

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14 JANUARY 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Remote Meeting on Thursday, 14 January 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Clive Carver (Chairman)

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Sean Bibby, Geoff Collett, Mared Eastwood, Patrick Heesom, Richard Jones, Kevin Rush, Paul Shotton, Andy Williams and Arnold Woolley

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Joe Johnson for Andy Dunbobbin

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Ian Roberts (Leader and Cabinet Member for Education), Councillor Carolyn Thomas (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Countryside), Councillor Billy Mullin (Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets), Councillor Glyn Banks (Cabinet Member for Finance), Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Governance), Corporate Finance Manager, Senior Manager for Human Resources & Organisational Development, and Strategic Finance Manager

IN ATTENDANCE: Head of Democratic Services, Civic & Member Services Officer and Democratic Services Officer

Prior to the start of the meeting the Chair expressed condolences on the recent sad loss of Councillor Kevin Hughes. He asked Members to join him in one minutes silence in tribute to Councillor Hughes life and achievements.

46. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None.

47. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2020 were submitted.

Accuracy

Page 6: Councillor Richard Jones referred to the Forward Work Programme and explained that in addition to his comments on the Council Plan he had also said that the Committee needed to focus on the wider issues of major financial value in the budget.

Councillor Ian Roberts responded to the further comments made by Councillor Jones regarding the creation of a North Wales super authority and referred to the proposal to create Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs). Councillor Jones raised concerns around the need to retain local scrutiny on decision making. Councillor Roberts gave an assurance that the opportunity for local scrutiny would continue

and evolve, however, he felt that matters such as strategic planning could be addressed on a regional level.

The minutes were moved by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor Geoff Collett.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above amendment the minutes be approved as a correct record.

48. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Democratic Services presented the report, He referred to the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 11 February, and advised that an additional item to provide a risk update would be included on the programme for the meeting.

Referring to discussion at the previous item on the proposal to create Corporate Joint Committee's (CJC's), the Chief Officer (Governance) said the Authority's response to the Welsh Government's consultation on CJs could be sent to the Committee which highlighted issues around local autonomy, accountability, cost and bureaucracy.

Reiterating his comments at the previous meeting Councillor Jones said that the Council Plan should be clearly aligned with portfolios and commented on the need for clearer accountability, citing the example of the need for the Council Plan to be aligned with the Well Being Strategy to allow scrutiny to work properly. Councillor Jones also said that the Forward Work Programme (FWP) should also identify the biggest financial risks regularly during the year. The Chief Officer indicated that the appropriate officers would agree clear lines of accountability between Council Plan themes and portfolios and the Overview & Scrutiny Committees. He also reminded Members that the Council Plan was proposed by Cabinet and submitted to Council for approval, and that it was thus for Cabinet to choose its format.

In response to the comments and concerns made by Councillor Jones It was agreed that the FWP be approved with the inclusion of future items on Council Plan themes, alignment with Overview & Scrutiny Committees, wider issues of financial risk, and emerging guidance on CJs. On that basis, the Committee supported the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

- (a) The Committee approves the Forward Work Programme with the inclusion of future items on Council Plan themes, alignment with Overview & Scrutiny Committees; wider issues of financial risk and emerging guidance on CJs; and
- (b) That the Head of Democratic Services in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings.

49. ACTION TRACKING

The Head of Democratic Services presented the report on progress with actions arising from previous meetings. He advised that all actions had been completed.

The recommendation was supported by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the progress which has been made.

50. OVERVIEW OF OPEN RISKS FROM THE EMERGENCY PERIOD AND RECONCILIATION OF EMERGENCY GRANT FUNDING

The Corporate Finance Manager gave a presentation on the open risks from the emergency period and reconciliation of Emergency Grant funding, together with analysis of longer term risks in the risk register. The presentation covered the following main points:

- National funding announcements
- update on Hardship Fund claims
- update on income loss claims
- approved contingency reserve £3m
- update on key finance risks
- assumptions in budget planning 2021/22

Councillor Paul Shotton thanked Officers for their work in resolving claims.

