

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
18 DECEMBER 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Wednesday, 18 December 2019

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

Councillors: David Cox, Rosetta Dolphin, Mared Eastwood, Dennis Hutchinson, Ted Palmer, Kevin Rush, Paul Shotton and David Wisinger

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors: Bernie Attridge (for Helen Brown) and Patrick Heesom (for Brian Lloyd)

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Jean Davies and Ray Hughes

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Dave Hughes, Cabinet Member for Housing; Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development; Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection; and Enterprise and Regeneration Manager

Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) and Homeless and Advice Manager - for minute number 32

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

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

30. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 6 and 22 November 2019 were received.

Minute number 22 (6 November 2019): Private Sector Home Improvement Loans - Councillor Shotton referred to his comments on the converted building in Connah's Quay and asked officers to thank Jeff Williams for allowing him the opportunity to view the apartments which were now under offer. He moved approval of the minutes and was seconded by Councillor Dolphin.

RESOLVED:

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

31. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Facilitator presented the latest Forward Work Programme on which there were no changes. On Action Tracking, the majority of actions arising from previous meetings had been completed.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Attridge and seconded by Councillor Palmer.

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.

32. ROUGH SLEEPERS BRIEFING PAPER

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) presented a report on priority actions being taken to tackle and prevent homelessness across Flintshire as set out in the Council's Local Homelessness Action Plan which was based on the three main themes of the Regional Homelessness Strategy. The report focussed on the 'People' theme and its priority of rough sleepers.

It was acknowledged that rough sleeping was no longer confined to major towns and cities as it was extending into other areas such as communities in Flintshire. There were a number of contributing factors, often involving complex long-term issues, requiring a multi-agency response including the Drug & Alcohol team, Housing and Welfare teams. Following the withdrawal of emergency bed provision by the service provider in Flintshire, an alternative temporary facility had been identified in Shotton to accommodate the night shelter service. With the recruitment process underway, it was hoped that the new service would be available from January for a period of 18 months to two years until permanent accommodation could be found.

The Chief Officer spoke about the range of positive initiatives delivered through the Local Action Plan such as promotion of the Streetlink app. The report detailed the various reasons for homelessness with a large percentage due to parents no longer willing or able to accommodate the individual. The team had recently engaged with four individuals who were found to be sleeping rough but recognised that there were more out there including 'sofa surfers'. The recruitment process was underway for the Housing First service which was an effective model in engaging and provide wraparound support to rough sleepers with multiple complex needs.

In thanking officers for the comprehensive report, the Chairman welcomed the Housing First pilot and said that the Council should be commended for its approach to tackling homelessness.

Councillor Attridge thanked the officers and Cabinet Member for the report and the actions being taken by the Council. He said it was disappointing that the Council's strategic partner had removed the emergency bed provision at short notice and that housing associations could do more to address homelessness in Flintshire. In response to questions, the Chief Officer spoke about developing the multi-agency approach into an effective model to help get people off the streets. The night shelter service provider was keen to develop and train volunteers and would be working with various organisations such as Help the Homeless. The Homeless and Advice Manager said that establishing links with volunteers, including members of the public, would provide a network of support to help those in need.

Councillor Dolphin referred to discussions on the development of the North Wales Safeguarding Board and suggested a joint meeting with the Social and Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee to explore the subject in more depth.

The Committee supported the Facilitator's suggestion for an update in six months' time to review the impact of actions and that Social and Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee Members be invited. The Chief Officer said that the service worked alongside Social Services on the safeguarding process and that the update report would explore the complexities in legally establishing self-neglect. He gave assurance that rough sleepers refusing to engage with the Council would not be written off and that the team would continue their efforts, as demonstrated by a recent long-term case in Buckley.

Whilst thanking officers for visiting Holywell Town Council, Councillor Palmer welcomed the positive actions and encouraged even more focus on those refusing to engage.

Councillor Shotton expressed concerns about the number of rough sleepers aged 18-24 who could not be accommodated by their parents.

Councillor Butler praised the Council's response to tackling homelessness which was a serious national problem. He thanked the Chief Officer and Manager, along with the Chief Officer (Social Services) for the time that they had spent at the shelter, outside working hours, helping people in need.

Whilst Councillor Heesom complimented the team on their work, he spoke about the need for wider investment and establishing links with partner agencies to work with individuals on activities which could make a real difference to their lives. The officers said that the importance of early intervention had been recognised and that raising awareness of experiences leading to homelessness, particularly in schools, helped young people to understand those challenges.

In response to a query by Councillor Attridge on homelessness levels in Flintshire, the Chief Officer said that although numbers had increased, these were relatively low in comparison with other areas such as Rhyl, Liverpool and Manchester. This was endorsed by Councillor Hughes who said that numbers were lower than Wrexham and Chester. He said that even one rough sleeper was too many and that the Council would continue its efforts to help those in need.

