

COMMUNITY & ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
18 SEPTEMBER 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Community & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Wednesday 18 September 2019

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

Councillors: Helen Brown, David Cox, Jean S Davies, Ron Davies, Rosetta Dolphin, Ray Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Brian Lloyd, Ted Palmer, Paul Shotton and Dave Wisinger

APOLOGY: Councillor Derek Butler

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

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Dave Hughes, Cabinet Member for Housing; Chief Officer (Housing and Assets); Benefits Manager and Service Manager – Housing Programmes

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

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were received.

11. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2019 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

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

12. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme, together with an update on actions arising from previous meetings, all of which were now completed. She advised that the half hour training session on safeguarding had been held prior to the meeting and therefore would be removed from the Forward Work Programme.

Councillor Ted Palmer asked if a report on Tenants Right to Succession could be provided at a future meeting in order to review the current policy.

Councillors Hutchinson and Dolphin raised concerns over the allocations of properties and the allocations at sheltered accommodation. The Facilitator advised that at a previous meeting it had been agreed that a report on Tenancy and anti-social behaviour would be submitted to a future meeting

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted;
- (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; and
- (c) That the Committee notes the progress made in completing the outstanding actions.

5 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT POLICY

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) introduced the revised policy with regards to the Disabled Facilities Grants. The Benefits Manager went on to discuss how they were making the policy clearer and that following on from an Audit Report that the process with regards to adaptations to homes had been much improved. The Benefit Manager commented that the feasibility checks were now up front and that items such as Stair lifts no longer need to go through the DFG process.

The Chairman commented on previous concerns which had been raised by residents on the length of time taken waiting for different contractors to complete different stages of the process. He asked whether this had been addressed. The Benefits Manager advised that the current framework agreement with Contractors was due to be reviewed in early 2020. As part of the reviewed Policy, residents would have a designated contact officer within the Council who would be in regular contact with Contractors in order to ensure project were completed within the timeframe.

Councillor Helen Brown commented on the number of days taken to complete a disabled adaptation and asked whether the 'stop the clock' system, where the time taken to complete the adaptation was stopped if issues outside of the Council's control arose, was still being implemented. The Benefits Manager advised that the 'stop the clock' system was being implemented, which brought more alignment with how other authorities recorded activity. This also assisted residents who felt the need to take a break from the work involved in undertaking a disabled adaptation in complex circumstances.

Councillors Paul Shotton and Rosetta Dolphin welcomed the report and the progress made with introducing a revised policy. Councillor Dolphin commented on the performance targets of completing disabled adaptations and asked when it was thought that performance would improve. The Chief Officer advised that the performance was improving and would continue to be monitored closely as part of the quarterly performance monitoring reports to the Committee. He commented that due to the complex nature of some disabled adaptations, and due to a number being held during the previous financial year due to funding there were a number of long standing DFG's in the system. These were being cleared but their performance overall pulled down current performance of all DFG's in the system. If they were set aside and timescales for those subject to the new policy measured, there would be a significantly more positive picture of timely achievement.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee support the revised Policy.

6. MODULAR BUILDING

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) introduced a report to provide an update on the progress made to date on the use of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) in Flintshire.

The Service Manager – Housing Programmes advised that a combination of acute housing demand and market failures in terms of cost, quantity and quality, were forcing industries to look at MMC as a solution. Detailed recommendations were put forward following the Independent Review of Affordable Housing Supply in Wales which have been accepted by Welsh Government (WG). WG have prepared a consultation document 'Re-imagining social house building in Wales, An Off-Site Manufacturing Strategy for Wales' and this strategy was aimed at social and affordable housing providers in Wales to encourage organisations to relook at the building of new social housing, and consider complimenting traditional construction methods, with new technologies and approaches to home building.

Councillor Dennis Hutchinson welcomed the report and commented on the high quality of the apartment complex at the former doctor's surgery in Buckley, which had recently been completed using off site construction methods. The Service Manager – Housing Programmes suggested that the Committee take part in a site visit to the complex in Buckley in order to see the different site construction methods. He also suggested that the Committee re-visit the site at St Andrews Church, Garden City, as the development of the apartments was near completion. The Committee supported the suggestion of the site visits.

Councillor Paul Shotton raised concerns around the shortage of trades across Wales and said that it showed the need to ensure an increase in apprenticeships. The Service Manager – Housing Programmes commented on the initiatives available as part of the Strategic Housing and Regeneration Programme (SHARP) and the work alongside Job Centre Plus and Coleg Cambria to offer work opportunities and training.

In response to questions around Berwyn Prisons, the Service Manager – Housing Programmes advised that early dialogue had recently begun around the principle of working with HMP Berwyn and a private sector sponsor to build timber frame buildings or pods for either existing project or for planner refurbishments. The project could support affordable housing being built by the men at Berwyn so giving them realistic prospects of future employment. Councillor Rosetta Dolphin commented on the need to ensure students were given the same opportunities and priority to access training.

Councillor Helen Brown asked if apprentices were given the opportunity to work on building developments in order to gain on-site experience. The Chief Officer confirmed that apprentices were given the opportunity to work on void properties in order to enhance their skills. He also said that the Council should be proud of its in-house apprentices, of plumbers, joiners, electricians and painters.

Following a suggestion from the Service Manager – Housing Programmes to share the SHARP report on Community Benefit with the Committee, the Chief Officer suggested that the Community Benefits being delivered as part of the SHARP programme be added to the Committee’s Forward Work Programme for consideration at a future meeting. The Committee supported this suggestion.

The Service Manager – Housing Programmes agreed to look into possible sites in Buckley and Holywell for future MMC development, as suggested by Councillors Hutchinson and Ted Palmer.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee support the approach being taken in exploring and testing out Modern Methods of Construction and Modular Building to complement existing house building programmes.

7 YEAR-END COUNCIL PLAN MONITORING REPORT 2018/19

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) introduced a report to present a summary of performance for the Year-end position of 2018/19 for the Council Plan priorities ‘Supportive Council’ and ‘Ambitious Council’ relevant to the Committee. The report was an exception based report and therefore focused on the areas of under-performance.

The Benefits Manager and Service Manager – Housing Programmes provided an update on the following performance indicators and which showed a red RAG status for current performance against target:

- The number of additional Council homes being built through the SHARP programme;
- Average number of calendar days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG); and
- debt levels will rise if tenants are unable to afford to pay their rent or council tax

The Chairman invited Councillor Patrick Heesom to ask a question, who was attending the meeting as an observer. Councillor Heesom referred to the performance indicator to address the increasing frequency of unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller encampments and improve the Council’s own permanent site and asked if an update on the grant to deliver this from Welsh Government (WG) could be provided. The Service Manager – Housing Programmes advised that an application for Capital Site Grant funding had been made to WG to improve the aesthetics of the Riverside site, and the Council had secured £250,000 capital funding for refurbishments. It was hoped that the work would be completed before the end of the financial year.

In response to concerns raised by Members around the volume of rubbish at the Riverside site, the Chief Officer advised that the funding would assist in refurbishing the site but also in managing the site in the future, which would now be the responsibility of the Council, as opposed to the previous and historic agency type arrangement.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

8 MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.36 am)

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Chairman