

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
4 NOVEMBER 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Wednesday, 4 November 2015

PRESENT: Councillor Ron Hampson (Chairman)

Councillors: Amanda Bragg, David Cox, Paul Cunningham, Ron Davies, Rosetta Dolphin, Alison Halford, Brian Lloyd, Mike Reece and Gareth Roberts

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors: Haydn Bateman (for George Hardcastle), Andy Dunbobbin (for Peter Curtis) and Paul Shotton (for Ian Dunbar)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Ray Hughes and Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor: Bernie Attridge

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance; Councillor Helen Brown, Cabinet Member for Housing; Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise); Service Manager for Council Housing; Service Manager for Enterprise & Regeneration and Housing Manager

IN ATTENDANCE: Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

43. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6: Framework for the implementation of Local Lettings Policies, as he was a Council tenant.

44. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2015 were submitted.

Accuracy

Minute number 41: Council House Allocations Service - Councillor Ron Davies said that it was he who had initially stated confidence in officers' approach to the case.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the amendment, the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

45. DELIVERY AND OUTCOMES OF RECENT REGENERATION PROGRAMMES

The Service Manager for Enterprise and Regeneration introduced an overview of the strategy for regeneration in Flintshire and a brief summary of the main regeneration programmes and projects delivered in Flintshire since 2010. The report set out the current and anticipated changes to the main regeneration programmes and the future direction of travel for regeneration activity.

The Service Manager provided explanation on the programmes of work focussing mainly on the priority to strengthen the rural economy through encouraging diversification and revitalising towns by developing them as successful local centres. In recognising the continuing pressures on smaller town centres across the UK, the report included progress on the main strands of activity within the Flintshire Town Action Plan. An update on changes to the different funding streams was also included.

Councillor Paul Shotton welcomed various programmes of work including the energy efficiency improvements to Council homes (which had been recognised at ministerial level), the work experience programme and successful outcomes from the Jobs Fair and Dragon's Den. He also welcomed ministerial discussions on the potential link between the Mersey Dee Alliance and the Northern Powerhouse. The Chief Officer reassured Members that every opportunity was taken to explore additional funding sources. She spoke about forthcoming changes to funding for solar PV schemes, the focus on bungalows where gains from the schemes could be maximised and the decline of a number of high value energy schemes.

In the absence of the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Councillor Aaron Shotton welcomed the update report. He reported on recently published statistics for the percentage of 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training where Flintshire was the best overall in Wales at 1.3% in comparison to the Welsh average of 9.1% and UK average of 8.3%. He said that this was due to a number of factors including Communities First activities and Flintshire's selection as a pilot area for the LIFT programme which helped to support unemployed people into employment or learning.

Following comments from Councillor Ron Davies on the environmental improvement scheme on Shotton High Street, the Service Manager provided clarification on the work which was shortly due to take place, with notification of the start date to be given to the Town Council and Local Members.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin requested information on the areas applicable to Communities First funding, details of the more deprived areas of the county and further detail on the Communities 4 Work programme. The Service Manager agreed to provide an update at a future meeting.

The Chairman and Councillor Mike Reece commented on the need for other areas of the county to benefit from external funding schemes. The Chief Officer advised that once the anticipated next programme of Vibrant and Viable Places (VVP) funding had been confirmed, all options would be considered based on the priorities for schemes, and proposals would be brought forward. However it was noted that although Flintshire had been successful in the last

application, the allocation had been impacted by a change in criteria partway through the process.

Councillor Aaron Shotton stressed the reliance on meeting the criteria for external grant funding schemes and spoke about the importance of getting the balance right. He pointed out the availability of funding for Communities First schemes for cluster areas and said that the Council had been successful in securing Rural Development Programme funding of £744K to carry out improvements in Mold, Holywell, Talacre and Gronant.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee is reassured that the Council is maximising opportunities for regeneration in Flintshire and notes the outcomes of recent programmes and is supportive of the future priorities identified in the report.

46. GROWING THE LOCAL ECONOMY

The Service Manager for Enterprise and Regeneration presented the report which set out key areas of work to maintain the economic success of Flintshire which also served to benefit the North Wales and North West England sub-regions.

The background to the report detailed the significant and ongoing investment and high quality job growth in key sectors within the county, particularly in manufacturing which equated to 31.2% of the workforce. An update was given on job creation on the Deeside Enterprise Zone, which was a Welsh Government (WG) programme, with the development of the Northern Gateway site aiming to add to this. A ministerial announcement was awaited on the next stage for the proposed Deeside Advanced Manufacturing Centre.

The Chief Officer spoke about Flintshire's role in regional and sub-regional partnerships and the benefits from potential involvement in the Cheshire and Warrington LEP growth bid if this proved successful. She went on to refer to discussions with Manchester City Council on supporting the growth of the Northern Powerhouse and the need to maximise what Flintshire had to offer over the longer term with links to job creation.

Councillor Aaron Shotton referred to the high level of complex activities and negotiations which he felt deserved a greater understanding and the potential contributions by Flintshire to the economic sub-region of North West England which was of significant scale. He went on to speak about positive relationships with Cheshire West and Wirral Councils through the work of the Mersey Dee Alliance and the need for rail electrification in North Wales which would encourage economic growth across the sub-regions. In relation to the rollout by WG of superfast broadband, Councillor Shotton highlighted concerns raised about connectivity in areas such as the Deeside Industrial Park. He advised that the newly appointed Director of BT Cymru Wales, Alwen Williams, had offered to deliver a presentation to the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee and suggested that this could also benefit this Committee.