Councillor Bithell said that whilst homelessness today was upsetting, it had been evident for many years. In welcoming the various initiatives, he said it was inevitable that some individuals may choose not to accept help.

The Chairman allowed Mr. John Ennis, who was present in the public gallery, to speak. Mr. Ennis referred to the importance of adequate funding to tackle homelessness and reduce the housing waiting list. In response to comments on decarbonisation, the Chief Officer said that this was an area of focus by the Welsh Government to reduce energy bills and tackle fuel poverty which could lead to homelessness.

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

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee welcomes the report and the work being undertaken with multi-agencies to meet the challenges for rough sleepers; and
- (b) That the thanks of the Committee be passed to all the Homelessness team for the work being undertaken to meet the challenges for all people presenting as homeless.

33. TOURISM UPDATE

The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager presented a report on the main areas of work undertaken by the Business Development team to support the tourism sector. The contribution to Flintshire's economy in 2018 had risen by 6.5% from the previous year which was the largest increase recorded in North Wales.

Support for the tourism sector was delivered by the Business Development team which included a dedicated Tourism Officer. The report set out the collaborative approach with other authorities to promote tourism across North Wales through various initiatives. The Destination Management partnership involved a co-ordinated action plan to increase footfall and improve visitor experience.

During the debate, a number of local points of interest were highlighted by Councillor Shotton whilst Councillor Cox suggested exploring links to outside events such as the Llangollen Eisteddfod.

Councillor Dolphin asked about the marketing of local events to encourage visitors from outside Flintshire.

In welcoming the contribution to the economy, Councillor Heesom spoke about the need to invest in local transport infrastructure along the A55 and also to address the oil and gas terminal at Talacre.

In response, the Enterprise and Regeneration Manager said that the team maintained an active social media presence and signposted local campaigns, for example the recent Mold Christmas Market which had generated significant online interest. On Councillor Heesom's point, he said that whilst the team focussed on businesses, the work of the Economic Ambition Board and Welsh Government recognised the need for improvements.

On the infrastructure issue, Councillor Butler said that cross-border connectivity was being progressed through the Mersey Dee Alliance. In recognising the demographics in Flintshire, he spoke about the benefits of sharing resources across the region and commended the initiatives taking place with limited resources.

Following remarks by Councillor Palmer, the Enterprise and Regeneration Manager said that there had been a long history of promoting Holywell as an important historical destination.

Councillor Hutchinson referred to the negative impact of conditions and train delays at Bidston station. Councillor Butler gave assurance that representations had been made on improving the journey to and from Liverpool which would benefit the economy.

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

RESOLVED:

That the progress made in supporting the tourism sector in Flintshire be noted.

34. DOMESTIC ENERGY PROGRAMMES

Councillor Bithell introduced a report summarising the approaches taken by the Council's Domestic Energy Efficiency Programme team to reduce fuel poverty and improve the quality of life for residents in Flintshire. Fuel poverty was recognised as a national and local issue, as prioritised in the Council Plan, and was more likely to affect those living in less energy efficient properties.

There was a significant challenge in reducing fuel poverty due to the number of older properties in Wales which were expensive to make more fuel efficient. Over the past five years, the Domestic Energy Efficiency Programme team - comprising five employees - had been successful in installing 4,600 energy efficiency measures in 4,000 households.

The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager provided an overview of the main programmes of work including the introduction of WG home loans towards new heating systems for fuel-poor households. He explained that the team worked with individuals from all property tenures to help access funding which was complex. Members were encouraged to raise awareness of the services of the team.

The Chairman gave an example where the team had provided help to an initially reluctant resident which had generated a positive outcome. During the discussion, other Members gave similar examples of residents who had benefitted from the support of the team and thanked them for their services.

In highlighting the importance of sharing information on tackling fuel poverty, Councillor Heesom asked that the report be shared with Cabinet and an update brought back to the Committee in six months' time.

Councillor Dolphin referred to previous reports received on the subject. The officer agreed to respond separately to her specific question about a pre-paid electric meter.

In response to queries, the Enterprise and Regeneration Manager clarified the funding arrangements for the service as set out in the report. He referred to the Council investing in energy efficient measures for its own housing stock and work being undertaken with Clwyd Alyn Housing Association.

The recommendations, which were amended to reflect the debate, were moved by Councillor Heesom and seconded by Councillor Attridge.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress made in delivering domestic energy efficiency programmes to support fuel-poor households in Flintshire be noted; and
- (b) That the report be recommended to Cabinet in order to highlight the positive action being taken by the Council to reduce fuel poverty and improve the quality of life of residents.

35. 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 11.50am)

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Chairman