

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
19 DECEMBER 2018

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, 19 December 2018

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

Councillors: Ron Davies, Adele Davies-Cooke, Rosetta Dolphin, Mared Eastwood, George Hardcastle, Dennis Hutchinson, Ted Palmer, Mike Reece, Paul Shotton and David Wisinger

APOLOGIES: Councillors: David Cox and Jean Davies

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Patrick Heesom attended as an observer

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Bernie Attridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing; Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development; Chief Officer (Housing and Assets); Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy); Service Manager - Enterprise and Regeneration; Customer Support Manager; Housing Strategy Manager; and Benefits Manager

Delivery Manager, Communities for Work & Communities for Work Plus (for minute number 37)

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

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

35. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 30 October and 7 November 2018 were submitted. On the minutes of 30 October, an amendment was noted in the first paragraph.

Councillor Hutchinson asked that his apologies be recorded on both sets of minutes.

RESOLVED:

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

36. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

The Chairman announced that Katie Clubb would be leaving the Council to take up a new job. In wishing her well, Members expressed their gratitude to Katie for her dedication and hard work during her time at Flintshire.

37. COMMUNITIES FOR WORK

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) introduced a report to provide information on the Enterprise and Regeneration service and to update Members on the delivery of the Welsh Government (WG) employability programmes in Flintshire.

In response to a previous request, the Service Manager - Enterprise and Regeneration circulated a briefing note and gave an overview of the roles and current activities within each service area following a recent restructure. A diagram of the new structure indicated that the majority of teams were externally funded. A number of positive outcomes were reported such as support given by the Social Enterprise team to a social business recognised at the recent Flintshire Business Awards along with the Regional Economy team's success in securing £9m of funding for digital connectivity. A report on work by the Programme Development function on an approach to delivering social value through procurement activity would be scheduled for the Committee's meeting in March.

In welcoming the information, Councillor Dolphin raised concerns about the length of time taken to fill the vacant post to support town centre regeneration. The Service Manager explained that resources had decreased over time along with external funding support. The needs of town centres were changing in response to economic challenges nationwide, and officers would need to consider a new strategic approach to target resources effectively. A full report on town centres would be received in March/April.

These concerns were shared by Councillor Hutchinson who said that the impact was evident across all town centres, where smaller shops were at most risk.

Whilst giving assurance that the Council's limited resources would be used in the most effective way, the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) said that the main challenge to high streets was the significant shift in the retail market across the UK over which the Local Authority had little influence.

This view was shared by Councillor Butler who pointed out that the offer in each town centre was different. He said that everyone had a duty to support their local shops and that the Council was doing everything in its power to increase footfall such as encouraging landlords to make available empty accommodation above shops.

Councillor Shotton referred to the impact of internet shopping and asked about WG business rate relief. The Service Manager explained that this funding was automatically given to eligible businesses. On tourism, he said that a programme of work was underway to improve visitor infrastructure in coastal areas.

Other Members acknowledged town centre regeneration as a widespread issue which also presented problems for Town Centre Managers.

Sharon Jones, the Delivery Manager of Communities for Work and Communities for Work Plus, was in attendance to give a presentation on the employability programmes in Flintshire to support participants into employment and self-employment. The Committee was shown a short video which illustrated the support given to apprentices participating in the Wates Construction 'Building Futures' project.

The Communities for Work programme was restricted to eligible postcode areas and offered intensive mentoring support for people who had been unemployed for a long time to help them return to work or further education. For those who did not qualify, Communities for Work Plus offered a range of wraparound support to anyone in Flintshire who needed help returning to employment. The Legacy Fund, which sat under the Enterprise and Regeneration Service, focussed on supporting the Business Entrepreneurship Network and social enterprise sector.

During the presentation, explanation was given on the range of pathway projects which aimed at equipping individuals with relevant skills and experience to enter the labour market. The presentation also highlighted success stories and previous participants of the programme who were now acting as mentors. Performance in 2018/19 was on track including some areas already exceeding targets.

Councillor Butler gave a reminder that all three programmes were reliant on grant funding from WG and he commended the dedication and enthusiasm of the team in achieving excellent outcomes.

