

COMMUNITY HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
13 OCTOBER 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, 13 October 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

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

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor David Wisinger (for David Cox)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors: Patrick Heesom, Haydn Bateman, Paul Johnson and Christine Jones attended as an observer

CONTRIBUTORS: Chief Executive, Councillor Dave Hughes, Cabinet Member for Housing; Councillor Billy Mullin, Cabinet Member for Corporate Management; Chief Officer (Housing & Assets), Housing & Assets Senior Manager, Benefits Manager, Housing Programme Services Manager, Housing & Prevention Senior Manager, Corporate Finance Manager, Business Performance Team Manager, Benefits Officer, Principal Accountant, Community and Business Protection Manager & Senior Surveyor.

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

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None.

13. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2021, were moved as a correct record by Councillor Geoff Collet and seconded by Councillor Kevin Rush.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

14. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Facilitator introduced the current Forward Work Programme and action tracking report and reported that both actions arising from the previous meeting had been completed.

The Facilitator reported that at a recent meeting of the Recovery Committee, it has been recommended that the portfolio risks identified be reported to the appropriate Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The risks identified for this Committee were around Rent Arrears, Homelessness and Raw Materials. She reported that the Committee would receive an update report on Housing Rent and Welfare Reform at the December meeting, with a verbal

update from the Chief Officer on raw materials being considered at today's meeting. She would liaise with the appropriate Officers to ensure a report on Homelessness was added to the forward work programme following the meeting.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved by Councillor Ron Davies and seconded by Councillor Mared Eastwood.

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.

15. BUDGET 2022/23 – STAGE 2

The Chief Executive, Corporate Finance Manager and Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) introduced the second budget stage report which detailed the forecast and the cost pressures which would make-up the total budget requirement.

A report to Cabinet and the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee in July provided an updated position on the budget for 2022/23. The cost pressures identified were referred to the respective Overview & Scrutiny Committees with a request that they all undergo a rigorous review. The details of the cost pressures for Education and Youth were included in the report.

The Chief Executive, Corporate Finance Manager and Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) provided a detailed presentation which covered the following areas:-

- Purpose and Background
- Summary Totals of Cost Pressures
- Housing & Assets Portfolio Cost Pressures 2022/23
 - Housing & Assets Pressures
- Strategic Solutions
- Update on Efficiencies
- Budget Timelines

The Benefits Manager reported on Council Tax Reduction and commented that they had seen a significant increase in expenditure. She added that a great deal of significant support was about to come to an end (furlough scheme and tax credits) which would have an impact. The Benefits Manager gave an overview to the Committee on the exposure level and commented that there would be a significant impact for Universal Credit and that the service for the scheme had been scaled up to provide comprehensive measures to help with advice and support to the public and household income.

The Benefits Manager also commented on the 'Help You' scheme for Council tenants and fuel support due to the increase in fuel pricing and the grant for tenancy hardship.

The recommendations outlined within the report were moved by Councillor Ron Davies and seconded by Councillor Dennis Hutchinson.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee supports the Housing and Assets Portfolio cost pressures; and
- (b) That no further cost efficiency areas be proposed by the Committee to be explored further.

16. FLINTSHIRE HOUSING NEED PROSPECTUS

The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) and Housing Programme Services Manager jointly introduced the Housing Need Prospectus which would inform the Social Housing Grant Programme.

The Welsh Government (WG) had requested that each Local Authority develop a Housing Need Prospectus. The aim of the prospectus was to inform affordable housing delivery, shape of Social Housing Grant programme by setting out what the Local Authority priorities were and provide a guide about what type of housing was needed in what locations.

The Chief Officer reported that the WG allocated the Social Housing Grant based on pro-rata amount of the all Wales allocation. He advised that the allocation for Flintshire County Council had substantially increased for 2021/22.

The recommendation outlined within the report was moved by Councillor Dennis Hutchinson and seconded by Councillor Kevin Rush.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the Flintshire Housing Need Prospectus be noted.

17. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT (DFG) POLICY

The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) and Benefits Manager introduced the revised policy and new discretionary grant. As part of the Internal Audit review of the Disabled Facilities Grant service in June 2018, it was identified that the current policy required a review in order to make the process and detail clearer and easier to understand.

The Benefits Manager outlined changes to the new policy and explained that the process has been greatly simplified for applying for a £36,000 grant based on a 5 year period of recommendations from specialists such as Occupational Health. She added that there was no means test for children, and no means test for any works to be carried out under £10,000. They had also

removed the equity requirement for a top up grant, and relocation grants were still available of up to £20,000.

The Benefits Manager informed the Committee that Welsh Government (WG) timescales for adaptation had been adopted and where previously the work carried out had been recorded in the number of days, it would now be brought in line with WG and the wording changed to months/weeks.

The Chair commented that he was pleased that the grant was remaining at £36,000.

The recommendation outlined within the report was moved by Councillor Geoff Collet and seconded by Councillor Mared Eastwood.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee support the revised policy and new discretionary grant.

18. PROGRESS OF EMPTY HOMES SCHEME IN FLINTSHIRE

The Community and Business Protection Manager introduced a report to provide an overview of the work undertaken by the Empty Homes Services. She gave a joint presentation with the Development Officer which covered the following:

- context
- achievements since 2019
- case studies

The Chairman commented that the number of empty homes seemed high but added that the standard of the refurbishments was excellent. The Senior Surveyor added that the figures for the number of empty properties was obtained from Council Tax. He also commented that they had the use of an excellent private investigator to identify home owners, and that private landlords were often part of the solution.

In response to a question from Councillor David Wisinger around an empty property in the Deeside area, the Senior Surveyor that work was progressing on identifying a solution to bring the property back into use.

In response to a question from Councillor Adele Davies-Cooke, the Senior Surveyor advised that all properties were sold at auction to ensure the best possible price at a given time.

Councillor Ron Davies asked if empty buildings were addressed alongside empty homes. The Senior Surveyor advised that only empty residential properties were targeted with their being not enough resources in the team to address commercial properties.

The recommendation outlined within the report was moved by Councillor Veronica Gay and seconded by Councillor Mared Eastwood.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

19. RAW MATERIALS SUPPLIES

The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets), relayed the impact that Covid and Brexit has had on suppliers, and that it had created and continues to create a number of pressures for activities & works including the impact on the speed of a build and the costs of construction. For example, the costs of timber and windows had increased 30-40% in the current market, and the waiting time for lift components had increased from 12 to up to 30 weeks wait. Haulage had also been hugely impacted with the shortage of lorry drivers and how quickly goods could come into the Country.

He commented that the situation was likely to settle down within the next 12/18 months and added that Officers were currently reviewing all projects to identify which would continue and which would have to be put on hold.

Councillor Ron Davies moved that the Committee felt assured that the risk around raw material supplies was being managed. This was seconded by Councillor Kevin Rush.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee feel assured that the risk around raw material supplies was being managed.

20. 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 11.20 a.m.)

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Chairman