

## **FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**19 FEBRUARY 2013**

Minutes of the meeting of the Flintshire County Council of Flintshire County Council held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA on Tuesday, 19 February 2013

### **PRESENT: Councillor Ann Minshull (Chair)**

Councillors: Bernie Attridge, Glyn Banks, Haydn Bateman, Helen Brown, Clive Carver, David Cox, Peter Curtis, Ron Davies, Ian Dunbar, Ted Evans, Jim Falshaw, Veronica Gay, Robin Guest, Alison Halford, Ron Hampson, George Hardcastle, Patrick Heesom, Cindy Hinds, Trefor Howorth, Ray Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Joe Johnson, Christine Jones, Kevin Jones, Richard Jones, Stella Jones, Colin Legg, Phil Lightfoot, Richard Lloyd, Mike Lowe, Dave Mackie, Nancy Matthews, Hilary McGuill, Mike Peers, Neville Phillips, Mike Reece, Gareth Roberts, Aaron Shotton, Paul Shotton, Ian Smith, Nigel Steele-Mortimer, David Williams, Sharon Williams, David Wisinger, Arnold Woolley and Matt Wright

### **APOLOGIES:**

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Chris Bithell, Amanda Bragg, Derek Butler, Adele Davies-Cooke, Alan Diskin, Glenys Diskin, Chris Dolphin, Rosetta Dolphin, Carol Ellis, David Evans, Hilary Isherwood, Rita Johnson, Brian Lloyd, Peter Macfarlane, Billy Mullin, Ian Roberts, Tony Sharps, Carolyn Thomas and Owen Thomas

### **IN ATTENDANCE:**

Chief Executive, Head of Finance, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Head of Housing, Democracy and Governance Manager, Corporate Finance Manager and Committee Officers

## **118. PRESENTATIONS**

### **Equalities Team**

The Chair welcomed representatives of the Equalities Team to the meeting. The Team had recently received an award on behalf of the Authority for 'Most Improved Welsh Council'; the Chief Executive explained that the award had been accredited by Stonewall, a member of the Equality and Diversity Forum, which recognised the Council's journey and commitment to developing an inclusive workplace and a culture that valued diversity.

### **Children's Services Team**

The Chair welcomed representatives of the Children's Services Team to the meeting. The Team had received accreditation by the Family Rights Groups for Flintshire County Council's Family Group Conference.

Councillor C.M. Jones, Cabinet Member for Social Services, explained that the accreditation status had been received following a review of Flintshire County Council's policies, practices and procedures against a set of National Standards as validated by the Family Rights Group. Out of 14 submissions Flintshire were

second in order of ranking. Councillor Jones congratulated the team on their hard work.

Councillor A.P. Shotton, Leader of the Council thanked the Equality Team and Children's Service Team on their hard work and success.

**119. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The Chair confirmed that no questions had been received.

**120. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made.

**121. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

A copy of the Chair's communication had been circulated to all Members before the meeting.

**122. PETITIONS**

No petitions were submitted.

**123. NOTICE OF MOTION**

The Chair confirmed that no Notices of Motion had been received.

**124. QUESTIONS**

The following questions had been submitted by Councillor A. Woolley:-

- (i) At the TCC AGM in Wrexham on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2012, the Deputy Leader made a formal public pledge that this local authority would work to deliver the "Living Wage" instead of the Statutory Minimum Wage for its lowest paid employees.

In view of that pledge, made some 8 months ago, what steps have been taken so far to deliver it and when will that delivery occur?

- (ii) The Budget Projection figures set out in the 16<sup>th</sup> January, 2013 document entitled 'Re: Budget 2013/14' indicate, at Appendix 9 on page 63, a foreseen £35.088Million budget funding shortfall in 2017/18. That foreseen shortfall equates to 10.42% of indicated total expenditure. Given the need to defend and probably expand both educational and social services expenditure between now and then, which other budget headings does the present administration see the saving coming from and what overall level of staffing is projected for that stated year?

A copy of the responses to the questions, provided by the Leader of the Council, was circulated to all Members before the start of the meeting. A copy of the response is attached at Appendix 1 of the minutes.

**125. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS ON COMMITTEE MINUTES**

The Chair confirmed that no Questions had been received.

**126. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2013/14 AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2013/14**

The Head of Housing presented the revenue budget proposals for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2013/14 financial year, including proposed rent changes, key areas of income and expenditure, and the level of closing balance at the year end. She also presented the budget proposals for the HRA Capital Programme 2013/14, which was year two of a six year improvement programme. The Council was informed that the Cabinet had met on the 19 February, 2013 and had approved the recommendations outlined within the report. The detailed report presented to Cabinet was attached at Appendix A of the County Council report.

