

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
13 JULY 2016

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 CH7 6NA on Wednesday, 13th July, 2016

PRESENT: Councillor Ron Hampson (Chairman)

Councillors: David Cox, Paul Cunningham, Peter Curtis, Rosetta Dolphin, Ian Dunbar, George Hardcastle, Ray Hughes, Hilary Isherwood, Sara Parker, Mike Reece, and David Roney

SUBSTITUTE: Councillors David Healey (for Ron Davies)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Jim Falshaw.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Andy Dunbobbin

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Helen Brown, Cabinet Member for Housing; Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development; Chief Executive; Chief Officer (Community & Enterprise); Corporate Finance Manager; Revenues Manager; Service Manager - Housing Programmes and Service Manager - Customer Support

IN ATTENDANCE: Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillors Helen Brown and David Healey declared a personal interest in the following item:

Item 6 – Discretionary rate Relief Policy

10. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 June 2016 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

RESOLVED:

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

11. COUNCIL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2017/18

The Chief Executive introduced the report which provided an update on the financial forecast for the 2017/18 financial year together with the budget pressures and the proposed efficiencies for the Community and Enterprise portfolio in the third and final year of the current business planning cycle.

The Chief Executive provided background information and context. He referred to a forecast 'gap' of £14.4M between anticipated income and cost pressures, and the current working 'gap' of £8.1M between the forecast 'gap' and combined total of working corporate and service portfolio efficiency proposals of £6.3M. He explained that the Authority was in a position where it had exhausted all the opportunities for further savings through organisational change and efficiencies and was now seeking to commence negotiation at a national level to outline the concern that the Authority could not provide the statutory services within its budget allocation.

The Chief Executive invited the Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) to give a presentation on the 2017/18 Council Fund Budget pressures and efficiencies for the Community and Enterprise portfolio. The Chief Officer advised that the purpose of the presentation was to explain the proposals for the Community and Enterprise portfolio and the ongoing work on Community and Enterprise Financial Planning and Stewardship. The main points of the presentation were:

- Local context
- Current plans
- Community & Enterprise - Business plan efficiencies and pressures
 - Enterprise, Regeneration and Strategic Housing - Business plan efficiencies 2017/18 and resilience statement
- Customer Business Plan
 - Revenues service efficiencies 2017/18, and resilience statement
 - Benefits Service efficiencies 2017/18, and resilience statement
 - Benefits cost pressure
 - Customer Services efficiencies 2017/18, and resilience statement

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive and the Chief Officer for their presentation and invited Members to raise questions.

Councillor Ian Dunbar referred to the provision of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless people and asked what alternatives had been considered to reduce the cost. He also commented on the scope to achieve savings through collaborative working with neighbouring councils and asked if collaboration with services was currently working between Flintshire and other local authorities. The Service Manager - Customer Support advised that property leasing was being extended to minimise bed and breakfast but there was concern about the lack of affordable accommodation for under 35s. The Chief Officer reported on the collaborative work which was undertaken with Denbighshire County Council and said consideration was also being given to collaboration with other larger projects and cited revenue services and benefits services as examples. The Chief Executive referred to discussion at national and regional level concerning what could be done on a combined authority level and commented that although it was complex and took time it generally worked well.

In response to a question from Cllr Rosetta Dolphin around whether the Council's own Bailiff Service could be used to address law enforcement matters concerning traveller communities, the Service Manager - Housing Programmes agreed to explore this further following the meeting.

In response to the concerns expressed by Councillor David Healey concerning the 'risk' to provision of services, the Chief Executive reiterated the need for a strong evidenced case to be put forward for engagement with the Welsh Government.

Councillor Paul Cunningham raised a query concerning the proposed changes to the Welfare Rights Team. The Service Manager - Customer Support agreed to provide the Committee with an update report on the commissioning of Citizen's Advice for Welfare Rights services. Councillor Cunningham commented on the need for the Authority to be mindful of the welfare of its employees who may have taken on additional workloads as a result of a reduced workforce. Councillor Hilary Isherwood sought assurance that those people who required a home visit because they were not able to visit the Citizen's Advice in person would still be able to receive support from a member of the staff visiting them at home.

During discussion, the Chief Officer and Revenues Manager responded to the questions raised by the Chair concerning the Universal Credit payment and the single person discount benefit for Council tax.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Community and Enterprise Business Plans cost pressures and proposed efficiencies for 2017/18 be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee accepts the evidence presented, that the Council cannot go beyond the current business plans without putting services at risk.

