the resilience of health and social care across the winter months and a vaccination plan for North Wales was in place in readiness for one of more vaccines as they became available. A further Member briefing paper would be circulated later in the week.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal update be noted.

12. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Facilitator presented the latest Forward Work Programme. In line with the recommendation made at the last meeting, whilst considering the Recovery Strategy, the Forward Work Programme had been populated, as shown at Appendix 1 of the report. On Action Tracking, all actions arising from the previous meeting had been completed.

The recommendations outlined within the report were moved by Councillor Ron Davies and seconded by Councillor Kevin Rush.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted;
- (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 progress made in completing the outstanding actions be noted.

13. BUDGET 2021/22 - STAGE 1

The Chief Executive and Corporate Finance Manager introduced the first budget stage report which detailed the forecast and the cost pressures which would make-up the total budget requirement.

A report to Cabinet in October had provided an update on the financial forecast for 2021/22 and the following two financial years. A full review of the forecast had been undertaken to build an accurate and robust baseline of cost pressure which needed to be funded. The review had taken into account the ongoing impacts of the emergency situation including the speed of recovery of income against set targets.

This report set out the limited solutions available to fund the cost pressures with the funding strategy highly dependent on sufficient national funding for local government. The details of the cost pressures for Housing and Assets were included in the report.

The Chief Executive and Corporate Finance Manager gave a detailed presentation which covered the following areas:-

- Financial Forecast for 2021/22;
- The Future – What we advised back in February;
- Summary Totals of Cost Pressures;
- Three Part Solutions and Risk-Taking;
- National Position and Funding;
- Potential Funding Scenarios;
- Budget Timetable;
- Support and Challenge Today

Additional details around specific Housing and Assets cost pressures were provided by the Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) as part of the presentation.

In response to a question from Councillor Brown, the Chief Officer advised that a list of commercial units available to rent was available on the Council's website and work was being undertaken to make them more visible.

In response to a question from the Chairman around financial assistance from Welsh Government, the Chief Executive explained that the provisional budget settlement would be received on 22 December and a briefing was planned for 23 December in order to provide an update to all Members.

The Committee were asked to consider the recommendations detailed within the report and outlined within the presentation, which were moved by Councillor Kevin Rush and seconded by Councillor Ron Davies.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee support the overall budget strategy;
- (b) That the Committee re-affirm the Council's position on local taxation policy;
- (c) That the Committee support the Council's expectations of Governments, as outlined within the presentation provided;
- (d) That the Community, Housing and Assets cost pressures, as outlined within the report, be noted; and
- (e) That no further cost efficiency areas be proposed by the Committee to be explored further.

14. RECOVERY STRATEGY UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) introduced the Recovery Strategy update and advised of the risks which had been amended since the last meeting. The risk around Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) had been downgraded as it was now more readily available, and critical work was still being undertaken on DFG's providing tenants were comfortable with the work taking place. With regards to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) programme which had previously been halted, careful risk assessments had now been undertaken and

the WHQS has commenced again with a careful approach and improvements taking place safely for tenants and contractors.

Cllr Brown raised concerns on tenancy enforcement matters and the recovery of overpaid Housing Benefit. The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) commented that it was not the courts current priority to deal with enforcements and that it had created many challenges which would take some time to resolve. The Benefits Manger commented with regards to the over payment of Housing Benefits and informed the committee that a soft recovery was in process and was being conducted sensitively and carefully.

The recommendation outlined within the report was moved by Councillor Ted Palmer and seconded by Councillor Ron Davies.

RESOLVED:

That the updated Risk Register & Risk Mitigation Actions, as outlined within the report be noted.

15. PHASE 2 HOMELESSNESS - COVID 19 RESPONSE

The Housing & Preventions Service Manager introduced the support and approach which had been taken around homelessness during the emergency situation and outlined the future approaches, in line with guidance issued by Welsh Government (WG).

A detailed presentation was provided which covered the following areas:-

- Guidance issued from Welsh Government & Funding
- Focus on supporting people to avoid a return to the streets
- Moving people from emergency homes
- Access to long term settled housing
- Help to sustain tenancies
- Returning to family and friends
- Social Housing
- Private Renting
- Supported Housing.

The Housing & Preventions Service Manager also outlined the Phase 3 approach which would commence in January 2021. He commented that Phase 3 would focus more on prevention, building more affordable homes, improving the emergency housing offer and resource implications on how to maximise opportunities & partnership working.

Councillor Helen Brown whilst welcoming the homeless hub, raised concerns on issues arising in the vicinity and asked that representatives of Wallich be invited to a future meeting of the Committee. The Housing & Preventions Service Manager suggested that he speak to Councillor Brown following the meeting to provide her with assurances around the services being provided at the homeless hub and the work being undertaken in conjunction with North Wales Police. It was agreed that Councillor Brown's suggestion could be

considered further prior to the Committee receiving a further report on homelessness in March 2021.

In response to a further question from Councillor Brown around the services being provided at the homeless hub, it was agreed that a list of services be provided following the meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor Ted Palmer around the use of existing housing stock as part of the project in Holywell, the Housing & Preventions Service Manager advised that all housing stock would be considered.

In response to a question from Councillor Veronica Gay, the Housing & Preventions Service Manager outlined the benefits of Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) for younger people. He said he was not aware of many empty HMO's across the County but welcomed feedback from Councillors if they were aware of any properties.

The recommendations outlined within the report were moved by Councillor Ted Palmer and seconded by Councillor Kevin Rush.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee support the approach taken to date through Phase 1 "Crisis Management"; and
- (b) That the Committee support the Phase 2 "Response" approach, which includes a temporary variation to the Common Allocations Policy, as outlined in the report.

16. SHELTERED HOUSING REVIEW UPDATE

The Housing & Assets Senior Manager introduced the Sheltered Housing Review update following the first stage review which had been considered by Cabinet in February, 2019.

He commented that the range of requirements & compliance continued to increase with a third of housing stock being classed as sheltered housing and the need to ensure a 30 year life span going forward. They were currently reviewing all sheltered stock for Holywell, Buckley & Flint, and hoped to have the review complete by March 2021. The review was expected to reveal what stock was working well and to identify those which required work to be undertaken. All housing stock needed to be fit for purpose and vibrant and viable and work was currently being undertaken to identify possible grant funding.

Councillor Helen Brown questioned the need for a review given the review carried out only a few years earlier. The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) acknowledged Councillor Brown's comments and advised that the current review would outline which opportunities were available to get the best solution for tenants and once all information had been gathered, further reports would be provided to the Committee for consideration.

The Chief Officer also noted the suggestion from Councillor Brown that the Tenants Federation and Cabinet Member should be involved in the consultation process adding that the work undertaken to date was in its early stages of development, he noted the value of engaging with the tenants federation and confirmed that this would be undertaken.

The recommendations outlined within the report were moved by Councillor Ron Davies and seconded by Councillor Ted Palmer.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the work involved in the Sheltered Housing Review Stage 2 process be noted;
- (b) That regular update reports be submitted to the Committee for consideration and comments, when appropriate; and
- (c) That the proposed Terms of Reference for the Stage 2 review, as detailed within the report, be supported.

17. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.07 p.m.)

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Chairman