

EXECUTIVE
27TH JANUARY 2009

Minutes of the meeting of the Executive of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Tuesday, 27th January 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor A Woolley (Chairman)

Councillors: C. Ellis, P.G Heesom, M. Higham, H.D.Hutchinson, N. Matthews, N. Phillips, L.A Sharps, N.R Steele-Mortimer and H. Yale.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors: J.B Attridge, K. Armstrong-Braun, R.C. Bithell, R. Baker, A. Davies-Cooke, R.G. Hampson, Mrs C.M.Jones, Mrs D. Mackie, A.P Shotton and D. Wisinger.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Director of Community Services, Director of Environment, Director of Lifelong Learning, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Head of Finance, Assistant Director ICT and Customer Services and Head of Committee, Member and Electoral Services.

The Assistant Director (Financial Management), Head of Financial Planning and Principal Accountant were present for Agenda items 4 and 5.

APOLOGY

Councillor H.D. Hutchinson informed the Chairman that he would be leaving the meeting early in order to attend the Public Inquiry to be held in Buckley.

227. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th January 2009 were confirmed as a correct record.

228. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors A. Woolley, C. Ellis, P.G. Heesom, M. Higham, H.D.Hutchinson, N. Matthews, N. Phillips, N.R.Steele-Mortimer and H.Yale all declared personal non-prejudicial interests in Agenda item no 10 – School Admission Arrangements 2010, as School Governors.

229. GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2009/10

The Head of Finance provided copies of slides that were to be part of a presentation plus appendices on the previous year's growth/items dropping out, inflation, summary of pressures, local service pressures, pressures from demographic change, details in the reduction of income one off pressures, a summary of savings including efficiency savings for staff related and non staff related, savings from demographic change and increases in income. Additional papers were tabled on the General Fund Budget pressures which had been withdrawn and those pressures that were not recommended for inclusion.

The Chief Executive explained that all Members of the Council would receive copies of the presentation and supplementary papers and further presentations would be made at Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings to be held during the rest of the week. A full audit trail of all the budget considerations was available and the County Council at its meeting on 3rd March, 2009 would approve the budget proposals and set the Council Tax.

The Chief Executive outlined the purpose of the presentation which was to collectively propose the 2009/10 General Fund Revenue Budget. In view of the current economic climate the budget had been prepared prudently having regard to the Council's responsibility in the management of performance and transitional stage of the organisation. The Council was continuing to sustain its organisational priorities including Education and was aiming to be resilient under current market forces. The Council would protect public services by reducing overhead and increasing costs and overtime. There were a number of critical pressures and prioritisation which would take into account the strategic assessment of risks and challenges.

The Chief Executive then referred to the 3% increase in the Welsh Assembly Government funding for 2009/10. Indications were that the Revenue Support Grant funding would not match pressures on services in future years. An over spend was being projected for 2008/09 as an additional factor. The current economic climate was having an impact of approximately £1.8m and there were also service pressures such as Out of County Placements and waste. There was also a partial withdrawal or ending of several Welsh Assembly Government specific grants.

The budget approach and principles were being set within the context of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and a corporate and strategic approach had been taken. The budget proposals were considered to be realistic and prudent, incorporating items which were already committed. Funding was aligned with organisational needs and risks and there was a recognition that the Council was in a period of organisational redesign. There was a protection of public services and a control of fees and charges within the principles of affordability and comparability. It was emphasised that there was a full audit trail of the pressures and efficiencies within the budget consideration.

The Chief Executive referred to further budget considerations which had included the identification of pressures and efficiencies by the Mid Year Business Reviews at service level and it was proposed to include a £1m In Year efficiencies. Reference was made to cashable and non cashable items and to a £25k de-minimus level which would be applied to all directorates and would be managed within the directorates without having to be referred to Members for consideration. No new posts would be considered unless service critical and fees and charges would be considered against comparable market levels and with affordability and sensitivity. In year budget monitoring would be even more rigorous and Out of County Placements was given as an example. The reserves had been reviewed and a full list of all reserves would be contained within the budget considerations.

In conclusion, the Chief Executive referred to organisational efficiency which was a continuous discipline and was not an annual budget setting process. Organisational change programmes would be implemented with ownership and urgency and there would be strong budget management and control which would include the rigorous management of vacancies but it was emphasised that this should not be interpreted as a “moratorium” on recruitment.