Councillor Paul Shotton welcomed the flood alleviation work on the Dee banks but remained concerned about the pace of progress from WG. He highlighted the importance of involvement by the education sector in recognising skills required and asked what was being done to address this. The Chief Officer referred to linking the skills plan of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board with that of the Mersey Dee Alliance and said that a more detailed report on skills needed to support the growth bid and Northern Powerhouse could be shared early in the New Year. In response to comments on European funding sought to improve the A55, she provided clarification on successful bids to improve two roundabouts which would help to improve the road infrastructure.

Whilst Councillor Alison Halford welcomed the findings of the report, she emphasised the need for a viable infrastructure to be in place and effective broadband facilities to cope with the vision for growth. The Chief Officer spoke about the aim to improve various elements of the infrastructure but felt that any uncertainty around this should not prevent ambition. In terms of broadband, she clarified that the Superfast programme was generally aimed at homes and small businesses whereas the more costly 'Ultrafast' broadband, already available in Deeside, would benefit larger businesses. In response to concerns about the lack of progress on proposed red/blue routes along the A494, she advised that work was currently underway to look at this.

Councillor Aaron Shotton shared some frustrations about the pace of progress, particularly on land ownership of the Northern Gateway site, but said that the Council would provide support where possible. He referred to the absence of Council Member representation on the Deeside Enterprise Zone Board and said it was important to recognise the responsibilities of WG and to gain the support of the wider network in lobbying WG for improvements to North Wales.

In response, Councillor Halford called for more action by WG to develop Flintshire and to shift the focus on improvements to North Wales as opposed to South Wales. Councillor Gareth Roberts also spoke in support of this and the potential for improvements to the A548 which would boost local industries.

RESOLVED:

That the ongoing activity to sustain a vibrant and strong economy in Flintshire be supported and recognised.

47. FRAMEWORK FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LOCAL LETTINGS POLICIES

The Service Manager for Council Housing detailed changes to the recommendations in the report prior to its submission to Cabinet for approval.

The Committee was introduced to Jacqueline Perry, the Housing Manager, who presented an overview of the framework for the implementation of local lettings policies by setting out the approach and procedure that could be adopted by the Council to respond to and address local housing issues. She detailed the key points of the report, explaining that if introduced, local letting policies would

apply to specific geographical areas for a percentage of the lettings and would fit within legal requirements.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin commented that the consultation process with local Members could raise issues between wards. The Chief Officer explained that the intention was to introduce more flexibility and allow discretion on the allocation of properties, particularly for new housing developments to help create sustainable communities. Whilst the current Allocations Policy was entirely needs-based, the proposed approach would strike a balance in meeting the needs of individuals who could make a contribution to their communities. Use of local lettings policies in other areas had demonstrated positive outcomes and if approved in Flintshire, would be reviewed annually.

Councillor Aaron Shotton explained that this was not a new initiative and was regarded as a useful tool which was available to Councils within the legislation. He said that if approved by Cabinet, the Council would need to consider options for implementation and he gave examples where other Authorities had used local lettings policies to positive effect.

The proposals were supported by Councillor Paul Shotton who particularly welcomed the objective to improve aspects of community safety. Councillor Andy Dunbobbin also spoke in support, particularly in providing a solution for overcrowded households.

Councillor Alison Halford sought clarification on the wording in paragraph 1.13 of the report. The Chief Officer explained that the report was seeking views on the principle of implementing local lettings policies, to be determined on a case by case basis, with consultation undertaken in line with the agreed framework. The views of the Committee would be shared with Cabinet when seeking approval to the proposals. When asked for further clarity, officers said that the process was a tool to complement the current Allocations Policy and would be applied to all new build Council house developments, with consideration also given to some existing stock, based on the evidence gathered and consultation process.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the proposed framework for the implementation of local lettings policies be supported; and
- (b) That, subject to approval by Cabinet, an annual report is produced for the Committee to monitor and review the overall effectiveness and outcomes of any local lettings policies that have been implemented. The annual report would be presented to the Committee 12 months after the implementation of the first local lettings policy.

48. ALTERNATIVE SITES FOR THE EXTRA CARE FACILITY IN HOLYWELL

The Chief Officer reported that there were a number of sites to be evaluated as alternative options to the original site. She agreed to update the Committee when a preferred site had been identified.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

49. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Facilitator introduced the current Forward Work Programme for consideration by the Committee. She advised that the update on the Strategic Housing and Regeneration Programme (SHARP) had been deferred from this meeting to the next meeting on 9 December 2015.

Agreement was sought to the suggestion for a separate meeting of the Committee on 15 January 2016 to consult on the Community & Enterprise budget including the Housing Revenue Account draft budget and rent increase. This would enable the meeting on 12 January 2016 to concentrate on the Supporting People Local Commissioning Plan and Council Tax and Business Rate Statutory Policies. The Committee supported these changes.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the changes, the Forward Work Programme be noted.

50. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press and one member of the public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.50 am)

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Chairman