

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
19 SEPTEMBER 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Thursday, 19 September 2019

PRESENT: Councillor Clive Carver (Chairman)

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Bob Connah, Paul Cunningham, Mared Eastwood, Patrick Heesom, Paul Johnson, Richard Jones, Vicky Perfect, Andy Williams and Arnold Woolley

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor: David Wisinger (for Michelle Perfect)

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Geoff Collett; Aaron Shotton; Ian Roberts, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education; Billy Mullin, Cabinet Member for Corporate Management & Assets; and Chief Officer (Governance)

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Carolyn Thomas, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene & Countryside; Councillor Glyn Banks, Cabinet Member for Finance; Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection; Councillor Christine Jones, Cabinet Member for Social Services; Chief Executive; Corporate Finance Manager; and Finance Manager

For minute number 36

Community and Business Protection Manager; Community Safety Team Leader; Regional Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Advisor; District Inspector Gareth Cust of North Wales Police; Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator; and Partnership Manager for Wrexham and Flintshire, North Wales Fire & Rescue Service

For minute numbers 40 & 41

Business Information & Compliance Adviser; and HR Business Partner

For minute number 42

Service Delivery Manager, Highways & Waste; Integrated Transport Unit Manager; and Regulated Services Manager

Chief Officer (Social Services); Senior Manager (Children & Workforce); and Senior Manager, Inclusion & Progression

IN ATTENDANCE: Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officer

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Williams declared a personal interest on Agenda Item 11 (Significant Variances) due to his links with a business providing school transport.

34. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 11 July and 12 August 2019 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

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

35. ACTION TRACKING

The Democratic Services Manager presented the progress report on actions arising from previous meetings.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the progress which has been made.

36. COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT

The Chief Executive introduced the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) annual report which provided an overview of activities over the past 12 months. The statutory duties of the CSP were discharged through the Public Services Board led by Flintshire.

Members were introduced to Sian Jones, Community and Business Protection Manager; Richard Powell, Community Safety Team Leader; Rhiannon Edwards, Regional Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Advisor; District Inspector Gareth Cust of North Wales Police; Gerwyn Davies, Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator; and Mike White, Partnership Manager for Wrexham and Flintshire, North Wales Fire & Rescue Service.

A detailed presentation covered the following areas:

- Context
- Community Safety Delivery Groups
- Achievements
- Performance
- Interaction with the Safer Communities Board
- Local priorities for 2018/19

The Community Safety Team Leader reported a reduction in victim-based crime in Flintshire over the past year with the reduction in anti-social behaviour seen across North Wales. He gave an overview of interaction with the Safer Communities Board on priority areas to address violence against women, vulnerable adults and young people, as well as protecting communities.

Councillor Johnson spoke about the links between poverty, inequality and crime. In response to comments on hate crime, the appointment of a Community

Cohesion Officer for Flintshire (using Welsh Government funding) would help to encourage communities to report incidents.

Inspector Gareth Cust spoke about the various methods of reporting crime and raising awareness in schools of issues such as hate crime and County Lines. He also advised of a training programme with police officers in Flintshire to identify the impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE).

In acknowledging the pressures on Police resources, Councillor Richard Jones referred to a late addendum to the Council Plan Monitoring report later on the agenda, in which some Police performance data was missing. This included the number of reported incidents of domestic abuse and sexual violence which was a priority area.

Whilst referring to the complexity of the topic, the Chief Executive spoke about the need to understand the integrity of the data provided by North Wales Police and that an accurate figure would need to be shared with the Committee once available.

The Regional Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Advisor agreed that more clarity was needed on this data due to the way that incidents were recorded. To resolve this, analysts were reviewing the approach to recording incidents to incorporate all elements of domestic violence and provide an accurate picture.

Councillor Richard Jones said that an explanation should have been included to help understanding of the report in order to compare performance year on year. The Chief Executive agreed and said that at this point the Committee could only accept the figure in the original report with the caveat about ongoing data analysis.