The Head of Finance then referred to the final settlement which had been reported to the Executive previously which had resulted in Flintshire receiving a 2.9% increase in Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) and a 3% increase in the Aggregate External Finance (AEF) for 2009/10. On the level of Council Tax, the budget proposals assumed that the net budget would be set at £0.476m above the calculated SSA at £233.434m and that the Council Tax yield would be £51.425m, representing a 3.5% increase. This would result in a Band D Council Tax of £852.42 for Flintshire excluding Police and Town and Community Councils’ precept which was increase of 3.5% (£28.82).

The Council would receive un-hypothecated funding of £0.225m Deprivation Grant and £1.497m Improvement Agreement Grant. This latter amount had previously been known as the Performance Incentive Grant and was now linked to a Performance Agreement with the Welsh Assembly Government.

The Council would receive Revenue Support Grant of £141.572m, NNDR of £40.437m and income from Council Tax of £51.425m giving a total budget requirement of £233.434m. In addition the un-hypothecated grants referred to earlier totalled £1.722m and estimated specific grants for which details of a number were still awaited totalled £28.861m. With the use of un-earmarked reserves of £2.097m this gave a total budget of £266.114m.

The Head of Finance referred to a number of assumptions that had been made as part of the budget process including inflation were 2.36% had been provided for pay for teachers and 2.30% for pay for non teaching workers. A provision of 1.50% had been included for prices and non standard inflation was being applied to specific items were a higher level of increase could be expected such as energy and fuel costs. A 2.70% provision was being included for income.

On expenditure the total budget for 2008/09 totalled £259.878m with the previous year’s items dropping out amounted to £1.942m, inflation of £4.433m together with ongoing pressures for 2009/10 of £5.451m and one-off pressures £2.097m, less efficiencies of £3.803m giving a total of £266.114m. There were a number of pressures recommended for inclusion in the budget and these would be the subject of consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees later in the week. These included local service pressures of £4.200m, demographic change amounting to £0.330m and a reduction of income of £0.921m out of which totalled £5.451m. The reduction in income had been referred to earlier by the Chief Executive; the impact of the economic climate and the loss of income on charges such as Building Control

charges, Local Searches fees and the reduced investment income. Pressures recommended for inclusion in the budget which were non-recurring included local service pressures of £2.061m and a reduction in income of £0.036m making a total of £2.097m. Efficiencies recommended for inclusion in the budget included pay budget related (including MASS efficiencies and recruitment advertising) of £0.594m, non pay budget related £2.348m making a total of £2.942m to which adjustments for demographic change in respect of falling school numbers of £0.541m and an increase of income of £0.320m gave a total of £3.803m.

The Head of Finance then referred to the General Fund Un-earmarked Reserves which provided base level reserves to be maintained at 2% of turnover which represented £5.269m as at 31st March, 2010. The Contingency Reserve (at post month seven) was currently projected to be £1.076m as at 31st March, 2009 but this would fluctuate due to the movements of the in year budget monitoring and the implementation costs of Phase 2 of the Organisational Redesign. It was recommended that no provision be made for the Landsbanki investment of £3.7m. The loss of interest had been taken into account and no recognition made of the loss of the principal amount which reflected ongoing discussions being held nationally.

In conclusion, the Head of Finance referred to the consultation undertaken with the Schools' Budget Forum and Business Rate Payers and to the consultation planned with the Overview and Scrutiny Committees between 28th and 30th January. Further communication was planned with the Flintshire Joint Trades Union Committee.

The Chief Executive referred to the provision in the budget proposals. On the proposed Council Tax level, if approved, Flintshire would be in the middle range of all Welsh Councils. If alternative budget proposals were being put forward by individual Members or Groups, these needed to be tested for legality and affordability.

The Leader thanked the Chief Executive and Head of Finance and their teams for the work undertaken on the budget preparation. He considered the budget to be prudent and would set stability for the next few years and he moved that the budget proposals be recommended for consultation with the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and for the approval of the County Council.

RESOLVED:

That the proposals set out in the presentation made by the Chief Executive and Head of Finance be recommended for consultation with Overview and Scrutiny Committees and for approval by the County Council.

230. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2009/10

The Director of Community Services gave a presentation to the Executive and explained that all Local Authorities which manage their own

housing stock had to maintain a Housing Revenue Account (HRA). All expenditure on the management and maintenance of the Authority's stock had to be funded by the HRA. The HRA could not generally contribute to or be funded by the General Fund. The Council could not legally budget for the closing balance to be a deficit at the year end and the recommended practice was to budget for a minimum 3% closing balance at year end. The HRA income comprised 98% from dwelling grants, 1% from garage rents and 1% from other sources such as interest and balances, service charges for lease holders, rechargeable repairs and insurance/water commission.

On rents, the Welsh Assembly Government intended that all social landlords (Councils and Housing Associations), charge similar rents for similar properties by 2012. This was known as Rent Convergence. To this end, the Assembly advised all Local Authorities what their annual rent increase should be and this was known as the Guideline Rent Increase.

Local Authorities could decide their own increase but if they levied an increase below the guidance level the Assembly would assume they had levied the full increase and calculate subsidy accordingly. If an increase above the guideline level was applied this could lead to a reduction of the Housing Benefit Subsidy claimed by way of Rent Rebate Subsidy Limitation Deduction and this would be charged to the HRA. If Authorities were in negative subsidy the Assembly would require a greater return from the HRA.

The Assembly had advised the Council that a provisional increase of £3.14 per property per week should be levied for 2009/10 and this equated to an overall 5.26% increase. It was proposed that the increase be set at the guideline level and the average rent for 2009/10 would be £63.28.

The Director then referred to the items of expenditure, Housing Subsidy and the Major Repairs Allowance. The Repairs and Maintenance Budget was the largest expenditure item on the HRA. Reference was also made to Capital Financing and the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.

The HRA Budget had included assumptions for inflation of 2.3% for pay, 2% for prices and 2.70% for income. Budget pressures included the Building Maintenance Trading Account of £0.150m, Corporate Democratic Costs of £0.373m, Tenant's Gardens £0.030m and a reduction in the Right to Buy Fee income of £0.036m which provided total budget pressures of £0.588m. In conclusion, the Director referred to balances; it was proposed that a balance greater than 3% be planned to provide for contingency against unforeseen commitments and further stock options appraisal activity according to the Assembly guidelines. This was estimated as 5.65%.

The Executive Member for Housing Strategy and Planning referred to the budget pressure for Corporate Democratic Costs and this had been included as a budget pressure as a result of advice received from the external auditors. He had asked for further work to be undertaken on this re-charge. In response, the Chief Executive explained it was correct to take account of the Welsh Assembly Government advice and for support costs to be made to the HRA as part of the Corporate re-charge. As a result of the

Pricewaterhouse Coopers report on Contractor Functions further work was to be done on re-charging central costs.

The Executive Member for the Environment referred to a recent statement made by the Minister of State for Housing and whether this had any implications on the Housing Revenue Account. In response, the Executive Member for Housing Strategy and Planning referred to the statement which he considered would not affect the current budget deliberations and agreed to provide a copy of the press statement to the Executive Members and other Members. The Chief Executive also indicated that following Government statements there was always a time lapse before any proposals were finalised and implemented; as the County Council would determine the HRA Budget at its meeting on 17th February 2009 the contents of the statement would not affect the current budget proposals.

RESOLVED:

That the proposals set out in the presentation made by the Director of Community Services be recommended for consultation with the Community and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the approval of the County Council.

231. SCHOOL MODERNISATION STRATEGY: SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING

The Director of Lifelong Learning presented a report the purpose of which was to provide a summary of recent work undertaken to develop Flintshire County Council's School Place Planning methodology including co-ordinating the projection of pupil numbers, projections for the future demand for school places, assessment of school capacity and surplus place levels for all schools. The report also provided a summary of the annual school planning cycle and an overview of School Place Planning methodology for approval. Finally, the report sought to clarify the future use of School Place Planning guidance including its co-ordination with other areas of School Planning and how it would contribute to future school organisation and modernisation strategy.

The Director reminded Members that a report had been considered by the Executive in September 2008 which provided a proposed schedule of action to achieve completion of the Statutory Education Asset Management Plan and fit for purpose guidance during the spring term 2009. This report on School Places Planning was an important further contribution to the policy papers which would form the basis for future planning and decision making in relation to the school modernisation process.

