

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 DECEMBER 2017

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, 20 December 2017

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

Councillors: David Cox, Jean Davies, Adele Davies-Cooke, Rosetta Dolphin, Mared Eastwood, Ted Palmer, Mike Reece, Paul Shotton and David Wisinger

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors: Rob Davies (for Sian Braun), Dave Hughes (for Ron Davies) and Rita Johnson (for Ray Hughes)

APOLOGY: Councillor George Hardcastle

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Bernie Attridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing; Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise); and Service Manager, Housing Programmes

Housing Asset Manager and Senior Sheltered Housing Officer (for minute number 38)

Gypsy & Traveller Liaison Officer (for minute number 39)

IN ATTENDANCE: Community & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officer

35. INFORMATION SESSION

Prior to the start of the meeting, Members of the Committee were given a presentation on the Housing Revenue Account by Steve Agger and Sian Jones.

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

37. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 16 October and 15 November 2017 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

That both sets of minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

38. SHELTERED ACCOMMODATION REVIEW

The Housing Asset Manager presented a report on the outcome of the review of sheltered accommodation across the county, comprising a total of 2,637 properties.

The review was undertaken as there was a perception that the Council had a challenge in letting sheltered accommodation and that vacancy rates were a concern.

Amongst the findings, it was noted that empty property rent loss was not an issue and was broadly in line with general needs housing. Many sheltered housing schemes were in high demand, and the main reasons for ending tenancies were because of death or tenants moving to residential care facilities. Bedsitters were less popular and some schemes in rural areas could be more difficult to let. Finally there were a small number of schemes where access could be a challenge for those with mobility issues. These could be addressed through scheme investment plans.

On occasion, sheltered housing was let to applicants with support needs and physical disabilities who were under the age designation for sheltered housing as it was the most appropriate accommodation available to meet their needs. Changing the descriptor of sheltered housing to 'sheltered and supported' accommodation would accurately reflect this practice.

Councillor Shotton spoke in support of the recommendations and commended the refurbishment of the Glan-y-Morfa scheme in Connah's Quay.

The Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise) said that the report demonstrated high demand for accommodation as well as options for improvement, for example, to address accessibility issues and increase take-up of bedsits and properties in remote areas.

Councillor Attridge spoke about options to encourage tenancies in bedsits and the potential for some accommodation to be re-classified to meet demand of other customer groups.

Councillor Johnson asked if it was possible for elderly residents awaiting wet room installations to be given access to alternative bathing facilities. The Chief Officer said that cases should be referred to officers and was aware of arrangements with some extra care schemes. She advised that Council tenants were able to apply for an Occupational Health assessment to see if they qualified for a Disabled Facilities Grant.

As identified in the report, Councillor Dolphin referred to the lack of local facilities for those living in sheltered accommodation in more remote areas. She also stressed the need for properties adapted to a high-standard for disabled tenants to be retained for that purpose. On issues arising from problem tenants, Councillor Attridge spoke about the approach to tackling this and the aim to achieve the right mix of individuals with different needs within a scheme.

In response to comments from Councillor Shotton, the Chief Officer was aware of ideas being worked up to establish the potential for a mobile shopping service to remote communities and would seek an update.

Councillor Cox spoke about positive engagement by elected Members in helping residents to deal with issues such as loneliness. The Chief Officer said that the contribution of wardens was important in encouraging tenants to involve themselves in their local communities.

Councillor Hughes asked about the percentage of accommodation refused on the basis of lack of local transport services. The Senior Sheltered Housing Officer advised that the main reason for refusal was accommodation type. Councillor Attridge suggested that the Committee receive feedback on actions arising from the review after a 12 month period. The Chief Officer agreed that this would involve a detailed analysis of the waiting list and reasons for refusal.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the outcomes of the review and next steps, and supports the principle of sheltered accommodation being known as 'sheltered and supported accommodation' to reflect the customer group it serves.

39. PROVISION FOR GYPSY & TRAVELLER TRANSIT SITES AND THE RIVERSIDE MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT

The Gypsy & Traveller Liaison Officer presented a report to seek support for a costed options appraisal to be undertaken for the development of a 6 pitch transit site in Flintshire, and for an update of the management agreement for the Council's only existing permanent site at Riverside Park.

The report highlighted the statutory duties placed upon councils in respect of gypsies and travellers, and the benefits in providing a transit site for temporary use by gypsies and travellers passing through the area.

The refresh of the management agreement for the permanent site at Riverside was necessary to meet changes in legal requirements following which an application could be made for grant funding from Welsh Government to refurbish the site.

On a question from the Chairman, the Officer explained that the Council had no responsibility for unauthorised encampments on privately owned land but that cases brought to attention were recorded.

Councillor Dolphin referred to a particular example in her ward involving a long-term unauthorised encampment. Councillor Attridge asked that any specific issues be raised with officers outside the meeting so that information could be treated confidentially. Whilst he understood the concerns, he explained that significant progress had been made to the process to deal with issues more efficiently. The Chief Officer gave a reminder of the Council's responsibility to assess the circumstances of each case to reach an appropriate decision.

Councillor Attridge advised that concerns about security arrangements at Greenfield Dock should be passed to colleagues in Countryside Services. During discussion on the location of the proposed transit site, it was explained that options for Council owned land were initially being explored before looking at private land availability. Members were encouraged to pass suggested locations to officers and Councillor Reece put forward information on behalf of a private landowner.

The officer provided clarification to Councillor Shotton on the grant funding and advised that this was subject to planning permission granted on the land identified.

Councillor Johnson asked about the approach to charges for the transit site. It was explained that learning would be taken from similar examples across the UK, although this would be the first transit site in Wales.

Councillor Wisinger pointed out that despite initial concerns about Riverside Park, there had been no significant issues. In response to queries, Councillor Attridge said there were no plans to extend the site.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee supports:

- (a) A costed options appraisal to be undertaken for the development of a 6 pitch transit site in Flintshire;
- (b) The review and implementation of new management arrangements at Riverside; and
- (c) A capital funding application to be made in the Summer of 2018 to Welsh Government to refurbish the Local Authority site at Riverside.

40. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In presenting the current Forward Work Programme for consideration, the Facilitator advised that an additional item on the outcomes of the Audit report on the management of the housing register and allocations would be submitted to the next meeting in January 2018. No further changes to the Forward Work Programme were made.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be amended; and
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

41. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 10am and ended at 11.10pm)

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Chairman