Inspector Cust referred to significant changes in crime recording and compliance with regulation standards. His offer to provide year to date figures on domestic abuse and sexual violence incidents was noted.

In response to a question from Councillor Bateman, information was given on different forms of Modern Slavery and the development of an e-learning package to help officers to recognise signs of these offences. The Chief Executive spoke about cases in recent years and the sharing of intelligence across the region.

On a question from Councillor Johnson on the Youth Justice Service, the Chief Executive said that a reduction in national funding had resulted in a move to more regional work and the Council increasing its funding allocation to make up for some of the shortfall to protect the service.

Following comments by Councillor Wisinger on exploring new ways to support young people, the Chief Executive said that the annual report provided a high-level overview of work and that consideration could be given to sharing details of work on key themes, perhaps through Overview & Scrutiny.

Councillor Bithell highlighted examples of important day-to-day work such as Neighbourhood Wardens providing support and practical help to vulnerable households in fear of crime.

In welcoming the positive report, Councillor Thomas referred to the Council's key role on many crime initiatives and the range of preventative services.

The recommendations, which were changed to reflect the debate, were moved by Councillor Richard Jones and seconded by Councillor Cunningham who applauded the work of the partnership.

The Chairman thanked the contributors for their attendance.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee supports the achievements of the Community Safety Partnership over the last twelve months.

37. VARIATION IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chair indicated that there would be a slight change in the order of business to move the next agenda item (Forward Work Programme) to the end of the meeting to enable representatives to speak on the remaining items.

38. YEAR-END COUNCIL PLAN MONITORING REPORT 2018/19

The Chief Executive presented a high-level summary of year-end progress on the Council Plan which provided analysis on areas of under-performance relevant to the Committee. The Committee received a revised addendum comprising minor changes. An overview was given of the performance indicators with a red status, some of which would be achieved over time as work was ongoing. All the red risks were recurring issues with some subject to a delayed impact or external factors.

Councillor Richard Jones reiterated his earlier concerns about the sharing of late information which needed to be read alongside the report. In response to comments about the revised corporate appraisal model, the Chief Executive said that this would improve the quality of appraisals and links with training, and that the 100% completion target would remain. On the number of people kept in hospital while waiting for social care, the Chief Executive said that reference to comparison with the Welsh average was relevant and that a significant amount of work was ongoing due to the multiple issues involved. Councillor Jones suggested that the matter be referred to the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Heesom raised concerns about the lack of information on high-risk areas under the Ambitious Council theme such as the North Wales Growth Plan which was critical to the economy of Flintshire.

The Chief Executive reminded Councillor Heesom that the report was to summarise year-end progress on the content of the Council Plan, as agreed by County Council. He gave a brief update on progress with the Growth Deal from which Flintshire would benefit. In response to further comments, Councillor Thomas provided clarification on the national development framework and responded to comments on funding sought from Welsh Government for flood alleviation works.

On the red performance indicators, Councillor Banks reported positive progress with the Council house development in Gronant and the completion of Disabled Facilities Grants.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Heesom and seconded by Councillor Johnson.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received and Cabinet be informed that the Committee had remitted investigation into the delayed transfer of care (IP1.5.2.1 M01 (PAM/025) to the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

39. ANNUAL IMPROVEMENT REPORT OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES 2018-10

The Chief Executive presented the Annual Improvement Report which summarised the audit and regulatory work undertaken by the Wales Audit Office at the Council in 2018/19. The report concluded positively that 'the Council is meeting its statutory requirements in relation to continuous improvement but, as with all council in Wales, it faces challenges going forward'. No formal recommendations were made. The Council's response to voluntary suggestions for improvement comprised a number of low-level actions.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee is assured by the Auditor General for Wales' Annual Improvement Report for 2018/19.

40. EMPLOYMENT AND WORKFORCE QUARTERLY UPDATE

The Business Information & Compliance Adviser presented the workforce information report on Quarter 1 of 2019/20 which focussed on organisational performance and trends.

As requested by the Chairman, it was agreed that future dashboard reports would include figures on employee turnover as well as percentages.

