

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
6 NOVEMBER 2019

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, 6 November 2019

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

Councillors: David Cox, Jean Davies, Ron Davies, Ray Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Brian Lloyd, Ted Palmer, Kevin Rush, Paul Shotton and David Wisinger

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors: Bernie Attridge (for Helen Brown); and Rob Davies (for Rosetta Dolphin)

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Sian Braun; Ian Roberts, Leader and Cabinet Member for Education; Dave Hughes, Cabinet Member for Housing; and Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Christine Jones attended as an observer

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection; Chief Officer (Housing and Assets); and Capital Works Manager

Finance Manager, Community Services (for minute number 20)
Enterprise and Regeneration Manager (for minute number 22)

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

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

As a Council house tenant, Councillor Palmer declared a personal interest on agenda items 5 and 6 (Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2020/21 and Welsh Housing Quality Standard Capital Programme).

18. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2019 were submitted.

Councillor Shotton moved approval of the minutes and was seconded by Councillor Palmer.

RESOLVED:

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

19. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

In presenting the Forward Work Programme, the Facilitator drew attention to the special meeting in November to consider the Budget for 2020/21 which would also include the Mid-Year Council Plan Monitoring Report and NEW Homes Board Update brought forward from December.

On Action Tracking, Members were reminded about the site visit to the modular building project in Garden City on 15 November. Councillor Dolphin's request for information on the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) had been actioned and any further actions arising would be followed up.

Councillor Attridge raised concerns about an increase in homelessness and rough sleeping, particularly in the Deeside area, and the perception on social media. In acknowledging that this was not just an issue for the Council and that some individuals did not wish to accept the support on offer, he said that this was an important issue and asked that the report scheduled for April 2020 be brought forward to an earlier meeting.

Councillor Palmer suggested a future item on options available within the legislation to support those who refused help.

Councillor Hutchinson asked that his requested report on the allocation of sheltered accommodation be brought forward. The Facilitator advised that this would be included within an item on tenancy enforcement and anti-social behaviour scheduled for April 2020. She said that whilst every effort was made to accommodate requests from Members, there were already a range of items already on the Forward Work Programme.

Due to the number of items already scheduled for the next few meetings, the Chairman proposed that the items on homelessness and sheltered accommodation remain as scheduled.

In highlighting the importance of tackling homelessness, Councillor Attridge requested a briefing paper at the special meeting in November. This was supported by Councillor Ron Davies. The Chief Officer agreed that an information report would be received on actions being taken to address the rough sleeping situation. This was supported by the Committee.

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 progress made in completing the outstanding actions be noted.

20. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2020/21

The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) introduced the draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme 2020/21 for approval and recommendation to Council.

The Committee received a presentation from the Chief Officer and Finance Manager covering the following:

- 30 Year Capital Business Plan Focus
- Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS)
 - Delivering the WHQS
 - Compliance
 - Draft Capital Programme 2020/21
- Council House Build Programme
 - Maes Gwern, Mold
 - St Andrews, Garden City
- HRA Capital Programme 2020/21
- HRA Capital Funding 2020/21
- Post 2020
 - Future HRA Capital Priorities
 - Decarbonisation

The Finance Manager explained that projected figures in the draft Capital Programme were based on potential available resources whilst information was awaited from Welsh Government (WG) on the new rent policy. Amongst the assumptions built into the Programme was that, post-WHQS, the Major Repairs Allowance would be used to fund the decarbonisation of existing housing stock which was a future priority of WG.

On WHQS, the Chief Officer said that consistent high scoring on tenant satisfaction questionnaires was a key achievement for the Council. On future priorities, detailed consideration would need to be given to the approach to regenerating existing stock to reduce the number of voids. A future report on this would be scheduled.

In response to a question from Councillor Shotton on parking spaces on housing estates, the Chief Officer said that whilst some provision was made within the Environmental Works element of the WHQS, there was a wider issue due to the impact of private sector parking needs and an increased number of cars per household.

When asked by Councillor Ron Davies about the review of garage sites, the Chief Officer said that the aim was to refurbish those deemed viable, however it was known that many were inadequate for modern cars and quite often were used for storage purposes. Garage sites that were not used by tenants would be demolished to maximise local parking provision.

Councillor Hughes spoke in support of parking provision at bungalows in his ward which had been created from former garage sites.

