

CABINET
17 DECEMBER 2013

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of Flintshire County Council held at Clwyd Committee Room, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA on Tuesday, 17 December 2013

PRESENT: Councillor Aaron Shotton (Chairman)

Councillors Bernie Attridge (Deputy Leader), Chris Bithell, Helen Brown, Christine Jones and Kevin Jones

APOLOGIES: Councillors Derek Butler and Billy Mullin.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors Dave Mackie

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Director of Community Services, Director of Environment, Director of Lifelong Learning, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Head of Finance and Team Manager, Committee Services

128. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were received.

129. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2013 had been circulated with the agenda.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

130. ESTABLISHING THE PROPOSED HOUSING COMPANY

The Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the report which highlighted the legal and governance issues around the establishment of the proposed housing company and sought approval of its creation.

During its early years the company would be expected to own and let its own properties, lease and sub let properties and let and manage properties on behalf of private landlords.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that it was appropriate that the level of Council control should be very high, at least during the company's early years, which would mean it would be subject to a high level of regulation.

The Council would be able to exercise control over the company through ownership of shares and control of the board of directors. The right to cast the Council's vote as shareholder should be exercised by the Cabinet Member for Housing which would ensure that key decisions would be taken in accordance

with the wishes of the Cabinet. The board would be limited to five or seven positions with the majority being held by Councillors.

The company would buy any services it required from the Council with Council employees remaining employed by the Council but able to undertake functions on behalf of the company with that being built into their job descriptions.

At the recent Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the report was fully supported. Quarterly reports were requested through the regular performance monitoring mechanism, with additional reports if required.

Additional comments were that if in the future the company wanted to borrow money or may ask the Council to stand as guarantor, that Overview and Scrutiny be consulted and have full involvement throughout.

In response to a question on the company potentially borrowing money from the Council, the Head of Finance explained that research was currently being undertaken to establish the process followed by other Local Authorities.

Members welcomed the report and expressed their thanks to all of the officers and Members involved.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the housing company is established as a company limited by shares as set out in the report on the basis that the Council is assured of having a sufficient level of control of the body;
- (b) That the Chief Executive, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Head of Finance and Head of Housing in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing be given delegated authority to take all necessary steps to establish the company; and
- (c) That the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing be given delegated authority to approve the business plan.

131. ASSISTED GARDENING SERVICE

The Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the report which sought approval of the new Assisted Gardening Service.

The Assisted Gardening Service required modernising to align it with the changing needs of the population and implications of the Government's Welfare Reform proposals.

A review was necessary for the following reasons:

- Residential gardening services did not form part of Streetscene's core business and as a result they no longer wished to deliver the service

- There was no provision for ensuring the welfare of the tenant in carrying out visual checks of the building for security purposes
- The service did not allow for additional services such as garden clearance for antisocial tenants or void properties
- There were limitations on who was able to receive the service, with no option for other residents to pay for services if they required them
- Grass clippings were left in situ; a matter which had caused some dissatisfaction amongst tenants and elected Members
- The service did not provide value for money
- The cost of delivering the Service was met by all tenants whether they received it or not

Following the tender process during the summer, the cost of delivering a comparable service for grass and hedge cutting under the terms of the new contract had been calculated at £125k, enabling an annual saving of £125k. This included the cost of delivering the welfare element of the service.

Charging for the service could be fixed or variable. A fixed charge was based on how much the Council estimated it would reasonably cost to run the services in the scheme/block. The advantage of fixed charges for tenants was that they were simple to understand and easier to budget for and manage.

Variable service charges were based on the actual costs of a particular service so the tenant only paid for the service, plus any associated management fee. When operating a variable charge, the administration burden increased and this was therefore the less favoured option.

The report provided full details of examples of how much a disabled council tenant, a non disabled council tenant and a private resident would pay for grass cutting charges and hedge cutting charges.

An additional welfare element would compliment the new Community Based Accommodation Support Service (CBASS) which would ensure that the most vulnerable tenants were supported in ways to meet their needs. An example was a gardener who would check for evident signs of alarm, distress or unusual activity including a build up of post in the letter box, signs of forced entry etc. The gardener would report any signs of concern to Care Link or the Emergency Services so they could be acted upon immediately.

RESOLVED:

That the introduction of a chargeable gardening service to tenants and private Flintshire residents and the charging model set out in the report be supported.

132. MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSIONING PLAN - SERVICE UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Social Services introduced the Mental Health Commissioning Strategy and Summary documents which described the plans for the provision of training, education and work opportunities within the context of supporting recovery for services users with a mental health.

The strategy also aimed over time to address a gap in the area of accommodation support. The focus of the commissioning strategy excluded dementia or dementia related illnesses.

RESOLVED:

That the implementation of the Mental Health Commissioning Strategy be approved.

133. DEMENTIA COMMISSIONING PLAN

The Cabinet Member for Social Services introduced the Dementia Commissioning Strategy and summary documents which described the vision for long term care services for people living with dementia in Flintshire over the next five years.

The focus of the document was primarily residential care services but it recognised that much work was needed to improve the quality of life for people living with dementia in all settings.

