

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
10 FEBRUARY 2022

Minutes of the meeting of Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held remotely on Thursday, 10 February 2022

PRESENT: Councillor Clive Carver (Chairman)

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

APOLOGY: Councillor Billy Mullin - Deputy Leader (Governance) and Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Ian Roberts - Leader and Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Paul Johnson - Cabinet Member for Finance, Social Value & Procurement, Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Governance), Corporate Finance Manager and Strategic Finance Managers

Chief Officer, Social Services and Social Value Development Officer (for minute number 80)

Customer Contact Service Manager (for minute number 81)

Strategic Performance Advisor (for minute number 82)

IN ATTENDANCE: Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officer

76. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

77. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2022 were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Shotton and Kevin Rush.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

78. ACTION TRACKING

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented an update on actions arising from previous meetings which were all completed or on track. Members of the Committee had been provided with a copy of the letter to the Health Board outlining the Committee's concerns about debt levels and the response would be shared when received.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Arnold Woolley and seconded by Councillor Andy Williams.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the progress which has been made.

79. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In presenting the updated forward work programme for consideration, the Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator advised that the Employment and Workforce quarterly update had been scheduled for the June meeting.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Arnold Woolley and seconded by Councillor Haydn Bateman.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted; and
- (b) That the Overview & Scrutiny Facilitators, in consultation with the Committee Chairman, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

80. SOCIAL VALUE

As Cabinet Member for Finance, Social Value and Procurement, Councillor Paul Johnson introduced a report on the Council's social value programme designed to achieve social, environmental, economic and cultural added value outcomes through procurement activities. He commended the positive outcomes during 2021 which had resulted in significant contributions to the local economy and communities in Flintshire, and he spoke about the aim to further embed social value within the organisation through the work of the social value team.

The Chief Officer (Social Services) said that the Council's track record on delivering social value was widely recognised. He introduced Olivia Hughes, the Social Value Development Officer, who gave a presentation on the risks, challenges and opportunities within the social value programme, comprising:

- Definition of social value
- Key performance indicators
- Case studies
- Key challenges
- Overcoming challenges
- Recommendations for Overview & Scrutiny

The presentation highlighted the range of outcomes to date for local communities, apprenticeships and economic growth through procurement activity linked to social value. Amongst the key challenges, there was a need to increase

resources to meet future demand and support the long-term sustainability of the programme.

In thanking the officer for her presentation, Councillor Paul Shotton commended the achievements on social value and was provided with more detail on engagement with volunteers.

Whilst welcoming the report, Councillor Richard Jones questioned the continued focus on supporting contracts when the corporate target had been exceeded, at the expense of other areas of the programme.

The Chief Officer explained that the initial ambitious approach to embed social value within Council activities had been reviewed to prioritise work and maximise resources within the small team to achieve the right outcomes across the programme.

The Social Value Development Officer spoke about the impact of temporary additional resources allocated during 2021, which demonstrated what could be achieved with increased capacity. In response to further questions, she provided clarification on the establishment of specific core requirements within each contract and the scoring of contracts based on best value and social value opportunities.

The Chief Executive referred to the potential to further improve outcomes by reviewing the level of resources and exploring social value opportunities within lower value contracts.

The recommendations, which were amended to reflect the debate, were moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Shotton and Richard Lloyd.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee notes the performance of the social value programme to date; and
- (b) That the Committee supports the proposal around performance reporting to secure an achievable social value work programme for 2022/23, given available resources, as outlined within the report.

81. PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES (PSOW) ANNUAL LETTER 2020-21 AND COMPLAINTS AGAINST FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL DURING THE FIRST HALF OF 2021-22

The Chief Officer (Governance) introduced the report to share the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) Annual Letter which summarised the Council's performance on complaints investigated during 2019-20. The report also included an overview of complaints against Council services between 1 April to 30 September 2021. Although there had been a decrease in the number of complaints made against the Council in 2020/21, this was higher than the Welsh average. However, this was due to the majority being premature (as the

complaints procedure had not been fully exhausted), out of jurisdiction or closed after initial consideration by the PSOW.

Following detailed analysis, the Customer Contact Service Manager identified that Flintshire had the highest number of premature complaints in Wales and excluding these would put Flintshire broadly in line with other councils in North Wales. Whilst it was reassuring that over half of the complaints had been rejected at the start of the process, the findings identified the need for the Council to review its approach to promoting the complaints procedure and keeping complainants informed of progress on their complaints. Statistics relating to local complaints for the first half of 2021-22 found that 80% were dealt with within 20 working days and that regular reporting to the Chief Officer team was helping to improve the timeliness of complaint responses.

In welcoming the explanations behind the data, Councillor Richard Jones remained concerned at the number of complaints made to the PSOW about the Council's complaints handling process, which may have influenced the number of premature complaints. Whilst welcoming the actions being taken, he referred to the table showing that Flintshire required more PSOW intervention than most other councils in Wales. He also said that some services were failing to respond to messages and that there should be a minimum expectation to acknowledge communications in the first instance.

In response, the Customer Contact Service Manager referred to the analysis data and explained that the classification of duplicate complaints could skew the figures. She spoke of positive engagement with the Complaints Standards Authority in helping to interpret the data, identify improvements and share good practice. Members were reminded of the contact officers within each portfolio with whom to refer complaints, in addition to contacting herself or Joanne Pierce.