The Executive Member for Education and Youth explained that this was one of a number of reports to form the basis for future planning and decision making in relation to the school modernisation process. He drew Members' attention to Table 1 of the report which showed the increase in birth rate for Flintshire projected to 2010. The Executive Member also paid tribute to the work by Kim Garcia, Interim Assistant Director (Development and Resources), on this particular issue.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the overview of School Place Planning methodology and the Annual School Place Planning Cycle, be approved;
- b) That consultation on the School Place Planning methodology and Annual School Place Planning Cycle be undertaken with schools and partners;
- c) That a further report be made to the Executive on the consultation findings.

232. SCHOOL MODERNISATION STRATEGY: FIT FOR PURPOSE GUIDANCE

The Director of Lifelong Learning presented a report, the purpose of which was to provide the Executive with a summary of the work undertaken in the Autumn term 2008 to produce guidance for identifying the minimum standards for school accommodation and facilities to support and contribute to the process of modernisation of secondary schools in Flintshire. Secondly, to present draft Fit For Purpose Guidance documents for approval and to clarify the future use of the guidance as part of the criteria for prioritising future Capital Programme work for schools against, short, mid and long term timelines.

The Director referred to the report submitted to the previous meeting of the Executive on the Fit For Purpose Guidance for Primary Schools and this report now dealt with Secondary Schools. The document would be a key tool for prioritising asset management and capital investment and would be subject to consultation with the education partners.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the use of the draft Fit For Purpose Guidance for Secondary Schools be approved for consultation;
- b) That the draft Fit For Purpose Guidance for Secondary Schools be referred to Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration;
- c) Consultation to be undertaken on the draft Fit For Purpose Guidance with school and partners;
- d) That a further report be presented to the Executive on the Local Statement as required for the strategic planning of education assets; and
- e) That the consultation findings be reported to the Executive in March 2009.

233. DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME – ANNUAL REPORT

The Executive Member for Corporate Governance and Strategy introduced a report, the purpose of which was to present the second annual

report of the Disability Equality Scheme for the period December 2007-December 2008 for consideration and approval. He reported that this report had been considered by the People and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee the previous day and Fiona Mocko (Policy Officer, Equalities) the author of the report had been congratulated on the work undertaken.

The Chief Executive explained that this was the second annual report and it covered progress to meeting priorities identified by disabled people and meeting statutory duties as well as the next steps. He also paid tribute to the work undertaken by Fiona Mocko (Policy Officer, Equalities) and other Officers. The report contained details of future priorities which included improving awareness of reasonable adjustments in the work place and to services to increase customer access to services.

The Executive Member for Social Services also referred to future priorities and welcomed the involvement of disabled people and for their views to be heard not only in monitoring the development and implementation of the Disability Equality Scheme and also the planning, delivery and evaluation of services.

RESOLVED:

That the Disability Equality Scheme Annual Report be approved.

234. WELSH EDUCATION SCHEME 2009-2014

The Director of Lifelong Learning presented a report, the purpose of which was to appraise Members of Flintshire's Welsh Education Scheme for 2009-2014. Copies of the scheme were available in the Members' Library and it was awaiting final approval by the Welsh Language Board but a positive evaluation had been received on 6th January 2009.

RESOLVED:

That the final version of the scheme be approved and for publication upon final approval from the Welsh Language Board.

235. SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2010

The Director of Lifelong Learning presented a report, the purpose of which was to seek authority to commence the statutory consultation on the admission arrangements to apply from September 2010. The consultation process had commenced in January and would be included by the end of February.

The Director reported that the present admission arrangements had been in place since 2003 and were implemented to address significant overcrowding in some schools and to increase occupancy in others and the policy had been very successful. The vast majority of parental preferences were met and admission appeals were relatively low. He also reported that a detailed review and options appraisal in respect of secondary admissions

would commence in September 2009 and this work will be taken into account in the School Modernisation Strategy.

The Director referred to the current policy regarding nursery admissions and that it needed to be noted that admission to a nursery class at a particular infants school did not guarantee subsequent admission to the reception class at that school. It was proposed that the nursery admissions policy be amended to enable parents to express a preference for a nursery of their choice and if there were more applications received than there were places available, the over subscription criteria in respect of Primary School admissions would apply. These proposed amendments would be included in the consultation exercise and be brought to the attention of consultees. The amended policy would take effect from September 2010.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the proposed admission arrangements for September 2010 be used as the basis for consultation;
- b) That a report on the outcome of the consultation be presented to the Executive and subsequently to the County Council in order that the admission arrangements are determined by 15th April 2009; and
- c) That further work is commissioned to examine the options for secondary school admissions taking into account the School Modernisation Strategy.