On the downturn in attendance, Occupational Health colleagues were continuing to work with portfolios to tackle stress, depression and anxiety absences which remained the most recorded reason. Detailed data analysis had established that most of those absences were related to life issues, for example

coping with bereavement. The 'CareFirst' service was to be re-launched following an increase in the number of employees accessing that support.

The most up-to-date figure for the completion of appraisals was 83%. It was anticipated that the next quarterly report would provide a more accurate picture and that Chief Officers would be called to account for any slippage in their portfolios.

Following a request by Councillor Richard Jones, the Chief Executive agreed that the new appraisal model could be shared with the Committee through a briefing session before a future meeting.

In response to further comments, the Business Information & Compliance Adviser provided clarification on data for the turnover and stability of schools. He also noted that the number of active agency placements was 89 rather than 94.

The recommendations, which were changed to reflect the debate, were moved by Councillor Jones and seconded by Councillor Johnson.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Employment & Workforce Information report for Quarter 1 of 2019/20 be noted;
- (b) That in future, the report include figures as well as percentages for employee turnover; and
- (c) That the new appraisal model be shared with the Committee as part of a briefing session before a future meeting.

41. PEOPLE STRATEGY PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Chief Executive introduced a performance update report on achievements towards the key priorities for 2018/19 in the final year of the current People Strategy 2016-2019.

The report was presented by the HR Business Partner who highlighted the rollout of the new pay model and enhancement of the learning and development offer involving more online options. He also commented on the high standard of participants in the Apprenticeship programme and the development of the Health and Well-being Strategy which would help to support individuals affected by personal issues, as highlighted in the previous agenda item.

Councillor Richard Jones proposed an additional recommendation to thank the Human Resources team for their work on the strategy which impacted positively on the workforce. This was seconded by Councillor Bateman.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee notes the performance made during 2018/19 in support of the vision, outcomes and priorities identified in the 2016-2019 strategy and supports the extension of the strategy into 2019/20 to conclude ongoing work programmes;
- (b) That the Committee supports the development of a new People Strategy for 2020/2023 and associated action plan which will be shared in draft for comment before being taken to Cabinet; and
- (c) That the Human Resources team be thanked for their work in producing and maintaining the strategy.

42. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2019/20 MONTH 4 AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING 2019/20 MONTH 4 AND SIGNIFICANT VARIANCES (OUT OF COUNTY PLACEMENTS, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND SCHOOL TRANSPORT)

The Corporate Finance Manager presented a report on the revenue budget monitoring position for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and an update on the Capital Programme of 2019/20 at month 4. As requested, a report on the significant variances in Out of County Placements, Children's Services and School Transport was also shared.

Revenue Budget Monitoring

On the Council Fund, the projected year-end position - without new actions to reduce cost pressures and improve the yield on efficiency planning - was an operating deficit of £2.983m, which was a reduction of £0.118m from July. The projected balance for contingency reserves at year-end was £1.886m. The overspend areas for Out of County Placements, Children's Services and School Transport were partially offset by an underspend in Central and Corporate Finance. A balanced outturn was projected for Social Services if Cabinet approved the recommended transfer of £0.250m to Adult Services from Resources & Regulated Services to meet changes in service demand. All areas of non-essential spend would continue to be reviewed to reduce the overall projected year-end overspend.

The projected 90% achievement rate on projected planned in-year efficiencies would increase to 91% if Cabinet agreed to re-phase the efficiency from the Aura Subsidy.

Following changes to the report format, an update on school pressures indicated the position on deficits in secondary schools which would be closely monitored.

On the HRA, in-year spend was projected to be £0.081m higher than budget, leaving a year-end balance of £1.242m which was above the recommended minimum level.

In welcoming the change of report format, Councillor Heesom questioned why the un-earmarked reserves for the Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) Approving Body and the Victim Contact Team were not under their portfolio areas. The Chief Executive explained that both had been included as pressures in the 2019/20 budget - as agreed by Members - and that these additional amounts would meet new legislative requirements and increase capacity to meet the needs of vulnerable young people. The Corporate Finance Manager confirmed that the amounts were allocated to Social Services from the Contingency Reserve in-year. Officers agreed to provide a future report on the costs involved with SuDS.