The strategy document described an overall direction of travel for those services and it was acknowledged it would be subject to review on an ongoing basis.

The Director of Community Services advised of four amendments to the figures outlined in 2.3.1 of the appendix to the report which were:

- a. To read 28%, not 27%
- b. To read 28%, not 27%
- c. To read 44%, not 42%
- d. To read 72%, not 68%

Members welcomed the report, commenting in particular on the success of the 15 apartments for people with dementia to live independently at Llys Jasmine Extra Care in Mold.

RESOLVED:

That the Dementia Commissioning Strategy be approved.

134. TOGETHER FOR MENTAL HEALTH

The Cabinet Member for Social Services advised Members of the response of Flintshire with partners to the Welsh Government's Strategy "Together for Mental Health".

The vision set out in "Together for Mental Health" provided the strategic context for an ambitious mental health agenda for the next 10 years. It shared responsibility and accountability between the NHS and Local Government for driving forward improvements in mental health provision in North Wales.

The strategy highlighted a range of factors in people's lives which could affect mental health and wellbeing. These built on the 'Areas of Life' used in Care and Treatment Planning to improve the mental health and wellbeing of the whole population, full details of which were outlined in the report.

A specific improvement approach identified in the strategy was for Local Authorities to identify a "Mental Health Champion" and it was proposed that the elected Member for the portfolio for Social Services was best placed to take on the role. Full details of the responsibilities were outlined in the report.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Christine Jones be noted as having the responsibilities of Mental Health Champion as Portfolio holder for Social Services.

135. THE DUBLIN DECLARATION ON AGE FRIENDLY CITIES AND COMMUNITIES IN EUROPE 2013.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services provided background information on the Dublin Declaration on Age Friendly Cities and Communities in Europe 2013, and the invitation from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to every Council in Wales to sign the Declaration.

The Dublin Declaration reaffirmed commitment to adopt best practice, to collaborate with regional and international stakeholders, to communicate with regional and international stakeholders, and to communicate through local and regional channels to stimulate and promote equal rights and opportunities for older people living within communities.

The Dublin Declaration did not constitute a legally binding contract, however by becoming a signatory, the Council would be pledging a commitment to the aspirations and principles referred to in the Declaration.

RESOLVED:

That Flintshire County Council become a signatory to the Dublin Declaration.

136. REVIEW OF SUBSIDISED BUS SERVICES

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment provided an update on the review of subsidised bus services following the consultation exercise, and confirmed the proposed action to be taken in relation to specific bus services.

A wide consultation and subsequent review of subsidised bus services within the County had been undertaken in accordance with the Policy which was appended to the report.

Feedback to the consultation had been received, details of which were outlined in the report.

The report was presented to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13 November 2013 who resolved that:

- (a) Members support the implementation of the changes as set out within the report and supporting appendices; and
- (b) Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee will review service performance tables annually, including the actions taken by officers to improve the performance of services

A summary of the subsidised bus services within Flintshire was attached at Appendix 3 to the report.

The Director of Environment explained the Welsh Government (WG) Concessionary Travel Scheme which was designed to leave bus operators no better and no worse off as they currently recovered approximately 73% of the cost of the journey back through the concessionary fee per passenger. In Flintshire, the level of funding was £2 million per annum. WG had reviewed its Concessionary Travel Scheme and was likely to seek changes to the level of funding support given back to bus operators in the future. Current details were unclear but amendments to the financial level of support given to operators would have further consequences for bus services within the County with the potential for commercial and subsidised services to be affected. The situation would be monitored with a view to the proposals being amended should it be deemed necessary to do so.

Members praised officers and the Cabinet Member on the consultation exercise that had been undertaken.

RESOLVED:

That delegated authority be granted to the Director of Environment following consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment to implement the changes set out in the report taking account of any impacts from the Welsh Government review of Concessionary Travel.

137. THE AMALGAMATION OF YSGOL PERTH Y TERFYN INFANT SCHOOL AND YSGOL Y FRON JUNIOR SCHOOL IN HOLYWELL

The Cabinet Member for Education introduced the report which sought formal approval for the amalgamation of Ysgol Perth y Terfyn Infants and Ysgol y Fron Junior Schools to form a new primary school from September 2016.

The statutory notice to amalgamate the two schools did not attract any objections which Members felt reflected the enthusiasm of the residents of Holywell.

The Director of Lifelong Learning said this was an important milestone in the programme for primary schools. There would be a continuity of learning experience for families which was part of a wider programme in Holywell.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed amalgamation of Ysgol Perth y Terfyn Infant and Ysgol y Fron Junior Schools be approved.

138. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2013/14 (MONTH 6)

The Head of Finance provided the most up to date revenue budget monitoring information (Month 6) for the Council Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in 2013/14.