Councillor Richard Lloyd thanked the officer for the detailed explanations and suggested that many residents referred complaints to the Council via their local Members. The Service Manager explained that the information currently published on the website about the complaints procedure was being reviewed and that any input from Members was welcomed. Following a question from the Chairman, she advised that paper copies of the complaints form could be requested from Flintshire Connects Centres.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the actions identified to improve performance and encourage residents to engage with the Council in the first step in the process, rather than escalating straight to the PSOW. He took the opportunity to point out that many complaints were handled well within services without reaching the PSOW stage.

Following comments by Councillor Richard Jones, the Facilitator suggested that the analysis data be shared with the Committee and the item be placed on the forward work programme for the Committee to consider whether a future update was required. On that basis, the recommendations were moved by Councillor Richard Jones and seconded by Councillor Andy Williams.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee notes the annual performance of the Council in respect of complaints made to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales during 2020-21;
- (b) That the Committee notes the 2021-22 half year performance of the Council in respect of complaints made to services in line with its complaints procedure;
- (c) That the Committee supports the actions outlined in paragraph 1.28 to improve complaints handling across the Council; and
- (d) That the analysis data be shared with the Committee for information and a note placed on the forward work programme should the Committee wish to consider the analysis data at a future meeting.

82. ANNUAL AUDIT SUMMARY FOR FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL 2020/21

The Chief Executive introduced the Annual Audit Summary for 2020/21 which summarised the findings of audit and regulatory work undertaken at the Council by Audit Wales (AW). The report concluded positively that the Council has met its remaining legal duties for improvement planning and reporting during the period. There had been no formal recommendations and work was underway on the two proposals for improvement arising from one of the reviews.

The report acknowledged the impact of the pandemic upon the level of comparative performance information, the Council's focus on improving financial resilience and service recovery arrangements with oversight by the Recovery Committee. Attention was drawn to planned work for 2021-22 including key issues facing all Councils arising from the pandemic.

The Strategic Performance Advisor confirmed that in line with the reporting protocol, the Council's response would be agreed by Cabinet prior to consideration by the Governance & Audit Committee where the annual external regulatory report would also be shared, detailing progress on actions from proposals for improvement.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Andy Williams and seconded by Councillor Haydn Bateman.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee is assured by the content and observations of the Auditor General for Wales' Annual Audit Summary Report for 2020/21.

83. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2021/22 (MONTH 9) AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME (MONTH 9)

The Strategic Finance Managers presented reports on the revenue budget monitoring position at month 9 for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the Capital Programme of 2021/22, prior to consideration by Cabinet.

Revenue Budget Monitoring

On the Council Fund, the projected year-end position was an operating surplus of £1.537m (excluding the impact of the pay award to be met from reserves) which reflected a favourable movement of £0.821m from month 8. This would leave a year-end contingency reserve balance of £7.407m. The variances from month 8 were detailed in the report including significant movements in the Housing & Assets and Planning, Environment & Economy portfolios. The update on in-year risks included confirmation of an approved retrospective claim to Welsh Government (WG) for Storm Christoph residual costs. On other tracked risks, the latest position on emergency funding and progress with Income Loss grant claims was reported. The review of earmarked reserves had resulted in £0.585m being released back into contingency reserves and would continue to be monitored.

On the HRA, a projected overspend of £0.437m would leave a closing un-earmarked balance of £4.035m, which was well above the recommended guidelines on spend.

Councillor Richard Jones said that the significant variances detailed in the report did not reflect approved budget changes. Officers explained that the variances were not affected by budgetary transfers between portfolios and that a breakdown of movements between portfolios for approved budgets could be provided, with explanations.

Councillor Haydn Bateman queried the earmarked reserves for Single Status/Equal Pay and was advised that following implementation, reserves had been set aside to deal with any legacy or general workforce costs.

Capital Programme

The summary position at month 9 showed a revised budget of £81.588m taking into account agreed carry-forward amounts, changes during the period and savings transferred back in. The main changes had arisen from increases in grant funding as detailed in the report. Capital expenditure compared to budget indicated a projected underspend of £1.206m on the Council Fund which would be recommended for carry forward to complete schemes in 2022/23. No additional allocations were identified and a saving of £0.386m was reported on Disabled Facilities Grants. The overall funding position at month 9 indicated a revised projected surplus in the Capital Programme of £4.904m which was an increase of £0.757k from the last quarter. Indicative Provisional Local Government Settlement figures reflected an estimated funding increase of £0.786m over the approved three year period when compared with the Capital

Programme approved in December, resulting in a deficit of £0.081m in next year's Programme. It was also confirmed that Flintshire would receive £3.1m of additional grant funding from WG to support the Capital Programme.

Councillor Richard Lloyd queried the rationale of the breakdown of areas shown in Table 6 on investment in county towns. The Chief Executive explained that the areas had been previously changed and agreed by Members to report on levels of investment across broad geographical areas of the Council.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor Richard Jones.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That having considered the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2021/22 (Month 9) report, the Committee confirms that there are no specific matters to be raised with Cabinet; and
- (b) That having considered the Capital Programme Monitoring 2021/22 (Month 9) report, the Committee confirms that there are no specific matters to be raised with Cabinet.

84. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

None.

(The meeting started at 10am and ended at 11.40am)

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Chairman