

COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
10 MARCH 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Community, Housing & Assets Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a remote attendance meeting on Wednesday, 10 March 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

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

APOLOGY: Councillor Ray Hughes

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Haydn Bateman and Patrick Heesom (as observers)

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Dave Hughes (Cabinet Member for Housing); Councillor Billy Mullin (Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets), Chief Officer (Housing and Assets), Benefits Manager, Housing and Prevention Service Manager and Housing and Assets Senior Manager

IN ATTENDANCE: Community & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator, Democratic Services Officers

46. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None.

47. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme. She referred to the items scheduled for the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 19 May 2021 and explained that the item on Community Asset Transfer which had been listed for consideration would be reported to the meeting of the Education, Youth and Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee instead. There were no further changes to the Forward Work Programme as reported at the last meeting. She advised that work was in progress on the scheduling of meetings from September 2021 onwards and a draft diary would be submitted to the annual meeting of County Council on 11 May for approval.

The Facilitator referred to the action tracking report which was appended to the report. She advised that the single action arising from the last meeting had been completed and an update on the Dynamic Resource Scheduler (DRS) System had been added to the Forward Work Programme as an item for future consideration by the Committee.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson suggested that the Committee received a report to provide details on the housing allocation process to Members. Councillor Dave Hughes said he had requested a presentation on the SARTH policy and the allocations policy to update all Members and gave an assurance this would be provided. The Housing and Prevention Service Manager agreed to

provide a briefing session to the Committee prior to the start of a future meeting to give an overview on how the SARTH policy worked and further clarification on the allocations process.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Ron Davies and Dennis Hutchinson

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.

48. REGENERATION OF EXISTING STOCK

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) introduced a report to provide an update on the delivery of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) the Council was delivering through its Capital Investment Programme. The report focussed on the achievements and journey to date. He explained that the WHQS Programme of Works would have reached its final year (2020-2021) of the six year Capital Programme, however, it had been extended by a further year due to the impact of the Covid pandemic. The report provided an update on what had been delivered and was to be completed before the extended December 2021 deadline.

The Housing and Assets Senior Manager provided background information and presented the key considerations as detailed in the report. He said there were a number of properties where the Council was unable to deliver the WHQS because, for a variety of reasons, tenants did not give permission for the work to be undertaken, however, once the property was vacant the work was carried out to bring the property up to the required standard. From 23 March 2020 all WHQS works to council properties and communal areas ceased with resources being concentrated on properties being closed/completed safely and ensuring all tenants and works were left in a safe manner. On the Capital side of the work all responsive, urgent, emergency and compliance works continued. With the easing of lockdown restrictions and further guidance published on 14 June 2020 further action was undertaken. Discussions are ongoing with the Welsh Government (WG) on the impact of the pandemic on the WHQS programme.

The Housing and Assets Senior Manager advised that the Service had been subject to audits and reviews on the Council's performance in delivering the WHQS. He gave reassurance that the Welsh Audit Office (WAO) and Internal Audit had found the Council was making good progress towards achieving the WHQS and no major issues had been raised. He also reported that the audits had identified that the Council's tenants were satisfied with the quality of work carried out in their homes and said the WHQS Tenant Satisfaction Survey was at 96%.(highest to date).

The Housing and Assets Senior Manager reported that the WG had committed to achieving a carbon neutral public sector by 2030 and to coordinating action to help other areas of the economy to make a decisive shift away from fossil fuels. The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 required the WG to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in Wales by at least 80% for the year 2050 with a system of interim emissions targets and carbon budgets. The Council would be required to ensure its homes meet the highest possible thermal efficiency and energy performance (EPC level A) by 2030. As part of the WHQS the Council's properties are currently required to meet a minimum of SAP 65 (EPC Level D). Discussions with WG were continuing on the requirement to procure and deliver a large retrofit programme. During the next 12 months officers will provide plans as part of the wider asset management and decarbonisation programme to Members for consideration which will encapsulate the investment challenges and options.

Members were informed that in addition to the work detailed in the report there was a need to consider the wider issue of the potential to undertake regeneration schemes on some of the Council's estates rather than committing funding to assets that will be expensive to maintain, have a high number of voids, and are expensive to heat and run for the tenant.

The Chair spoke in support of the progress made in delivering the WHQS programme. He expressed concerns around the requirement for the Council to ensure its housing stock meet a thermal efficiency and energy performance (EPC level A) by 2030. He also commented on Tenant Refusals or No Access (Acceptable Fails) and asked how this problem was progressed. The Housing and Assets Senior Manager explained that refusals arose for a number of reasons and if the tenant changed their mind the work could be done at a later date. If the property became vacant he reiterated that the work to bring the property up to WHQS requirement would then be carried out. Referring to the concerns raised around EPC level A, he advised that the Council's in-house Stock Condition Surveys gave a good understanding of the thermal efficiency of each property and the most cost effective way of bringing housing stock up to the required EPC rating.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson said the improvements carried out on the Council's housing stock were commendable. He sought assurance that the Service would achieve the targets set by the WG for the WHQS and asked if penalties would be imposed if not. The Chief Officer advised that the WG had been flexible in allowing a 12 month extension to local authorities who had requested such in recognition of the impact of the pandemic on implementing the WHQS programme. He said officers were in regular contact with the WG which was not proposing to apply penalties and gave reassurance that the Council was making good progress towards completing the Programme. The Chief Officer also commented on the possibility of future funding streams which would continue the work and seek different objectives to the WHQS.