The Delivery Manager advised that the Communities for Work programme was funded until 2020 and that verbal confirmation had been received on the continuation of funding for the Communities for Work Plus programme until 2020. However, it was unlikely that grant funding for the Legacy Fund would continue beyond 2020.

In response to a query, information was shared on the programme of pathway projects to support the care sector by working with specific providers and the Health Board. It was explained that projects were targeted at areas of need or at the request of a business.

Councillor Dolphin asked that parts of the presentation not included in the report be emailed to Members (eg tailored pathway projects to link with forthcoming job vacancies).

During the debate, Members praised both Managers and their teams for their achievements on the three programmes.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee supports the progress made in delivering the employment programmes.

38. REGIONAL HOMELESS STRATEGY AND LOCAL ACTION PLAN

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) introduced an update report on the development of a regional strategy which was a statutory requirement. He spoke about the benefits of a regional partnership which aimed to create a culture of improved and effective collaboration to address specific root causes of homelessness. Reference was made to the Council's proactive approach in tackling youth homelessness including preventative work at an early stage in partnership with Education.

The Customer Support Manager explained that the initial review had helped to verify existing data to feed into the local action plan. This was based on the three agreed themes of the regional strategy - People, Homes and Services - but also reflected local priorities. A summary of priorities under each theme was set out in the report, involving working with other Council services. It was suggested that an update on progress against the local action plan be scheduled in the New Year.

Councillor Attridge acknowledged the strength of a regional approach and gave assurance that local priorities were also reflected in the action plan.

The Customer Support Manager agreed to speak with Councillor Palmer outside the meeting regarding an issue in his ward. As requested by Councillor Hardcastle, she agreed to circulate details of the number of homeless individuals currently placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

Councillor Butler spoke about the need for intervention by the UK and Welsh Governments to help bring empty accommodation above town centre shops back into use.

During discussion, Members spoke in support of the Council's approach to addressing rough sleeping in the County. The impact of Government policy on renting properties and direct payments was also highlighted.

As Flintshire's representative on the regional strategy, the Housing Strategy Manager said that the approach also provided positive opportunities for sharing best practice and learning.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee supports the North Wales Regional Homelessness Strategy and high level action plan; and
- (b) That the Committee supports the priority actions highlighted within the Flintshire Homelessness local action plan, as detailed within the report.

39. COUNCIL PLAN 2018/19 - MID-YEAR MONITORING

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) presented the mid-year progress report on performance against the Council Plan 2018/19 focussing on areas of under-performance under the priorities 'Supportive Council' and 'Ambitious Council' which were relevant to the Committee.

Overall positive progress was reported with 81% of activities likely to achieve their planned outcomes and 79% of performance indicators meeting or exceeding their targets during the period. Risks were also being successfully managed with the majority assessed as either moderate or minor.

Under the Supportive Council priority, there was a red performance indicator was on the number of days to process change of circumstances for housing benefit. The Benefits Manager said that changes in Universal Credit were a significant challenge for the team. She advised that some long-term employee absences had been resolved and that Modern Trainees were being encouraged to fill a number of temporary vacant posts. On the red indicator for the amount of additional income paid to Flintshire residents as a result of work undertaken by the Council, she explained that late figures provided by external partners would improve the outturn for the next report.

The only major risk area was on the potential for increased debt levels if tenants were unable to afford to pay their rent or Council Tax, on which a detailed report was received at the last meeting.

Members expressed their disappointment at the response of the Department of Work & Pensions to concerns on proposed changes to grant funding arrangements.

Following comments by Councillor Reece on identifying suitable land for future housing developments, Councillor Attridge reported that work on the former Canton Depot site would be progressed in the New Year.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

40. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In considering the current Forward Work Programme, the Committee agreed that the following would be scheduled for the New Year:

- Report on current borrowing conditions and interest rates, as requested at the recent County Council meeting.
- Report on town centres.
- Homelessness Local Action Plan Update.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted; 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 public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10am and ended at 11.40am)

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Chairman