The Corporate Finance Manager provided further clarification in response to the questions raised by Councillor Richard Jones on Council Tax collection rates and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

Councillor Glyn Banks expressed thanks to the Corporate Finance Manager and his team for the achievements gained on Council Tax income. He also expressed thanks to the Welsh Government (WG) for the payment of claims submitted.

The Chief Officer commented on the role and use of reserves in maintaining the Authority's financial position in conjunction with the financial support received from the WG as a result of the unprecedented demands of the pandemic. He emphasised the importance of maintaining a prudent level of reserves to meet unknown contingencies in the future.

Councillor Ian Roberts expressed his thanks to the Financial Services team for their hard work and support in dealing with matters relating to Council Tax, rent, and business grants, during the pandemic.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor Richard Jones.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation and its contents be received with thanks.

51. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2020/21 (MONTH 8)

The Strategic Finance Manager introduced a report on the latest budget monitoring position for 2020/21 on the Revenue Budget as at Month 8. He referred to the Council Fund projected position which had an operating surplus of £0.27m (excluding the impact of the pay award which would be met by reserves) and a projected contingency reserve available balance as at 31 March 2021 of £1.65m. He advised that all non-essential spend continued to be reviewed and challenged and this had helped to reduce the overall position by about £720k with delayed spend and vacancy management. The Strategic Finance Manager presented the key considerations as detailed in the Revenue Budget Monitoring Report which was appended to the report.

Councillor Paul Shotton referred to page 39 of the report and asked for further information on the additional disposal expenditure incurred by Streetscene and Transportation as a result of increased kerbside waste collections due to people working and remaining at or close to home. He also referred to the impact of the pandemic on Arriva bus services and on Streetscene operatives due to the high transmission rate of the Covid-19 virus.

In response to the comments made by Councillor Richard Jones regarding the waste collection service during the Christmas and New Year period Councillor Carolyn Thomas advised that a statement made by the Chief Officer at Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee which explained the decisions and arrangements made, was available on the Authority's website and reported in the local press. Councillor Ian Roberts suggested that a Member seminar be arranged in due course on Christmas waste collection and the financial implications. He commented on the hard work of officers and Streetscene operatives during the Christmas and New Year period in harsh Winter conditions and throughout the pandemic and thanked all involved for their sterling efforts.

Councillor Richard Jones referred to the £0.200m grant funding from WG towards the Teachers Pay Award with the remainder to be met from Schools delegated budgets and the impact this would have on Schools. He also referred to out-of county placements and asked if consideration had been given to lobbying the WG to ask that national funding be made available, or a funding cap, or additional support, to help local authorities meet the cost. In response to a suggestion from the Chair the Chief Executive asked the Corporate Finance Manager to contact fellow 151 Officers to provide an overview of in-year overspend on Children's Services.

Councillor Richard Jones proposed that the Committee should send a letter to support lobbying of the Welsh Government for consideration of a funding cap or additional support for Out of County placements. This was seconded by Councillor Mared Eastwood and when put to the vote was carried.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That having considered the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2020/21 (Month 8) report, the Committee confirms that there are no specific matters which it wishes to have raised at Cabinet and
- (b) That a Member seminar on Christmas waste collections and financial arrangements be arranged in due course.

52. EMPLOYMENT AND WORKFORCE MID-YEAR UPDATE

The Senior Manager, Human Resources and Organisational Development presented a report to provide strategic updates in addition to the quarterly workforce statistics and their analysis. The format of the report and the accompanying Workforce Information Dashboard reports (as appended to the report) were intended to focus on organisational performance and trends. The dashboards were a visual presentation of data showing the current status and historical trends of the Council's performance against key performance indicators. The Senior Manager presented the main considerations as detailed in the report.

Councillor Arnold Woolley suggested that thanks be recorded to all the Authority's employees (including Agency staff) for their hard work and commitment in challenging circumstances during the pandemic.

It was agreed that an open letter from the Leader of the Council be sent to the people of Flintshire, thanking them for co-operating with the regulations and restrictions which have been caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Following a suggestion by the Chair, the Service Manager agreed to look at a re-ordering of the dashboard.

Councillor Sean Bibby moved the recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Paul Shotton.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received and employees be thanked for their diligence in dealing with changing circumstances during the emergency.

53. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at Time Not Specified and ended at Time Not Specified)

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Chairman