

COMMUNITY & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14 DECEMBER 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Community & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a remote attendance meeting on Wednesday, 14 December 2022

PRESENT: Councillor Helen Brown (Chairman)

Councillors: Gilliam Brockley, Tina Claydon, Geoff Collett, Rosetta Dolphin, David Evans, Ray Hughes, Kevin Rush, Dale Selvester and Linda Thew

SUBSTITUTIONS: Councillors: Bernie Attridge (for Pam Banks)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor: Marion Bateman attended as an observer

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Ian Roberts (Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure); Councillor Paul Johnson (Cabinet Member for Finance, Inclusion, Resilient Communities including Social Value and Procurement); Councillor Sean Bibby (Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration), Chief Executive, Principal Accountants (Corporate Finance), Housing & Prevention Senior Manager, Corporate Finance Manager, Business Performance Team Manager (Housing & Assets), Service Manager – Housing, Welfare and Communities, Strategic Finance Manager (Management Accounting), Contract Surveyor (Housing Asset Management), Strategic Finance Manager - Financial Strategy & Insurance, Housing Programme Services Manager

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

7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None.

8. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 November, 2022 were approved as a correct record, as moved and seconded by Councillor Bernie Attridge and Councillor Dale Selvester.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 16 November be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

9. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme for consideration.

The Benefits Manager provided an update on the actions relating to the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016. She reported that Committee Services were currently reviewing past reports to Members on the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 and an update would be provided to Members following the meeting.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved by Councillor Bernie Attridge and seconded by Councillor Dale Selvester.

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 Committee notes the progress made in completing the outstanding actions.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 - TO CONSIDER THE EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting as the following item was considered to be exempt by virtue of paragraph 15 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

10. MTFS & BUDGET SETTING 2023-24 (STAGE 2)

The Corporate Finance Manager introduced a report on the latest position for the Council Fund Revenue Budget 2022/23 whilst awaiting the Welsh Local Government Provisional Settlement (LGPS) and formal budget setting process.

The Service Manager – Housing, Welfare and communities, Service Manager – Housing & Prevention and Strategic Housing & Programme Delivery Manager gave a detailed presentation which covered the following areas:

- Reminder of the Council's Budget Position
- Cost Pressures / Budget Reductions / Past Efficiencies:
- Budget Procedure – Stage 2
- Budget Procedure – Stage 3 (Final)
- Next Steps

Following the presentation, officers and Cabinet Members responded to questions and comments raised by the Committee.

Councillor Bernie Attridge raised concerns around the information provided to the Committee which he did not feel was adequate in order for proper scrutiny to take place. The Corporate Finance Manager advised that information had been shared with all Members during the workshop sessions and that the

information provided as part of the Agenda detailed all relevant budget information and cost pressures.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report, were moved by Councillor David Evans and seconded by Councillor Geoff Collett.

RESOLVED:

That the comments made by the Committee be collated and shared with Cabinet ahead of its meeting on 20 December, 2022.

11. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) 30 YEAR FINANCIAL BUSINESS PLAN

The Principal Accountant gave a detailed presentation which covered the following areas:-

- How we compare to other stock holding authorities.
- Value for Money.
- Welsh Governments Rent Policy.
- Income Modelling.
- Proposed Rent Inflation of 5% for all tenants.
- Rent Impact uplift & garages.
- Impact of setting rents lower than permitted
- Service Charges
- Uncontrollable Pressures
- Controllable pressures included in the service plan
- The efficiencies identified
- Prudential borrowing and 50 year pay back
- Proposed reserve level at 7%

Councillors Rosetta Dolphin and Bernie Attridge expressed their concerns at reserves being set at 7% when the average was 3%

The Principal Accountant added that it was a legal requirement for them to hold reserves at 3%, but they had been set at 7% to protect the council around future cost pressures, i.e. pay awards.

In response to a suggestion from Councillor Attridge, Councillor Sean Bibby, Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration, agreed that consideration could be given, in year, to utilise any available reserves in order to bring into use additional void properties across Flintshire.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, together with an additional recommendation to request that Cabinet consider utilising available reserves in year if possible, was moved by Councillor Bernie Attridge and seconded by Councillor Rosetta Dolphin.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee support the HRA 30 year Financial Business Plan and budget for 2023/24, as set out in the report and appendices; and

- (b) That the Committee recommend to Cabinet that consideration be given, in year, to utilise any available reserves in order to bring into use additional void properties across Flintshire.

12. HOUSING STRATEGY

The Strategic Housing & Programme Delivery Manager introduced the annual update on progress towards meeting the priorities set out in the Local Housing Strategy 2019-24. The Housing Strategy had an action plan that set out 3 priorities with key areas for action within each priority, as follows:-

- Increase supply to provide the right type of homes in the right location
- Provide support and ensure people live and remain in the right type of home
- Improve the quality and sustainability of homes

In response to a question from Councillor Bernie Attridge around the reduction in the target for the number of properties to be built, the Strategic Housing & Programme Delivery Manager explained that demand was driven by the amount of land in the Council's ownership and that it was possible for the Council to acquire further properties and increase the target when possible.

The Service Manager – Housing & Prevention also explained that he did not believe that SARTH was a barrier for the Council to be able to rent out properties quickly.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved by Councillor Bernie Attridge, and seconded by Councillor Rosetta Dolphin.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the progress against delivery of the Housing Strategy Action Plan October 2022.

13. FLINTSHIRE HOUSING NEED PROSPECTUS

Prior to consideration of the item, Councillor Bernie Attridge had requested legal advice on whether the report should be considered in open session. The Head of Democratic Services had sought legal advice from the Chief Officer (Governance) who had confirmed that no information contained within the report should be exempt from discussion in open session. The Chief Executive advised that the report had been considered by the Committee in October 2021 and was broadly the same report.

Councillor Attridge said that whilst he thanked officers for the advice, he did not accept that the information in the report should have been made public prior to consultation with local Members.

The Strategic Housing & Programme Delivery Manager introduced the Flintshire Housing Need Prospectus which had been reviewed and updated. The

format and content had not changed significantly to alter the direction of travel set out in its first iteration. The changes identified in the report reflected the increasing demand for Social Housing from the housing register and homelessness duties.

The Chair raised concerns around the development listed for Hawarden/Aston which was outside the settlement boundary and had been met with negativity in the past from residents during pre-application advice. Councillor Attridge spoke in support of the concerns and said that Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) should be working alongside the Council and understand what the Council expected of them as partners.

In response, Councillor Sean Bibby, Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration, asked that a meeting be arranged between himself and all RSLs to ensure that the Council's priorities for development were aligned to the Housing Prospectus and the LDP.

The recommendation, as outlined within the report, was moved by Councillor Bernie Attridge, and seconded by Councillor Geoff Collett.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the content of the Flintshire Housing Need Prospectus.

14. 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 12.12pm)

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Chair