

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
26 SEPTEMBER 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, 26 September 2018.

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

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

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Patrick Heesom (for Ray Hughes)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Bernie Attridge, Cabinet Member for Housing

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Helen Brown and Christine Jones attended as observers

CONTRIBUTORS: Chief Officer (Housing and Assets), Customer Support Manager, and Capital Works Manager

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

Prior to the start of the meeting it was agreed that the Facilitator would write to Councillor Bernie Attridge to express the Committee's best wishes for his speedy recovery following illness.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

22. MINUTES

(i) The minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2018 were submitted.

Matters Arising

Minute number 11: In response to a request from Councillor George Hardcastle, the Facilitator advised that an update report on rent arrears would be provided to the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 7 November 2018.

(ii) The minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2018 were submitted.

Accuracy

Page 9: the title of the minutes to be amended

Matters Arising

Councillor Paul Shotton commented on the success of the Holiday Hunger Programme.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above amendment, the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

23. SINGLE ACCESS ROUTE TO HOUSING (SARTH)

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) introduced a report to consider the Allocations Policy for social housing. He invited the Customer Support Manager to present the report.

The Customer Support Manager provided background information and advised that a review of the SARTH policy had been carried out in 2017 following the first year of operation. The review identified that the policy required updating to ensure compliance with the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. A review of issues raised at the operational panel and steering group established that there were no significant changes required to any of the key principles of the policy. The Customer Services Manager advised that the requirement for an updated policy provided an opportunity to develop a document that was easier to read and understand. The revised policy (attached at appendix one) sets out the key commitment of the partners to a common regional approach to social housing allocations.

The Customer Services Manager reported on the main considerations, as detailed in the report, regarding regional collaboration, social housing demand, audit, and specialist housing.

Councillor Ian Dunbar commented on the need for suitable housing solutions to meet specialist needs and asked if appropriate housing had been provided from old or new housing stock. The Customer Services Manager explained that solutions had been provided from a mixture of old and new housing.

Councillor Paul Shotton referred to the collaborative work undertaken with Denbighshire County Council and asked if there were further opportunities to develop work on the triage and housing register with other local authorities. The Customer Services Manager explained that the Authority also received an income from other partner landlords and would follow up any opportunities to widen the partnership to further Councils.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin asked if information was shared between service areas in the Authority, and cited Housing services and Social Services as an example and a situation if a property became vacant because a tenant had moved into a care home. The Chief Officer gave an assurance that information and intelligence was shared between the Authority's Housing and Social Services departments.

In response to a concern raised by Councillor George Hardcastle around the allocation of social housing, the Customer Services Manager explained that Flintshire and Denbighshire operated two separate housing registers. She advised that Flintshire had been managing the triage and housing register for Denbighshire since April 2017 and referred to the many benefits of Flintshire hosting both Registers.

Councillor Patrick Heesom raised concerns around the triage service and referred to the increase in the number of applications in 2017/18. He commented on the number of annual applications and asked what support was provided to those applicants that did not proceed to the housing register. He also commented on the Council's democratic accountability in providing housing and said that he did not feel that this had been written into the terms of reference of the SARTH Policy and neither had the role of elected Members been adequately referenced. The Customer Services Manager gave an assurance that all applicants who presented themselves in need of housing assistance were provided with support, information, and signposted to other services/agencies where appropriate.

Councillor Heesom sought an assurance that the Housing service would not be put forward for consideration as an alternative delivery model. The Chief Officer confirmed that no such proposal was under consideration.

Councillor David Wisinger referred to the need for specialist housing and the number of applicants in urgent need in Flintshire. He commented on the need to work with property developers and the Planning department to increase the supply of stock to meet the needs of households with a disability or which required a larger sized property. The Chief Officer advised that developers were not obliged to provide adapted properties, however, the Authority did influence the type and number of social housing units through its discussions with developers and based on housing need in a specific area; in addition controls were further exercised through the planning system. The Customer Support Manager advised that a full report on specialist housing would be presented to the Committee in early 2019.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee continue to support the management of the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) policy in Flintshire.

24. WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS (WHQS) CAPITAL PROGRAMME – DELIVERY REVIEW UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) introduced a report to provide an update on the progress of the WHQS the Council was delivering through its Capital Investment Programme. He explained that the WHQS Programme of Works had reached its halfway milestone and was moving into the final three years of delivery. The report focussed on what had been delivered to date and what was left to be completed before the 2020 deadline.

The Chief Officer reported on the main considerations, as detailed in the report on the WHQS Programme. He advised that the WHQS project team was nearing the end of the Internal Work programme (kitchens and bathrooms) and the remaining

properties were either 'tenant refusals' or 'no access' which were classed as 'acceptable fails' by the Welsh Government in terms of achieving the WQHS. The WQHS project team had also procured all of the main WQHS Contracts moving into Year 4 (2018/19) of the Capital Programme and were ahead of target on the number of components installed and looking to implement the Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) Solution in Quarter 4 of this financial year. The Chief Officer continued that the WHQS project team had delivered many contracts varying from internal upgrade works through to large external refurbishment and environmental schemes. The Council had invested around £60m to date within its housing stock and was currently ahead of target in meeting the WHQS 2020 deadline.

The Chief Officer referred to the Welsh Audit Office (WAO) Report and provided background information, as detailed in the report. He said the audit had covered a number of areas relating to the Authority's service users and having undertaken surveys, considered feedback from users, and moderated their findings, the WAO concluded that "overall the Council was making good progress towards achieving the WHQS and most Council tenants were satisfied with the quality of the service and their homes".

The Chair and Councillor Paul Shotton congratulated the Chief Officer and his team on their achievements on the WQHS to date and on a good report.

Councillor Patrick Heesom commented on the need to ensure that local contractors and labour was used in the WQHS programme of works. The Capital Works Manager advised that local contractors and labour was involved on all new house build and said thresholds had to be met when contracting works for the WHQS programme. He explained that for every £1m spend the Authority had to ensure that a certain number of local job opportunities and apprenticeships were provided and commented that the target had been exceeded to date.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin referred to properties which had not been upgraded due to 'tenant refusals' or 'no access' and asked if the condition of the properties was checked to ensure housing standards were complied with. The Capital Works Manager explained that a condition inspection would be undertaken when appropriate.

The Chief Officer suggested that the Committee receive an annual update report on the delivery of the WHQS Capital Programme, to include information on the use of local labour and the number of apprentices and school leavers.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made in delivering the Housing Capital Investment Programme be noted.

25. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In presenting the Forward Work Programme for consideration, the Facilitator referred to the items to be considered at the next meeting of the Committee on 7 November, and said it had been agreed to defer the Quarter 1 and 2 Council Plan

2018/19 Monitoring Report to the meeting on 19 December 2018. It was also agreed that the Rent Arrears report would be submitted to the meeting on 7 November.

The Facilitator advised that a workshop would be arranged during October for members of the Committee to consider the budget proposals and said the details would be confirmed to Members by email.

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.

26. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 10.52 am)

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Chairman