

SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
31 OCTOBER 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Wednesday, 31 October 2018

PRESENT: Councillor Carol Ellis (Chair)

Councillors: Mike Allport, Marion Bateman, Jean Davies, Gladys Healey, Cindy Hinds, Kevin Hughes, Dave Mackie, Martin White and David Wisinger

SUBSTITUTES: Councillor David Healey (for Ian Smith), Paul Johnson (for Andy Dunbobbin) and Ted Palmer (for Mike Lowe)

APOLOGY: Councillor Rita Johnson

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Christine Jones, Cabinet Member for Social Services; Chief Executive; Chief Officer (Social Services); Senior Manager – Safeguarding and Commissioning and Accountant (Social Services)

IN ATTENDANCE: Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Community & Education Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

29. BUDGET 2019/20 STAGE 2 PROPOSALS

Prior to the introduction of the report, the Chair commented on the detail of the report and asked whether any additional information would be circulated at the meeting. The Chief Officer (Social Services) explained that method statements and resilience statements supporting the 2019/20 budget pressures and efficiency proposals had been produced as background documents with copies available on request. The Chief Executive advised that the efficiency proposals detailed within the report were small and modest which posed small or no risk.

The Chief Officer introduced a report to advise of the financial pressures and efficiencies identified for the Social Services portfolio for the 2019/20 budget. He advised that Member workshops were held on 13 and 23 July and 18 September, 2018 where information on the latest local financial forecast in the context of the overall national position was provided. An additional workshop specifically for the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee was held on 10 October, 2018 which provided Members with the opportunity to understand the portfolio budgets in more detail and consider the risk and resilience levels of each service area.

The Chief Officer and Senior Manager – Safeguarding and Commissioning provided a detailed explanation around the portfolio pressures and investments, together with the portfolio business planning efficiencies and those arising from

Welsh Government (WG) policy, as outlined within the report. The Chief Officer emphasised the need to continue to provide affordable, quality care services for residents across Flintshire.

Councillor David Healey commented on the financial pressures from Out of County placements and asked whether the Health Board made any financial contribution if a placement was due to the health needs of an individual. The Chief Officer explained that financial contributions were made by the Health Board, Social Service and Education Service where appropriate. There was a need for the Health Board to contribute a fair amount to ensure the Council was not left with an unnecessary financial burden.

In response to a question from Councillor Dave Mackie on the total amount shown for Out of County placements, the Chief Officer explained that the total shown included the financial pressure for the Education portfolio for the educational element of Out of County placements.

Councillor Kevin Hughes thanked all officers within the Social Services department who had continued to provide an excellent service. He commented on the financial pressures of Out of County placements and asked whether options to work collaboratively with Wrexham County Borough Council had been explored in order to reduce the pressure. The Chief Officer thanked Councillor Hughes for his comments which he would pass on to all officers following the meeting. He said that there was potential for further collaborative working with Wrexham and other North Wales Council's but that work was ongoing through the Senior Manager – Children and Workforce to assist current social care providers with the skills necessary to expand their businesses in Flintshire.

In response to a question from the Chair around collaboration with neighbouring authorities, the Chief Officer explained that collaborative working had been ongoing but that the successful financial bid through the Additional Learning Needs and Disability Act enabled greater opportunities going forward.

The Chief Executive advised that the proposed efficiencies, outlined within the report, were modest, and said that the total efficiencies made within the portfolio for the period 2015/16 – 2017/18 of £4.223m were not insignificant whilst protecting Social Care and Education budgets. The recommendations on proposed stage 2 efficiencies from all Overview & Scrutiny Committees would be presented to Cabinet and Council in November.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee support the portfolio efficiency options, as shown in the report; and
- (b) That the Committee congratulate the work undertaken by all of the Social Services Team in the current financial circumstances.

NATIONAL BUDGET UPDATE

The Chief Executive provided an update to the Committee following the announcement of the Welsh Government (WG) Provisional Settlement on 2nd October and the UK Government Budget announcement on 29th October, 2018.

On 2nd October, 2018, the WG published its outline draft budget for 2019/20 (Provisional Settlement) which increased the Council's budget gap to £13.7m and did not provide any additional funding for the teachers' pay award. The UK Chancellor presented his budget statement on 29th October, which included an additional £554m for Wales, made up of £486m revenue and £68m capital. This equated to £33m of 'new money' and it was hoped that following the First Minister's previous comments that Local Government would be 'first in the queue' for any consequential funding coming from the Chancellor's statement, that it would be pass-ported to Local Authorities.

Continued pressure was being put on WG to provide the following:-

- The extra £30m being held for social care in Wales be paid out to Councils (which is worth an estimated £1.3m for Flintshire);
- The extra £15m being held for schools in Wales was paid out to councils (worth an estimated £0.800m for Flintshire and our schools);
- An extra £13m was found so that no council faced an annual reduction in their government grant (worth an estimated £1.9m for Flintshire); and
- The extra £33m 'consequential' funds coming to Wales as a result of the recent Chancellor's budget was paid out to councils as committed by WG (worth an estimated £1.6m for Flintshire).

The Chief Executive explained that options to increase Council Tax levels had been explored but reminded Members that during the workshops there had been very little appetite for this but that this may have to be considered in order to set a legal balanced budget.

Councillor Kevin Hughes commented on the importance of all Members working collectively to inform members of the public what the Council had done, and would continue to do, to protect services despite continued reductions in funding and also explain the rationale behind a high Council Tax increase, if that was necessary. A number of Members spoke in support of Councillor Hughes comments, agreeing that information for Members to include in their monthly newsletters would be helpful.

The Chief Executive explained that the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), with the full support of its membership has spoken of the Provisional Settlement being inadequate to meet the needs of Local Government in Wales. Alongside the WLGA, the Council has been sending letters and lobbying local Assembly Members to demonstrate the risks to public services. Officers were currently working on a media pack for Members to assist in getting the message out to the public, which included digital tools. The Chief Executive also asked Members not to underestimate the power of social media which would be utilised as part of the Council's campaign.

Councillor Paul Johnson said that he had recently attended the Hustings meetings for the forthcoming election of First Minister to the WG and reported that a number of questions were raised around additional funding for Local Authorities. All 3 candidates gave a commitment that additional funding for Local Authorities would be a priority. The Chief Executive commented that there was a genuine interest from WG to provide additional funding, and that there was flexibility within their own budget to do this.

The Committee thanked the Chief Executive for his update on the latest budget position.

30. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.16 pm)

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Chair