

HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
13 DECEMBER 2013

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council, held at County Hall, Mold, on Friday, 13 December 2013.

PRESENT: Councillor Ron Hampson (Chairman)

Councillors: David Cox, Peter Curtis, Rosetta Dolphin, Jim Falshaw, George Hardcastle, Ray Hughes, Brian Lloyd, Mike Reece, and Gareth Roberts

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Ron Davies, Glenys Diskin and Alison Halford

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Haydn Bateman

CONTRIBUTORS:

Cabinet Member for Housing, Head of Housing Services, Head of Finance, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Neighbourhood Housing Manager, Capital Works Manager, and John Ennis and Mavis Crofts, representatives of the Tenants Federation.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Housing and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest.

39. LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES AROUND ESTABLISHING A PROPOSED HOUSING COMPANY

The Head of Housing Services introduced a report to explain the legal and governance issues around the establishment of the proposed housing company and to approve its creation. She provided background information on the proposals and gave a presentation on the following main points:

- Housing need – the evidence
- Homes and services needed
- What could be offered to meet the need
- Options to address the challenges

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services continued with the remainder of the presentation which addressed the questions which had been raised by Members during the workshop held on the establishment of a Housing Company, around the following issues:

- Governance
- Finance/Assets

- Operational matters
- How is the process being managed
- Technical issues

The Chairman thanked the Head of Housing Services and Head of Legal and Democratic Services for their detailed presentations and invited Members to raise any further questions.

During discussion Members sought further clarification around the financial, legal, and governance implications for the Authority of establishing a Housing company. They also raised queries in relation to gifted properties, the needs of elderly residents who owned a property which was difficult to maintain and no longer suitable for their purpose, and the letting and managing of properties on behalf of private landlords.

Councillor Brian Lloyd raised concerns around the possibility of the Authority being asked to stand as guarantor for the Housing Company in the future. The Head of Housing Services commented on the business plan currently being prepared for the Company and gave reassurance that there was no immediate intention to request the Authority to stand as guarantor. Members asked that if such a need arose that the Committee be consulted on any decision.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin emphasised the need for more affordable homes to be built as part of any future residential developments. Members expressed the view that the focus of the Housing Company should be on homes to rent as opposed to homes to buy. Councillor Dolphin asked how many Local Authorities in England had established a similar Housing Company. The Head of Housing said she would provide this information to the Committee.

Officers responded to the comments and concerns raised by Members. The Head of Housing provided reassurance that the principle of the model was to ensure local services for local people. The Committee supported the need to establish the Housing Company and its intended purpose. It was suggested and agreed that quarterly updates on progress would be submitted to the Committee through the regular performance monitoring mechanism with additional reports if required.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the Committee supported the establishment of the proposed Housing Company;
- (b) That the comments made by the Committee be passed to Cabinet; and
- (c) That the Committee receives quarterly update reports following the establishment of the Housing Company, with additional reports if required.

40. COMMUNAL AREA MANAGEMENT AND FIRE SAFETY

The Chairman introduced and welcomed John Ennis and Mavis Crofts from the Tenants Federation.

The Neighbourhood Housing Manager introduced a report on the options available for the management of communal areas in relation to fire safety. She provided background information and advised that a draft Mobility Scooter Policy was appended to the report for Member's consideration as part of the Council's approach to the management of communal areas.

The Neighbourhood Housing Manager referred to the main considerations in the report and outlined the benefits and disadvantages of the three options to reduce and manage risk in the Authority's 53 blocks of dwellings which contained common parts.

The Cabinet Member for Housing spoke in support of a 'Sterile Approach' as recommended by the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service.

The Chairman invited comments from the representatives of the Tenants Federation. Mrs. Mavis Crofts advised that this issue was considered at the last meeting of the Tenants Federation and it had been agreed that the Federation would support the approach recommended by the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service.

The Capital Works Manager referred to the draft Mobility Scooter Policy which applied to all motorised wheelchairs and scooters. During discussion the Committee welcomed the policy which outlined the Authority's approach to the keeping of mobility scooters by its residents in and around its schemes.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee supported a 'Sterile Approach', as outlined within the report, to manage fire risk in communal areas.

41. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were two members of the public and one member of the press in attendance.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and ended at 11.55 am.

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Chairman