The Housing and Assets Senior Manager advised that the main works outstanding on council properties were external and cited extensions, footpaths, and gardens as examples. He said external work could be progressed more quickly as it did not require the same level of access to a property as internal

works and therefore was less likely to be refused by the tenant. He said all major internal works were almost completed.

The Chief Officer responded to the comments and concerns expressed by Councillor Geoff Collett regarding the cost and direction of the WG decarbonisation programme. Councillor Collett suggested that a workshop be held to enable Members to better understand the De-carbonisation Strategy when appropriate. The Housing and Assets Senior Manager agreed to provide a seminar for Members once the Strategy had been developed to share the range of measures proposed and how they would be applied.

Councillor Brian Lloyd expressed concerns around the environment some tenants experienced outside their home and cited the unacceptable issue of rubbish left in front and back gardens, broken fencing, and litter as examples. He asked what enforcement action could be taken against tenants who did not adhere to the conditions of their tenancy agreement and had disregard for their neighbours and local community. The Housing and Assets Senior Manager said repairs to fencing, footpaths, gardens etc. would be identified and undertaken in the last phase of works to complete the WHQS. The Service was improving the reporting process of breaches of tenancy to ensure that people could live in a good and pleasant environment. The Chief Officer said it was not acceptable that local communities were blighted by the behaviour of a small number of individuals and also commented on the WG initiative 'Beautiful Homes' which focussed on the creation of greener spaces, off-street parking etc. He referred to the impact of the pandemic and a delay in the legal processing of tenancy enforcement issues, but said that nevertheless tenants who refused to comply with their tenancy conditions would face enforcement action in due course.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Ron Davies and seconded by Councillor Kevin Rush.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made in delivering the WHQS programme be noted and the Capital Investment Programme in its final year be supported.

49. HOMELESSNESS UPDATE REPORT

The Service Manager – Housing and Prevention introduced a report to provide an update on the work undertaken to prevent homelessness across Flintshire. He provided background information and referred to the impact of the Covid pandemic. He said there were three phases to the homelessness response and the Council was currently in phase 3 which was the move to 'New Normal' and commented that there were some positives and challenges ahead. The Service Manager gave a presentation which covered the following main points:

- Phase 1 response
- Phase 2 Planning
- Phase 2 capital funding
- Phase 3 the New Normal
- Demand for services

- out of hours response
- emergency housing
- rough sleepers
- housing support
- housing register
- all social housing lettings
- 50% Covid nominations
- peoples journeys
- the homeless hub
- new support services
- looking to the future

The Chair thanked the Service Manager for his informative report and presentation and spoke in support of the enthusiastic commitment and success of the work undertaken to address the problem of homelessness in the County.

In response to a question from Councillor Kevin Rush the Service Manager agreed to circulate the out of hour's homeless telephone number to Members following the meeting.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson asked if there were plans to extend facilities and housing for homeless people into other areas of the County in addition to the areas already reported on. The Service Manager said there was a need to increase the supply of social housing and intermediate rental accommodation. The Chief Officer commented on the longer term strategy and on work with the SHARP programme to build in capacity and also reduce housing waiting lists.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Ron Davies and seconded by Councillor Mared Eastwood.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That the work being undertaken by the service continue to be supported.

50. RECOVERY STRATEGY UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) introduced a report to provide an oversight on the recovery planning for the Committee's respective portfolios. He referred to the portfolio risk register and risk mitigation actions which were appended to the report and reported on the following red risks: CF14, HA04, HA06, CP03, HA27, HA30, and HA33.

The Chair referred to risk CP11 (costs and complexities with the return and reinstatement of Deeside Leisure Centre due to an extended period of use as an emergency hospital) and asked if the cost of reinstatement was to be funded by the Council or the Health Service. The Chief Officer explained that the Rainbow Hospital was moving into a phase of planning for reinstatement as the regional vaccination programme diminished. As part of the reinstatement programme the Council would explore the options available for the provision of its leisure and other services in the future on site.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson asked if consideration might be given to joint use of the site by the County Council and BCUHB if provision of a leisure centre and hospital services continued to be needed in the future. The Chief Officer advised that the intention was to reinstate Deeside Leisure Centre to the same position and provision of leisure services as before the Rainbow Hospital was created on site.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Dennis Hutchinson and seconded by Councillor Geoff Collett.

RESOLVED:

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

51. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

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Chairman