

COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 JANUARY 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Community, Housing & Assets Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a remote attendance meeting on Wednesday, 20 January 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

Councillors: Helen Brown, Geoff Collett, Ron Davies, Adele Davies-Cooke, Mared Eastwood, Veronica Gay, Dennis Hutchinson, Brian Lloyd and Kevin Rush

APOLOGY: Councillor Ray Hughes

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Marion Bateman, Patrick Heesom and Paul Shotton were present as observers together with Rob Dewey (Chair of Standards Committee)

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Dave Hughes (Cabinet Member for Housing); Councillor Billy Mullin (Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets), Chief Officer (Housing and Assets), Housing Programmes Manager, Revenues Manager, Benefits Manager, Housing and Prevention Senior Manager, Housing and Assets Senior Manager, Strategic Finance Manager and Housing Strategy Manager

Strategic Performance Advisor - for minute number 37

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

29. COUNCILLOR KEVIN HUGHES

The Chairman led the Committee in a silent tribute to Councillor Kevin Hughes who had sadly passed away.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

31. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2020 were approved as a correct record, as moved and seconded by Councillors Rush and Eastwood.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

32. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the latest Forward Work Programme including a number of changes since the previous meeting. On action tracking, all outstanding actions had been completed.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Eastwood and Davies-Cooke.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted;
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair 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.

33. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) 30 YEAR FINANCIAL BUSINESS PLAN

The Committee received a report to consider the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for 2021/22 and the draft HRA 30 year Financial Business Plan. The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) and Strategic Finance Manager gave a presentation covering:

- Welsh Government Rent Policy
- Proposed Rent Uplift 2021/22
- Welsh Government - Wider Rental Agreement
- Service Charges
- Other Income
- Invest to Save Proposal
- Proposed Pressures and Efficiencies
- Reserves
- HRA Business Plan 2021/22
- HRA Capital Investment
- Capital Programme
- Development of the revised WHQS
- Capital Programme 2021/22
- HRA Capital Funding 2021/22

The proposals set out in the report met requirements of the revised rent policy by Welsh Government (WG). The proposed rent uplift for 2021/22 would ensure that no individual tenant paid more than the maximum allowed under the policy and progressed towards re-addressing the disparity between rents under and at target rent whilst seeking to make rent charges to all tenants more equitable. The proposal to freeze service charges for 2021/22 at current rates

would help to protect tenants, many of whom were experiencing financial difficulty from the emergency situation, and would allow for further work to be carried out to ensure services provided value for money.

On Capital Programme investment, the business plan would reflect the extended completion deadline of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) granted by WG as a result of the national emergency. The model for decarbonisation was one of the areas under development.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Chief Officer referred to the investment strategy which helped to reduce the cost of energy in tenants' homes.

The recommendations, which were amended to reflect the debate, were moved by Councillor Lloyd and seconded by Councillor Davies-Cooke.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee supports the HRA Budget for 2021/22 as set out in the appendices to the report;
- (b) That the Committee supports the proposed rent increase of up to 0.68% (plus up to £2);
- (c) That the Committee supports a garage rent increase of £0.20 per week and a garage plot increase of £0.03 per week;
- (d) That the Committee supports freezing for one year an increase in Service Charge recovery; and
- (e) That the Committee supports the proposed HRA Capital programme for 2021/22 as set out in Appendix C of the report.

34. WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED HOUSING REVENUE MANUAL

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) presented a report to seek feedback on the draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Manual which had been developed by Welsh Government (WG) to provide guidance to councils and to bring clarity and consistency around the activities which could be undertaken in the HRA. Feedback from the Committee would help inform the Council's formal response to the consultation.

It was agreed that Members would refer any written comments directly to the Chief Officer to form part of the consultation response.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Gay and seconded by Councillor Lloyd.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That Members of the Committee send comments directly to the Chief Officer (Housing & Assets), to inform the Council's consultation response to Welsh Government.

35. HOUSING STRATEGY UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) presented a report on progress towards meeting the priorities set out in the action plan for the Local Housing Strategy 2019-24.

Despite the emergency situation, good progress had been made on the extensive action plan to deliver key priorities. Further updates would continue to be shared with the Committee.

During the item, the Chairman led tributes to the Housing Programmes Manager (Mel Evans) who was due to leave the Council. The Chief Officer took the opportunity to praise Mel for his dedication and commitment to his work over the years.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Davies and Rush.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee supports the progress made as part of the Housing Strategy Action Plan, as outlined within the report.

36. STRATEGIC HOUSING AND REGENERATION PROGRAMME (SHARP) UPDATE REPORT

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) introduced a report on progress with the Council's Strategic Housing and Regeneration Programme (SHARP) to date. The report also provided an update on housing schemes delivered through other mechanisms outside SHARP.

The Housing Programmes Manager provided an overview of the key points. Updated figures on the current position on SHARP showed that an additional ten affordable rent properties had increased that total to 93, with 149 social rented schemes delivered. It was anticipated that work on further 71 social rented units would start in April/May 2021. Formal confirmation was awaited on a successful bid for grant funding from the Welsh Government (WG) Land Release Fund programme to progress a new social and affordable housing scheme on existing Council owned land.

It was estimated that approximately 600 properties had been delivered to date through a combination of SHARP and non-SHARP schemes.

In response to comments from the Chairman, the Housing Programmes Manager reported on feasibility work on the site of the former Canton depot. He would pass on concerns to Edwards Homes about the advertisement of new properties that were located in Connah's Quay.

Councillor Davies expressed his thanks to the Housing department for all their work.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Davies and Rush.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress with the Strategic Housing and Regeneration Programme (SHARP) be noted;
- (b) That the Committee supports the use of the detailed delivery routes to deliver new social and affordable rent homes including the Housing Construction North and Mid-Wales Framework Agreement; and
- (c) That the Committee supports the re-allocation of the annual budget of £121k for scheme investigation and feasibility works from SHARP to support new delivery routes.

37. COUNCIL PLAN 2021/22

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) presented the proposed Council Plan for 2021/22 with specific focus on the Committee's respective portfolios aligned to priorities under the six themes. The content of the Council Plan for 2021/22 would continue to take into account continued recovery in addition to longer term strategic objectives.

The Chairman agreed that the majority of issues captured in the document were appropriate for the Committee. He suggested that Members of the Committee refer any comments directly to the officers.

Councillor Mullin spoke about workstreams under the Poverty theme such as helping to enable pupils to continue their learning from home.

The Facilitator explained that each Overview & Scrutiny Committee would consider performance on their relevant areas, with an overview of performance under all themes to capture cross-cutting issues.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Davies and Hutchinson.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the developed themes of the Council Plan 2021/22 prior to approval by Cabinet.

38. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 - TO CONSIDER THE EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Councillor Hutchinson moved exclusion of the press and public for the following item, which was seconded by Councillor Brown.

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting as the following item was considered to be exempt by virtue of paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

39. NORTH EAST WALES (NEW) HOMES BUSINESS PLAN 2020-2049

The Housing Programmes Manager presented a report on the North East Wales (NEW) Homes Draft Business Plan for 2020-2049 which set out the key elements of the company's proposed Development Strategy to increase the number of affordable rent properties delivered over the next three years. The report detailed progress made against targets and the impact from the emergency situation.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Davies and Rush.

RESOLVED:

That the NEW Homes Business Plan 2020-2049 be approved.

40. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10am and ended at 11.20am)

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Chairman