

COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
10 NOVEMBER 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Community, Housing & Assets Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held remotely on Wednesday, 10 November 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

Councillors: Helen Brown, Geoff Collett, Ron Davies, Adele Davies-Cooke, Mared Eastwood, Veronica Gay, Ray Hughes, Brian Lloyd and Kevin Rush

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors: Rob Davies (for Dennis Hutchinson) and David Wisinger (for David Cox)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Patrick Heesom attended as an observer

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Christine Jones (Deputy Leader - Partnerships - and Cabinet Member for Social Services), Councillor Billy Mullin (Deputy Leader - Governance - and Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets), Councillor Dave Hughes (Cabinet Member for Housing), Chief Executive, Benefits Manager, Housing Programmes Development Manager and Service Manager (Housing Assets)

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

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

22. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2021 were approved subject to an amendment on the list of observers. On that basis, they were moved and seconded by Councillors David Wisinger and Kevin Rush.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the change, the minutes be approved as a correct record.

23. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the latest Forward Work Programme for consideration. On the action tracking report, the presentation shared at the October meeting would be re-circulated to Members.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Ron Davies and David Wisinger.

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 progress made in completing the outstanding actions be noted.

24. HOUSING STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

The Chief Executive introduced the annual update report to review progress on actions within the three priority areas of the Local Housing Strategy 2019-24 setting out how the Council, with its partners, would deliver affordable housing, provide relevant support to its residents and ensure the creation of sustainable homes.

The Housing Programmes Development Manager reported that good progress had been made despite the impact of challenges arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. He summarised the key points in terms of changes introduced by Welsh Government, the new framework for accessing social housing grants and the development of a prospectus on local housing needs. The Action Plan included plans to increase extra care provision across the County by developing a facility in Buckley and to increase support to tackle homelessness which had increased nationwide during the emergency situation.

In response to a question from Councillor Veronica Gay on residents with rent arrears, the Chief Executive acknowledged the various factors involved and said that support was available for those who were willing to engage with the Council to reduce their arrears.

Councillor Ray Hughes asked about building timber-framed properties to increase affordable housing supply. The Chief Executive advised that modern methods of construction were used on some of the Council's housing schemes and that there was a need to develop the market and the skills involved. He noted Councillor Hughes' request for a site visit to view an example of this type of housing scheme.

In response to questions from the Chairman, officers spoke about work on a specific local housing scheme which formed part of a national pilot project. Information was also shared on apprenticeship opportunities included within the procurement framework for housing schemes.

The recommendation, which was amended to reflect the debate, was moved and seconded by Councillors Ron Davies and Ray Hughes.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee supports the progress made in meeting the priorities set out in the Local Housing Strategy 2019-24.

25. VOID PROPERTIES WITHIN THE HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

The Service Manager (Housing Assets) presented the update report in relation to void properties managed by the Housing and Assets Service.

In detailing the key areas of the report, he provided background on the various reasons for properties becoming vacant, the impact from the pandemic and the importance of effectively managing voids. Information was also shared on changes introduced within the Housing service and voids performance over the past five years.

The Benefits Manager provided information on the reasons for tenancy terminations and the work undertaken on this. She also explained the approach to managing properties that were difficult to let and the benefits of the team restructuring in managing all aspects of neighbourhood issues.

In response to a query on anti-social behaviour from Councillor Brian Lloyd, officers said that the enforcement team continued to work with the Police to tackle such issues and that residents were encouraged to report incidents at an early stage to support evidence gathering.

In raising concerns about rent loss associated with void properties, Councillor Kevin Rush suggested an additional category between 'routine' and 'major' voids to improve turnaround of properties.

The Service Manager (Housing Assets) said that 20 days was the target for routine void works to be completed and that all voids were inspected and works ordered; if only minor works were required then the void may only take 5 days or less to hand over to housing management. This target mainly applied to the in-house voids team and as could be seen from the report, this target was being met. He assured Members of the commitment to bring properties up to the required standard whilst prioritising safety and compliance with regulations. He also explained that use of Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) would provide clear information to identify any performance issues.

As requested by Councillor Adele Davies-Cooke, information was shared on the assistance and guidance given to new tenants to help them to manage their properties.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Kevin Rush and Geoff Collett.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the update in relation to voids managed by the Housing and Assets Service.

26. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2pm and ended at 3.15pm)

.....
Chairman