In response to Councillor Jones' comments on the report format, it was clarified that the table set out the overall position and the narrative would focus on significant variances above an agreed level of £0.100m, with full details of all variances in the appendix. The Chief Officer (Social Services) spoke about minimising the use of agency workers in his portfolio which was often unavoidable.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Wisinger and seconded by Councillor Heesom.

Capital Programme

The revised programme included two approved sums carried forward from 2018/19 and a number of changes along with confirmed funding allocations. There were two requests for carry-forward into 2020/21 and additional allocations were mainly due to changes in existing programmes. Confirmation was awaited from Welsh Government (WG) on a grant funding bid in relation to the £0.350m pressure to address the impact of flooding on the highway network. If received, this would leave a funding shortfall of £1.230m for approved schemes in 2019/20.

On investment in county towns, explanation was given to Councillor Jones on the classification of towns as previously agreed.

Councillor Heesom commended the work undertaken by teams in response to local flooding.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Heesom and seconded by Councillor Bateman.

Significant Variances in School Transport

Members were introduced to the Service Delivery Manager, Highways & Waste (Katie Wilby) who presented the report on significant variances on School Transport. She was joined by the Integrated Transport Unit Manager (Ceri Hansom); and Regulatory Services Manager (Ruth Cartwright).

There were a number of reasons for the overspend including historic non-statutory school transport arrangements which were being phased out following Cabinet approval in 2018. The income received from concessionary fares offered

in the interim did not meet the full cost and an increase in contract prices since the loss of a bus operator was a further impact. There were also financial implications arising from the timing of the school year and a rise in pupil numbers. Increased demand for transport for Out of County Placements was also a factor, involving some individuals with complex needs who required solo journeys or specialist vehicles.

Officers summarised progress on a range of mitigating actions, as detailed in the report, including reassessing higher value contracts and contract arrangements to achieve value for money. Other actions involved exploring in-house transport options and liaising with Education colleagues to forecast changes in demand.

The Chief Executive said that there was no further mitigation beyond the actions and that there would be a significant overspend at year-end. This pressure would be factored into the budget for 2020/21 and work with Education teams would help to forecast the longer term position.

In response to comments from Councillor Heesom, the Integrated Transport Unit Manager provided an overview of work to address the historical anomalies. Low demand for concessionary passes meant that many households were finding alternative school transport solutions and capacity on those subsidised services would be reviewed. Councillor Thomas paid tribute to the Manager for her work on this.

In thanking officers for the detailed report, Councillor Jones acknowledged the actions in place to address the issues, most of which could not have been predicted.

The Chief Executive said that more flexibility was needed on budgets to manage changes in service demand. In the absence of further mitigation, the overspend would need to be resolved corporately. He expressed his thanks to the team who had worked through the anomalies.

Significant Variances in Social Services and Out of County Placements

The Chief Officer (Social Services) presented the report on significant variances in Social Services and Out of County Placements (OCP) which had been considered at the recent joint Education & Youth and Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting.

The 30% rise in demand for Children's Services over the past two years reflected a 57% increase in the number of looked after children over the past eight years. The most significant factor was that levels of parental substance/alcohol misuse, parental mental ill health and domestic abuse across the County (the recognised 'trigger trio') were all above the Wales average. Another influence was the exploitation of young people through County Lines which, although a national issue, was a particular risk for Flintshire due to its geographical location.

Joint working across Social Services and Education had helped to reduce the number of OCP over the past year, however there were financial implications from the increasing number of complex cases.

There was no single solution to the financial pressures due to the number of external factors outside the Council's control. The Chief Officer summarised some of the activities taking place to make some impact: these included a multi-agency forum to target exploitation, the introduction of new incentives to attract new foster carers and exploring options for additional local placements. In highlighting OCP as a nationwide issue, he spoke about the approach being taken by the Council to manage these pressures whilst maintaining the quality of offer to young people.