236. SHOTTON EXTRA CARE SCHEME

The Executive Member for Social Services introduced a report, the purpose of which was to inform Members of progress on developing Flintshire's first Extra Care Housing Scheme for older people.

The Executive Member reported that the scheme was due to open in early February and Executive Members and local Members would be invited to view the scheme before the residents moved in. She was also pleased to note the facilities which would be provided within the scheme.

The Director of Community Services thanked Members and Officers for pursuing this facility which would be used to promote wellbeing for tenants with a wide range of needs. It was planned that this first Extra Care scheme would be complimented by a second scheme in Mold.

The Chairman welcomed this scheme which had been in development for two to three years and the role of the previous administration needed to be recognised in the decision to proceed with the scheme.

RESOLVED:

That the progress in developing Flintshire's first Extra Care Scheme for older people and use as a model for future service development, be noted.

237. WHITE ON BROWN TOURISM SIGNING

The Director of Environment presented a report, the purpose of which was to seek approval for a framework within Flintshire County Council, as Traffic Authority, would consider all requests for the provision of tourist signs commonly known as “White on Brown” signs. If the policy was approved, Flintshire would fall into line with the other North Wales Local Authorities. Whilst this was not the main reason for the policy, it was acknowledged that it would assist the tourism industry in the current economic climate.

The Executive Member for Regeneration and Tourism welcomed the policy but was concerned that retail establishments were not eligible for such signing and requested a follow up report on signage in roundabouts. The Director emphasised the need to conform with current regulations and there were issues of health and safety but a number of local authorities did have roundabout sponsorship and he agreed to investigate this and report back.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the policy in respect of “White on Brown” signs for Flintshire County Council be approved and noting that the Council, acting as Highway Authority, had no jurisdiction for the provision for these types of signs on trunk roads; and
- b) That the Director of Environment investigate the possible sponsorship and signage on roundabouts with a report to a future meeting.

238. DEE ESTUARY CANDIDATE SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented a report to update the Executive on the outcomes of a further report considered by the Environment and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a result of a previous call in meeting of the item on 13th February 2008.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services referred to the designation of the Dee Estuary as a Candidate Special Area of Conservation which had been reported to the Executive on 30th January 2008. As a result of the decision of the Executive a call-in was received because of concerns on the impact on economic development such designation could have. Subsequent meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been attended by representatives of the Countryside Council for Wales and the Environment Agency. As a result, there was a need to establish a management scheme jointly with relevant stakeholders to encourage the wise use of an area without detriment to the environment based on the principle of sustainability.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services referred to the four recommendations of the report and suggested that the Executive at this stage, only consider recommendations 4.01 and 4.02 and that a further report be prepared in relation to recommendations 4.03 and 4.04 in the report.

The Executive Member for Housing Strategy and Planning emphasised that the substance of the report represented the views of Overview and Scrutiny and the Executive would need to consider the details of such a management scheme.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the development of a management scheme for the Dee Estuary SAC be agreed;
- b) That in agreeing the development of the scheme, the Executive agrees that Flintshire should take the position of lead authority;
- c) That a further report be submitted by the Director of Environment on arrangements for a management scheme in accordance with recommendations 4.03 and 4.04 of the report.

239. EXERCISE OF DELEGATED POWERS

An information report of the Chief Executive, the purpose of which was to inform Members of actions taken under Delegated Powers, was introduced by the Chairman.

The actions taken were set out below:-

Lifelong Learning – Greenfield Valley Heritage Park – approval for the proposed Scale of Charges for the 2009 season.

240. DURATION OF MEETING

The meeting commenced at 9.30 am and ended at 11.01 am.

241. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were three members of the press present.

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Chairman

**SUMMARY OF DECLARATIONS MADE BY MEMBERS
IN ACCORDANCE WITH FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S
CODE OF CONDUCT**

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| EXECUTIVE | DATE: 27th January 2009 |
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| MEMBER | ITEM | MIN. NO. REFERS |
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| C. Woolley, C. Ellis, P.G. Heesom, M. Higham, H.D. Hutchinson, N. Matthews, N. Phillips, N.R. Steele- Mortimer, H.Yale | School Admission Arrangements | 235 |