The projected year end position on the Council Fund, as estimated at Month 6 was:

- Net in year expenditure forecast to be £1.012m less than budget (a decrease of £0.062m on the £1.074m reported at Month 5)
- Projected contingency reserve balance at 31 March 2014 of £3.653m

The projected year end position on the HRA, as estimated at Month 6 was:

- Net in year expenditure forecast to under spend the budget by £0.062m (£0.014 m under spend reported at Month 5)
- Projected HRA balances at 31 March 2014 of £1.495m

The report provided details on the projected positive variance of expenditure against budget of £1.012m, programme of efficiencies, inflation, monitoring budget assumptions and new risks, and unearmarked reserves.

On the HRA, for 2013/14 there was an overall projected under spend of £0.062m and a projected closing balance at Month 6 of £1.495m, which at 5.2% of total expenditure satisfied the prudent approach of ensuring a minimum level of 3%.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That the projected Council Fund contingency sum as at 31 March 2014 be noted; and
- (c) That the projected final level of balances on the Housing Revenue Account be noted.

139. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2013/14 (MONTH 6)

The Head of Finance provided information on the Month 6 (end of September) capital programme information for 2013/14 which detailed the cumulative information relating to each programme as shown in appendix A to the report.

Details of how the programme had changed since the Month 4 report to Cabinet on 15 October 2013 were outlined and had resulted in a net increase of £1.267m (Council Fund - £1.267m, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) - £0.0m).

Actual expenditure at the end of September (Month 6) across the whole of the programme was £13.196m. The breakdown of expenditure was detailed in the report which showed that 28.85% of the budget had been spent across the programme (Council Fund – 35.03%, HRA 39.44%).

The report also showed that there was a projected outturn of £43.629m. On the Council Fund there was a projected underspend against budget of £3.111m and the projection for the HRA was to spend up to target. Details of the variances for individual programme areas were listed in appendix B to the report which included the reasons and the required remedial action where those variances exceeded 10% of the budget.

£3.110m of rollover had been identified which reflected reviewed spending plans across all programme areas. Those committed amounts had been identified as now required to meet the cost of the programme works in 2014/15. The potential for further rollover was monitored closely on a monthly basis as an integral part of capital programme monitoring.

At the County Council meeting on 1 March 2013 it was agreed to hold back 20% of core programme funding in the light of the continuing uncertainty over the timing of receipts. Cabinet agreed on 15 October 2013 that the 20% should continue to be held back to keep the programme within the limits of anticipated receipts. The position at Month 6 did not allow for any revision to that position which would be closely monitored and would be reported on in future monitoring reports and would become part of the capital programme considerations for 2014/15.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted and approved;
- (b) That the continued holding back of 20% of the core programme be approved; and
- (c) That the rollover adjustments be approved.

140. NEW BUSINESS RATE GRANT SCHEMES

The Head of Finance provided details of two new Welsh Government (WG) business rate schemes, 'Open for Business' and 'New Developments' which were designed to bring long-term empty properties back into use and stimulate construction and development in Wales.

The schemes were in response to the recommendations from the Business Rates Task and Finish Group that examined how the business rates system in Wales could be used to encourage economic development.

The first scheme, 'Open for Business', was focused on bringing long term unoccupied retail properties back into use and especially supporting new businesses in the first year of trading. It would provide 50% rate relief for all eligible retail properties for up to 12 months from the date of occupation. The retail properties would have had to have been unoccupied for a continuous period of 12 months or more and have a rateable value of no more than £45,000.

The second scheme, 'New Developments', was designed to incentivise new and speculative developments in a bid which could boost construction in Wales and which would exempt from business rates all newly built but vacant commercial property, completed on or after 1 October 2013 and before 1 October 2016 for the first 18 months following completion.

In response to a question, the Head of Finance explained that 560 empty properties had been identified and a letter would be sent to each the following day about the 'Open for Business' scheme. On the 'New Developments' scheme, Revenues and Benefits were working with Economic Development to seek to maximise the availability of information of those who could potentially benefit from it.

RESOLVED:

That the implementation of both the 'Open for Business' scheme and 'New Developments' scheme be supported by adopting the scheme resolution as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

141. EXERCISE OF DELEGATED POWERS

An information report on the actions taken under delegated powers was submitted. The actions were as set out below:-

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|--------------------|---|
| Corporate | - Business Rates – Write Offs |
| | - Organisational Change Strategy Consultancy Support |
| Environment | - Sychdyn – Proposed Traffic Calming |
| | - Sainsbury Supermarkets Ltd Site Redevelopment, Mold |
| | - Granting of Lease of Former Youth Service Premises, Mostyn (Community Asset Transfer) |
| | - Lease of Former Bagillt Library – Community Asset Transfer |

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

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded for the remainder of the meeting for the following items by virtue of exempt information under paragraph 12 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

143. AGRICULTURAL ESTATE MANAGEMENT

That Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment introduced the report which sought approval for the disposal of part of the estate.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the sale of Wood Farm and associated land extending to approximately 14.45 acres be approved;
- (b) That, in association with this disposal, the grant of a new three year lease of 34.22 acres approximately be approved; and
- (c) That the surrender of the remaining land extending to 65 acres, and its sale on the open market, be approved.

144. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were two members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 9.30 am and ended at 10.45 am)

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Chairman