Councillor Richard Jones agreed that OCP was an issue for all councils and financial support from WG was required. He suggested that greater focus could be placed on the 'trigger trio' to target the causes.

In highlighting the scale of the challenge, the Chief Executive spoke about the breadth of work such as pursuing local accommodation options and extending the fostering network, whilst recognising the cost of providing quality services and the vulnerability of Flintshire's location.

Councillor Richard Jones called for representations to be made to WG and was told that during a recent visit, the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services had commended the Council's approach to tackling these significant issues. The Chief Executive said that this formed part of the case on support for high-demand services and should incorporate capital/revenue options currently being explored by officers to demonstrate innovative solutions.

The Senior Manager (Children & Workforce) welcomed discussions with Health colleagues on a changing approach to diagnosing the behaviour of young people to provide support in a different way. In response to comments on the varying costs of foster care provision, he referred to new ways of attracting foster carers and the development of a national framework in Wales.

Councillor Heesom spoke about recognition of Flintshire's position as a border County.

As Cabinet Member, Councillor Christine Jones said that Flintshire - as a foster friendly Council - was introducing incentives to encourage new foster carers. She went on to refer to the widespread impact of County Lines and Universal Credit, and the preventative work being undertaken by the Council and Community Safety Partnership.

Councillor Cunningham praised the work of the teams in the context of the financial challenges. Whilst supporting initiatives to tackle the causes of the increased demand for services, he highlighted the importance of individual responsibility.

Councillor Richard Jones spoke about the importance of understanding the data. He proposed an additional recommendation to acknowledge that the causes of mental health issues should be given more focus.

The Chief Executive said that investment in preventative work was a priority together with the development of more local cost-effective solutions. Budget pressures for both areas were built into the forecast for 2020/21 and would be monitored. Non-essential spend in each portfolio was being re-assessed to determine the impact on reserves at year-end.

In updating the Committee on discussions with the Welsh Local Government Association, the Chief Executive said that clarity was awaited on whether the costs for teachers' pay and pensions was already included in the base budget and therefore outside the £593m additional revenue given to WG from the spending review. An update on the budget position would be reported to the Committee.

Councillor Banks paid tribute to all the officers for their hard work on both reports.

Councillor Richard Jones proposed that the recommendations reflect the debate and points raised. This was seconded by Councillor Heesom.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee notes the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2019/20 Month 4 report and confirms that on this occasion there are no specific issues which it wishes to raise with Cabinet;
- (b) That the Committee notes the Capital Programme 2019/20 Month 4 report and confirms that on this occasion there are no specific issues which it wishes to raise with Cabinet;
- (c) That having reviewed to the Streetscene & Transportation portfolio financial pressures analysis, the Committee supports the ongoing work to mitigate those pressures and thanks all those involved for their hard work and commitment;
- (d) That having reviewed the portfolio financial pressures analysis within Children's Services and Out of County placements, the Committee supports the ongoing work to mitigate those pressures and thanks all those involved for their hard work and commitment;
- (e) That the Committee supports a case being made to Welsh Government for assistance in meeting the high cost of residential care for children with complex needs whilst the Council develops more cost effective local placement options to respond to growing demand;
- (f) That the officers be tasked with investigating 'invest to save' solutions to reducing overall costs within these areas of concern; and

- (g) That the officers undertake analysis of the statistics for Flintshire's higher recorded incidents of parental substance or alcohol misuse, parental mental ill health and domestic abuse and report back in due course.

43. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In presenting the current Forward Work Programme for consideration, the Democratic Services Manager advised that the requested half-hour briefing on the new appraisal model would be scheduled.

The Chief Executive advised that the item on County Hall may require deferral to November and that high-level updates on the national budget position may be available in October and November.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be approved, noting that items for the October meeting were likely to change;
- (b) That high-level budget updates be included on the agenda for the next two meetings; and
- (c) That the Democratic Services Manager, in consultation with the Committee Chairman, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

44. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10am and ended at 1.20pm)

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Chairman