The Head of Housing gave a detailed presentation which covered the following areas:-

- 2013/14 Budget Strategy and context
- Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
- Welsh Government (WG) – Financial Determinations
- Other charges
- Budget Proposals
- HRA – 2012 outcomes
- HRA 2013 – What Next?
- HRA 2013 – Efficiencies total of £1.326m (8.7% operating costs)
- HRA 2013 – service improvements/costs increases - 765k
- HRA Capital Programme 2012/13 outcomes
- Funding for HRA Capital Programme 2013/14
- HRA Capital Programme overall outcomes against promises after 2 years
- Summary

Councillor H. Brown, Cabinet Member for Housing proposed that the County Council support the recommendations as outlined within the report and thanked the Head of Housing and the workforce for the many improvements within the Housing Service. In seconding the proposal, Councillor R.G. Hampson also thanked the Head of Housing for the improvements that had been made particularly in reducing the number of void properties and the reduction in time taken to complete non-urgent repairs.

A number of Members spoke in support of the report and thanked the Head of Housing, her team and the workforce for the improvements made within the Housing Service which were appreciated by tenants. Councillor S. Jones asked that the comments from Members be passed to the workforce following the meeting.

Councillor P.G. Heesom thanked the Head of Housing for the report and presentation. He raised concern on the shortage of affordable housing in Flintshire and the increasing burden welfare reform would have on the tenants of

Flintshire. He asked that the Head of Housing be given an increasing leading role in the Authority to ensure that it was meeting the needs of affordable housing.

Councillor M.J. Peers thanked the Head of Housing for the positive report. He commented on the final guideline weekly rent increase and asked how many tenants would be affected by the rent increase together with additional financial burdens as a result of the welfare reform. He also commented on the financial pressure of £32,740 from void garages and asked why these garages were not being used.

The Head of Housing responded that approximately 66.7% of the Councils tenants would face no additional hardship as a consequence of the proposed rent increase but this was subject to claimants of housing benefits personal circumstances remaining the same and their household being unaffected by welfare reform. The Housing Team had visited all tenants who would be affected by welfare reform to explain to them the level of support that they could access. During 2013/14 a garage review would be undertaken and further proposals, including long term rent levels, investment and redevelopment options would be brought to the Council in order to tackle the number of empty garages.

Councillor A.P. Shotton, Leader of the Council commented on the significant response to the housing ballot in the previous year and the expectation this had put on the Council to deliver the Choices document. He commented on the number of improvements being made to tenant's homes which provided the Council with sound evidence to demonstrate to the WG during future discussions that the Council could meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS). He raised concern around the current HRA Subsidy which meant that an estimated £6.1m of rent income was paid to the Treasury and said that he would continue to lobby the WG and WLGA to end the current HRA Subsidy system. He thanked the Cabinet Member for Housing, the Head of Housing, her team and the workforce for their hard work and said that he looked forward to continued improvements within the housing service in the future.

The Chief Executive thanked Members for their comments and spoke of the creative and ambitious way in which improvements had been made to the Housing Service. He reported that changes to the HRA Subsidy system were currently being considered by Welsh Government through an exit from the UK level system and further discussions between WG and the Council were planned. The Choices document had made it clear that the Council could only meet the WHQS through continued efficiencies within the service and there was sound evidence to present to the WG to show that this was being achieved.

In response to a question from Councillor R.B. Jones, the Head of Housing confirmed that the figure showing the increase in capital funding, as shown in the presentation, should have read '£1.355m' and not '£1.855m' (against fiscal outturns for 2012/13). She also confirmed that £500,000 of the additional capital funding available had been as a result of the 31 March, 2014 falling on a Monday so the HRA would benefit from the full rental income for that additional week within the 2013/14 budget year.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the proposed HRA budget for 2013/14, as set out in Appendix 1 of the Cabinet report, which incorporated the proposals for Service Improvements and Efficiencies, as shown in Appendix 2 of the Cabinet report, be approved;
- (b) That the level of rent charges for 2013/14, as set out in paragraphs 3.02 and 3.05 of the report be approved;
- (c) That the level of projected balances at 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2014 at 3.20% of total expenditure be approved; and
- (d) That the proposed HRA Capital Programme, as set out in Appendix 3 of the Cabinet report, be approved.

**127. UPDATING THE CONSTITUTION**

The Democracy and Governance Manager presented a number of proposed changes to the Council's Constitution pursuant to recommendations from the Constitution Committee, its Chairman and officers.