12. STRATEGIC HOUSING AND REGENERATION PROGRAMME (SHARP)

The Service Manager - Housing Programmes presented a report on the next key stages of the Council's Strategic Housing and Regeneration Programme (SHARP) and on proposals to develop council housing at the following sites:

- Ysgol Delyn, Mold
- Heol y Goron, Leeswood
- Maes y Meilion Leeswood
- Redhall, Connah's Quay
- The Dairy, Connah's Quay

The Service Manager reported on the main considerations. He explained that the report provided information on each of the proposed schemes, identified prudential borrowing as the preferred funding option, and detailed the Development Scheme Assumptions against which the viability of each scheme would be measured and assessed. He also drew attention to the detail in the report around future potential funding support from the Welsh Government to support new developments for local authorities.

Councillor David Roney welcomed the report and the forthcoming proposals. He reported that he had not received an update on the proposed

housing scheme in Mostyn. The Service Manager explained the reasons for the delay and agreed to provide Councillor Roney and all Members who had schemes waiting in their ward with an update following the meeting. The Chief Officer acknowledged the concerns and agreed to take on board the comments from Members around staff resources/capacity in delivering the project.

During discussion, officers responded to questions raised by Councillor Hilary Isherwood around the Right to Buy scheme.

Councillor George Hardcastle commented on the recent Welfare Reform Workshop and asked that the Committee's thanks for the information provided to Members be passed back to all staff involved.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee support the development of 40 new Council homes on the 5 identified sites in Mold, Leeswood and Connah's Quay at a projected total cost of £6,376,931M; and
- (b) That the Committee support the use of prudential borrowing to the value of £6,376,931M (subject to final approval and verification) to fund the proposed development of 40 new Council homes.

13. DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY

The Revenues Manager introduced a report on the proposed new policy for 2017-18 and future years following the review of the affordability of the current policy of rate relief for charities, voluntary groups and not for profits organisations. He advised that the recommendations contained within the new policy framework focussed on ceasing Discretionary 'top ups' to those organisations that already benefit from 80% Mandatory Rate Relief and reducing all other Discretionary awards to Voluntary and Not for Profits organisations to a maximum Discretionary award of 80% from 2017-18. The Revenues Manager explained that this would mean that all organisations are expected to make a 20% payment contribution towards business rates. This proposal would contribute to the requirement to achieve efficiency savings across all service areas.

The Revenues Manager referred to the main considerations, as detailed in the report, and advised that the Council recognised the important role that all Charities, Voluntary Groups and Not For Profit organisations play in the communities they serve and to ensure the long term sustainability of these sectors the separate introduction of a framework to deal with any hardship cases will also provide a 'safety net' in appropriate cases.

The Chair thanked the Revenues Manager for his report and invited Members to raise questions.

Councillor David Roney expressed concerns around the possible detrimental impact of the new policy on Community Asset Transfers. The Chief Officer responded to the comments raised and referred to detailed discussions taking place around the business plans which had already been formulated. She advised that each scheme would be looked at on a case by case basis and

commented on the Council's discretionary powers to award Business Rates Hardship Rate Relief in exceptional circumstances.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee support the adoption of the new policy framework ceasing Discretionary 'top-ups' to those organisation that already benefit from 80% Mandatory Rate Relief and reducing all other Discretionary awards to Voluntary and Not for Profit organisations to a maximum Discretionary award of 80% from 2017-18.

14. HARDSHIP RATE RELIEF POLICY

The Revenues Manager introduced a report on the proposed Hardship Rate Relief Policy for 2016-17 and future years. He provided background information and advised that the introduction of a formal policy framework had been developed to ensure consistency, transparency and best practice. It also provided an opportunity to formalise into a single policy framework well established procedures and regulations for the determination of applications. The Revenues Manager reported that the framework will ensure all ratepayers making applications for Hardship Rate Relief are treated fairly and consistently as well as providing ratepayers with a clearer understanding of the scheme.

In response to a question raised by Councillor David Roney, the Revenues Manager confirmed that an appeals process was in place if a ratepayer was not satisfied with the Council's decision.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee support the introduction of the policy framework for Hardship Rate Relief.

15. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In presenting the current Forward Work Programme for consideration, the Facilitator advised that the Quarter 4/Year End Improvement Plan Monitoring Report, Performance Report 2015/16, and an update on the Housing Regeneration Programmes, would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 14 September 2016.

The Committee agreed that the Facilitator would circulate a copy of the Forward Work Programme to the Committee Members, to ask if they would like to include any items in the Forward Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted; and
- (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.

16. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the public or press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.57 pm)

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Chairman