

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
27 JUNE 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, 27 June 2018

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

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

APOLOGIES: Councillor Dennis Hutchinson; and Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Aaron Shotton and Andy Dunbobbin attended as observers, together with Councillor Adrienne Jeorrett of Wrexham County Borough Council

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Bernie Attridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing; and Service Manager, Enterprise & Regeneration

Service Manager, Housing Programmes and Councillor Sean Bibby, Deputy Chair of North East Wales (NEW) Homes (for minute number 13)
Chief Executive and Senior Auditor (for minute number 15)

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

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

11. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 May 2018 were submitted.

Matters Arising

Minute number 64: Year-end Council Plan 2017/18 Monitoring Report - as requested by Councillor Hardcastle, the Facilitator confirmed that an update on rent arrears would be incorporated in the report on homelessness scheduled for July.

Minute number 65: Forward Work Programme - the Facilitator agreed to follow up the request for a briefing note on tenants' Service Level Agreements to share with the Committee.

RESOLVED:

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

12. VARIATION IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman indicated that there would be a slight change in the order of business to bring forward agenda item 6. The Service Manager, Housing Programmes, was due to leave the meeting early to travel to a national awards ceremony where the Council's Strategic Housing and Regeneration Programme (SHARP) had been nominated in the Best Social Housing Development category. The Chairman commended the achievements of the programme in the provision of high-quality housing.

13. NORTH EAST WALES (NEW) HOMES BUSINESS PLAN 2018/27

The Service Manager, Housing Programmes, introduced a report on the North East Wales (NEW) Homes Business Plan 2018/27 which had been approved by Cabinet in May. The report detailed progress on the Strategic Housing and Regeneration Programme (SHARP) and the process for approving new lending to NEW Homes for the development or purchase of affordable homes. The Business Plan - which was included as a confidential appendix on the agenda - detailed housing to be developed through the SHARP programme, Section 106 properties and potential properties acquired through borrowing against existing assets.

As Deputy Chair of NEW Homes, Councillor Sean Bibby provided an overview of the key points. He referred to the financial appraisal requirements and commented on positive working relationships between partners to facilitate the delivery of high-quality housing at affordable rents. An update was also given on the managed lettings service which contributed towards the Council's corporate objective on the provision of affordable housing in the private sector.

In response to a question from Councillor Dolphin, the Service Manager explained the approach to managed lettings and advised that no major repairs to properties had been required to date. He added that the practice of undertaking quarterly inspections helped to identify any issues at an early stage.

Councillor Attridge commented on the effectiveness of the high-intensity management programme by NEW Homes to deal with tenancy issues.

In welcoming the positive report, Councillor Hardcastle thanked the Service Manager and his team for their achievements.

Councillor Paul Shotton said it was pleasing to note the affordability of rent levels set by NEW Homes and that new regulations on letting fees could be of benefit.

Councillor Ron Davies praised the partnership with the appointed contractors, Wates, who were providing an excellent service.

Councillor Palmer asked if the Committee could be represented on the NEW Homes Board. The Service Manager explained the composition of the Board which included cross-party representation from five Members.

Councillor Attridge alluded to the former Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise) as a key driver in the establishment of the new company, along with the Service Manager and his team. He spoke about the prospect of future growth of the company.

RESOLVED:

That the NEW Homes Business Plan 2018/27 be noted.

14. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In presenting the current Forward Work Programme for consideration, the Facilitator referred to a special meeting in Flint on 17 July to consider the Food Poverty Strategy, details of which would be confirmed by email. She also advised that the meeting scheduled for 19 September would need to be moved to 26 September.

Councillor Dolphin requested an item on enforcement of rental agreements and checking of properties. Councillor Attridge advised that this could be covered in a report on housing management in general.

Councillor Hardcastle asked whether the practice of estate walkabouts could be reinstated - where local Members were invited to accompany officers carrying out checks on properties in their ward. Councillor Attridge said that this work was the responsibility of Housing Officers.

During discussion, Members spoke about their individual experiences of reporting housing issues.

Following comments by Councillor Ron Davies, Councillor Attridge said that the issue of discarded supermarket trolleys had been raised at the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee. He agreed that a copy of the briefing note would be shared after the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme, as amended, be approved; 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.

15. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2017

The Senior Auditor presented the report summarising the findings of the 2017 Internal Audit report into the operation of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) scheme and the management responses being put in place to address these findings.

She explained that the scope of the audit covered the administration of the scheme from the tender stage through to completion of work, asking Members to note that the service had been through period of transition. The areas highlighted for improvement were detailed in the report, along with the management control action plan which had been developed to respond to the findings.

The Service Manager, Enterprise & Regeneration provided explanation on a number of processes which were being rolled out to strengthen controls and compliance. These would also enable a better understanding of timescales to help improve performance against targets. Progress on other actions included a new procurement framework to speed up the process, hold contractors to account and achieve value for money. The establishment of a professional oversight board would help to review processes and monitor progress on the action plan. The Audit Committee had accepted the findings of the report and had scheduled an update in six months' time, therefore it was suggested that this Committee may wish to consider an update at a later stage.

The Chief Executive cited the key issue as performance and he gave assurance that the report had been of particular concern and demonstrated the value of audit work. Due to concerns about the ownership and speed of responses to the findings, the professional oversight board had been set up to give a good response to the findings and were now tasked with reviewing and improving processes through a well-managed leaner mechanism and to seek improvement in performance and Flintshire's ranking on DFGs over the longer term. A commitment had been given to show transparency of work and to review roles and responsibilities involving both Housing and Social Services.

Councillor Attridge agreed that the findings of the report were of concern and were being addressed within the action plan, and that the Audit Committee had been content with progress to date. He went on to give a commitment to seek an improvement in the DFG service which was a long-standing issue.

Councillor Palmer spoke about the need to maximise opportunities for local companies. Officers explained that the procurement framework would allocate work to local and regional companies.

In response to remarks by Councillor Dolphin on previously adapted Council owned properties that were now void, the Service Manager gave assurance that there was a process in place for reviewing options and matching up with the most appropriate applicant. He also responded to a similar query by Councillor Hardcastle on recycling stair lifts removed from properties to be used by others in need.

The Service Manager provided clarification to Councillor Paul Shotton on relocation grants and top-up loans which were available for more complex DFGs exceeding the £36K threshold - neither of which were widely requested.

During discussion, Councillor Attridge suggested that the Committee receive the same update report as the Audit Committee in six months' time. The Chief Executive agreed and said that to give further assurance to Members, progress would also be reported as part of the Council Plan monitoring report.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the content of the Disabled Facilities Grants Internal Audit report and the service control action plan be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee receives an update report in six months' time following consideration of the service control action plan by the Audit Committee.

16. 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 11.05am)

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Chairman