Councillor Hutchinson congratulated officers on the report and the positive feedback from tenants. His comments about the importance of parking provision at sheltered accommodation was acknowledged by the Chief Officer who said that this formed part of a wider assessment of parking.

Councillor Palmer referred to the regeneration of existing housing stock and suggested that houses that were difficult to let could be split into much-needed single bedroom accommodation. He was told that this was amongst a number of options being explored to meet demand for one-bedroom accommodation as a direct result of the Bedroom Tax.

Councillor Attridge welcomed the Council's investment in its housing stock and asked about engagement with private homeowners in adjoining properties to Council tenants to establish if improvements could be carried out at the same time. The Capital Works Manager said that there had been little take-up from private homeowners and would provide further details. When asked about the potential for more investment in Council housing in the event of an improved financial settlement from WG, the Chief Officer said that various options could be explored including purchasing former Right to Buy properties which could meet demand for adapted accommodation.

The Chairman allowed John Ennis, who was in the public gallery, to speak. He referred to the costs involved in the modular build scheme in Garden City and asked if similar high insulation standards would be adopted at other schemes and whether there would be any impact on rent. The Chief Officer explained that this was an innovative housing project supported by WG to meet a number of initiatives including the decarbonisation policy mentioned earlier. Whilst the Council's new build estate was already highly insulated, the demands of decarbonisation would create additional costs not currently provided for by WG. The costs of modular build schemes would reduce as volumes of modular build increased throughout Wales.

The recommendations, which were amended to reflect the debate, were moved by Councillor Palmer and seconded by Councillor Ron Davies.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee supports and recommends to the Council the HRA Capital Programme for 2020/21, which is subject to change based on the outcome of the rent policy which will become available in December 2019; and
- (b) That the Committee supports and recommends the proposed HRA Capital Programme for 2020/21 as set out in Appendix 1.

21. WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD (WHQS) CAPITAL PROGRAMME - DELIVERY REVIEW UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) presented a report on progress in delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS) by the December 2020 deadline. He provided an overview of the key points including the results of an Internal Audit review of WHQS undertaken in December 2018. The WHQS assessment carried out by the Wales Audit Office on all stock-retaining authorities in Wales had generated a positive statement, with Flintshire being the only council receiving no recommendations. This provided assurance that the WHQS was being delivered efficiently and competently.

As a Council tenant, Councillor Palmer praised the report but spoke about the suitability of rendering on some properties. The Chief Officer gave assurance of continued investment and maintenance of housing stock in the Capital Programme.

Councillor Attridge sought more details on plans to reduce the number of 'acceptable fails' as part of the Internal Mop-up Contract. The Capital Works Manager provided clarification on the approach taken to gain access to properties to assess safety and condition. There were a number of reasons for those individuals refusing contractors access to their properties involving some genuine cases requiring a degree of sensitive handling. On resources, the Chief Officer spoke about shifting focus to address voids to maximise income.

Councillor Lloyd commented that some properties did not need the improvements. The Capital Works Manager said that those were classed as acceptable fails but still required assessment by the Council as stated within tenancy conditions.

During the debate, the Chairman and a number of Members congratulated the team for the positive report.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Shotton and seconded by Councillor Palmer.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee continues to support the Capital Investment Programme in its final two years of major investment and where possible, prioritise any requirements/support to enable the Programme to successfully meet the December 2020 deadline.

22. PRIVATE SECTOR HOME IMPROVEMENT LOANS

The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager presented a report on the Home Improvement Loan programme which provided a cost-effective way of improving the quality of life and well-being of Flintshire households. He provided an overview of the criteria for the three types of loan products in the programme

which was mainly funded by Welsh Government (WG). The re-launch of the programme would coincide with the restructuring of the team.

Councillor Bithell said that the re-launch would help to encourage homeowners to bring empty properties back into use which could have a positive impact on the housing waiting list.

In response to comments, the Enterprise and Regeneration Manager agreed to follow-up Councillor Shotton's comments regarding a converted building in Connah's Quay. He advised Councillor Cox to refer his concerns about long-term empty properties to the Environmental Health team.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Palmer and seconded by Councillor Ron Davies.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee supports the progress made in delivering private sector homes improvement loans.

23. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10am and ended at 11.35am)

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Chairman