

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
15 JANUARY 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 Monday, 15 January 2018

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

Councillors: David Cox, Jean Davies, Ron Davies, Rosetta Dolphin, Mared Eastwood, George Hardcastle, Ray Hughes, Ted Palmer, Mike Reece, Paul Shotton and David Wisinger

APOLOGIES: Councillors Sian Braun and Adele Davies-Cooke, and Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Patrick Heesom and Christine Jones attended as observers

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Bernie Attridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing; Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise); Housing Asset Manager; Accountant and Senior Sheltered Housing Officer

Chief Executive (for minute number 45)

Service Manager, Customer Support (for minute number 46)

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

42. OPENING COMMENTS

As suggested by Councillor Hardcastle, it was agreed that the Committee would send a card and flowers to the wife of the late Councillor Hampson following the sad loss of their son.

43. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Ted Palmer declared a personal interest on Agenda Item 4 'Housing Revenue Account 2018-19' as he was a Council tenant.

44. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 15 November and 20 December 2017 were submitted.

Matters Arising

It was noted that the minutes of 15 November 2017 had already been approved at the previous meeting. The Chief Officer agreed to discuss a matter raised by Councillor Hardcastle outside the meeting.

On minute number 38, the Chief Officer would seek an update on the mobile shopping service and respond to the Committee.

On minute number 39, Councillor Reece referred to the contact details of a private landowner which he had passed to officers and was told this would be followed up.

RESOLVED:

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

45. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) 2018-19

The Committee received a report to consider the draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for 2018/19 and the HRA 30 year Business Plan.

The Housing Asset Manager and Accountant gave a presentation covering the following:

- 2017/18 Achievements
 - Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS)
 - Council house delivery
- 30 year business plan
- 2018/19 budget
 - Income
 - Efficiencies
 - WHQS programme
- HRA future activity

As part of the presentation, photographs were shown which demonstrated the achievements on internal works, envelope and environmental works within the WHQS programme.

Councillor Shotton welcomed progress on WHQS and commended the Council's prompt response in reassuring tenants of the county's three high-rise flats, following the incident at Grenfell Tower. The buildings in Flint were three of only seven in Wales where internal sprinkler systems were already installed and the Council's safety inspection regimes had met standards of the North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority.

Councillor Dolphin spoke about the need to incorporate adequate parking in new developments to meet the needs of residents with more than one vehicle. Officers explained that as part of the environmental programme, sites such as unused garage plots were being identified to convert to parking spaces. In response to further questions, wet room installations mainly applied to sheltered accommodation however there was flexibility built into the programme to make provision for future adaptations to support lifetime tenancies. The Housing Asset Manager agreed to inform local Members of 'walkabout' assessments in their wards to enable them to participate, should they wish.

During discussion on rents, Councillor Dolphin said it was important for tenants to be made aware of payment options. It was explained that target rents applied to 17% of the Council's tenants and that the proposal by the Cabinet Member and Leader of the Council to limit the rent increase to that of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) was due to concerns about affordability in the current climate. The Council would not incur any sanctions on implementing a lower increase than that recommended by Government rent policy.

Members were advised that the requested programme of planned works for each ward would now be progressed by Sean O'Donnell, following the recent departure of the Capital Works Team Manager.

Councillor Hardcastle praised the improvements in the Housing service over recent years. In response to queries, officers explained the approach to revisiting properties where work was incomplete due to tenant refusals or no access. On service charges for laundry services, officers would engage with tenants in accommodation with low demand for services to determine the right outcome. The Accountant agreed to respond separately to provide the number of tenants taken to court for non-payment of rent.

Following questions by Councillor Palmer, the Housing Asset Manager explained that WHQS works were informed by the stock condition surveys which would be revisited towards the end of the programme. Councillor Palmer thanked officers for their help in tackling local anti-social behaviour issues.

On additional parking provision, Councillor Wisinger asked about the number of garage sites where rent was payable and referred to a number of garage sites in his ward that appeared to no longer be in use. He said that some grassed areas could also be converted to parking spaces, thus saving on grass-cutting. Officers explained that a report on the environmental programme, including a review of garage sites, would be shared around May 2018. Decisions on options for those sites were subject to consultation with the Cabinet Member and availability of funding.

Councillor Cox raised concerns about the impact of long-term empty privately owned houses and was advised to contact Jenny Prendergast in the Environmental Health team.

Councillor Hughes said that insufficient off-road parking provision in his ward had led to traffic problems from vehicles parked on main roads. Councillor Attridge said that some tenants had taken the decision to create off-road provision themselves. He suggested that any concerns about specific areas be raised with officers to consider as part of the planning process.

The Chairman and Chief Executive suggested slight changes to the wording of the first and second recommendations to better reflect the Committee's support. On being put the vote, these were accepted.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That having considered the report, the Committee supports the HRA budget for 2018/19 and Business Plan as set out in the appendices;
- (b) That the Committee supports the recommendations of the Cabinet Member and Council Leader on setting a rent increase of 3% (plus up to or minus £2), with target rents applied for new tenancies, as a more affordable increase than the Welsh Government Rent Policy formula which would set an increase of 4.5% (plus up to or minus £2);
- (c) That the Committee supports a garage rent increase of £1 per week and a garage plot rent increase of £0.20 per week; and
- (d) That the Committee supports the proposed HRA Capital Programme for 2018/19 as set out in Appendix D.

46. SINGLE ACCESS ROUTE TO HOUSING (SARTH) AUDIT REPORT

The Service Manager, Customer Support introduced a report on the outcome of an audit report on the management of the housing register and allocation of council property arising from the introduction of the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH).

Internal Audit had identified 13 actions of which nine had been fully implemented and two were linked to regional policy - due to be implemented by June 2018. The report gave detailed explanations on progress with the two actions currently being progressed in respect of the completion of periodic reviews within timescales and cancellation of appointments due to non-receipt of evidence. It was hoped that the actions would provide reassurance to Members on improved ways of working to make better use of limited resources and comply with the recommendations.

Following a question from the Chairman, it was explained that properties were generally allocated in date order according to bandings. There were a small number of reasons why applicants could be bypassed such as property type, accessibility issues or where a sensitive letting was required. The Chief Officer explained that a range of ICT developments were highlighted in the report to support automated working.

Councillor Dolphin referred to the action on timescales for cancelling applications and was told that the green (low) level of risk had been determined by Internal Audit as it was not possible to allocate a property without the necessary evidence.

The Chairman proposed a slight amendment to the resolution which was accepted.

RESOLVED:

That having reviewed the report, the Committee is reassured that all high risk actions have been fully implemented and that all remaining actions are either also complete or currently in progress.

47. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In presenting the current Forward Work Programme for consideration, the Facilitator advised that the item on the review of garage sites (discussed earlier in the meeting) would be scheduled for May. No further changes 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.

48. CLOSING REMARKS

The Chairman read out a statement in which he commended the Chief Officer and her team for their success in securing £2.7m from the Warm Homes fund to install central heating systems and energy efficiency measures in properties in Flintshire. The Chief Officer said that colleagues from the Planning and Environment portfolio had been involved in working on the bid.

49. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2pm and ended at 3.50pm)

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Chairman