A review of the Council, Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules had been undertaken by the Democracy and Governance Manager in consultation with the relevant members, the Chief Executive and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services prior to consideration by the Constitution Committee at its meeting on the 30 January, 2013. Following the Constitution Committee meeting, Councillor C.S. Carver and officers identified four further amendments. These had been discussed with the Chairman of the Committee who recommended that the four amendments be made in addition to those agreed by the Committee. Details of all the proposed amendments were outlined within the report.

Councillor R.J.T. Guest proposed that the County Council support the recommendation outlined within the report. He commented on the proposed changes which included the amendments to cater for remote attendance and said that there was a need for further discussion around remote attendance prior to its introduction. The proposal was seconded by Councillor I. Dunbar.

**RESOLVED:**

That the changes recommended by the Constitution Committee and those recommended by its Chairman and officers to the Council, Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny procedure rules be approved.

**128. COMMUNITY REVIEW**

The Chief Executive introduced a report to inform Council of the planning arrangements for the community review.

It had been a number of years since the County Council last carried out a community review. The Council had committed to undertake a review with the intention of commencing such a review at the beginning of 2013.

The Democracy and Governance Manager reported that on the 29 November, 2012 the Welsh Government (WG) published the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Bill. That Bill replicated the existing provisions for community reviews in the 1972 Act but also adds provisions detailing the process that should be followed in conducting a community review. The Democracy and Governance Manager explained that the detailed provisions in the Bill about how a review must be conducted may be amended as part of the Parliamentary process leading to enactment. This could create a potential difficulty in that if the Council conducted a community review in accordance with the provisions in the Bill that work could prove abortive if those provisions were amended. The Chief Executive suggested that the Council request the WG to give an assurance that the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Bill would only apply to reviews commenced after the Bill had been passed. He also suggested that this matter could be raised during a coming meeting of the Welsh Local Government Association Council (WLGA) (NB avoid acronyms).

Councillor J.B. Attridge proposed that the County Council support the recommendation outlined within the report and request the Welsh Government to give an assurance that the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Bill would only apply to reviews commenced after the Bill had been passed. The proposal was seconded by Councillor R.J.T. Guest.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the County Council noted the current position of the community review; and
- (b) That the County Council request the Welsh Government to give an assurance that the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Bill would only apply to reviews commenced after the Bill had been passed.

**129. REVIEW OF INTERNAL MEMBER FORA**

The Democracy and Governance Manager presented the recommendations from the Constitution Committee as part of the ongoing review of internal Member fora.

At the Annual Council meeting on the 15 May, 2012 the Council agreed to the recommendation that a review of internal Member fora be undertaken by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services in consultation with Group Leaders and reports submitted to the Constitution Committee and Council. The report detailed Member fora considered by Group Leaders on the 29 January, 2013 and Constitution Committee on the 30 January, 2013.

Councillor J.B. Attridge proposed that the County Council support the recommendations as outlined within the report. This proposal was seconded by Councillor R.J.T. Guest.

Councillor N. Phillips thanked the Democracy and Governance Manager for the report and commented on the proposal for the ICT Panel to be reconstituted. He raised his concern that few Members had attended previous meetings of the Panel and urged Members to attend future meetings.

Councillor P.G. Heesom asked that the Cabinet Member for Environment consider and bring forward methods to enable the Council to have greater control on major planning applications. Councillor Attridge, Cabinet Member for Environment said that this matter could be considered by the Planning Strategy Group.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Planning Delegations Body be discontinued;
- (b) That Planning and Development Control Committee papers be made available to Members a week in advance of committee meetings;
- (c) That the Teachers Consultative Committee and Flintshire County Council Teachers' Consultative Committee be combined to cover all education staff not just teachers;
- (d) That the County Council recommend to Cabinet that the ICT Panel be reconstituted;
- (e) That the County Council recommend to Cabinet that the Waste Strategy Review Board and the Procurement Board be discontinued; and
- (f) That the County Council recommend to Cabinet that the following fora continued:-
  - The Joint Consultative Committee
  - The School Performance Monitoring Group
  - The Member/Officer Tenant Working
  - The Voluntary Sector Grants Panel
  - The Inclusion Service Steering Group
  - The Welsh in Education Strategic Forum
  - The Foster Care Panel
  - The Children's Forum
  - The Adoption Panel
  - The Health & Safety Board

**130. DURATION OF MEETING**

The meeting commenced at 2.00 p.m. and ended at 3.15 p.m.

131. **MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE**

There was one member of the press present.

.....

**Chair**