

CABINET
18 FEBRUARY 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of Flintshire County Council held in the Clwyd Committee Room, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA on Tuesday, 18 February 2014

PRESENT: Councillor Aaron Shotton (Chairman)

Councillors Bernie Attridge (Deputy Leader), Chris Bithell, Helen Brown, Derek Butler, Christine Jones, Kevin Jones and Billy Mullin

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Ron Hampson, Dave Mackie and Carolyn Thomas

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Executive, Director of Environment, Director of Lifelong Learning, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Head of Finance, Head of Housing, Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development and Committee Officer

164. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Chris Bithell, Helen Brown, Derek Butler, Christine Jones, Kevin Jones, Billy Mullin and Aaron Shotton declared a personal interest as school governors in Agenda Item Number 5 – National Model for Regional Working on School Improvement and Agenda Item Number 6 School Funding Formula Review.

Councillor Chris Bithell declared a personal interest in Agenda Item Number 5 – National Model for Regional Working on School Improvement and Agenda Item Number 6 School Funding Formula Review as he was a member of the Pupil Referral Management Committee.

165. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2014 had been circulated with the agenda.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

166. OUTCOME AGREEMENT 2013-2016

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Management introduced the report to recommend a new Outcome Agreement for 2013-16. He provided background information and referred to the key considerations in the report.

The Chief Executive advised that the choice of 5 of the strategic themes from the Welsh Government's Programme for Government had been made carefully to ensure:

- Close 'fit' with priorities within the Improvement Plan
- Strong evidence base to support the Council's actions
- A reasonable level of confidence in meeting the Council's outcomes to secure the grant

Appended to the report was the draft of the 5 themes. The final drafts had been shared with the Welsh Government as part of the negotiation process. Positive feedback had been received informally and it was anticipated that the Minister for Local Government and Government Business would agree the draft Outcome Agreement without further question.

RESOLVED:

That the Outcome Agreement for 2013-16 be approved.

167. NATIONAL MODEL FOR REGIONAL WORKING ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The Cabinet Member for Education introduced the report on developments with school improvement services and to recommend the new national model for regional working on school improvement for adoption. He provided background information and advised that the Model had been agreed by the Minister and the WLGA Coordinating Committee in late November 2013.

The Cabinet Member explained that the Model outlined a consistent approach to school improvement activities and aimed to encourage schools to take more responsibility for their own improvement. It also sought to clarify what activities could be undertaken at local authority level and what was best addressed regionally. He reported that the Model referred to the governance arrangements in relation to regional collaborative school improvement services and suggested that governance was best placed in a Joint Committee, and that its members be appointed by the constituent local authorities. The Committee would be supported by an Executive Board.

As part of the new arrangements it had been agreed that a common business plan template was required to enable consortia to clearly identify their key priorities for the year and the expected outcomes.

The Director of Lifelong Learning commented on the pooling of resources and learning regionally and nationally to achieve good and improving outcomes for all learners and schools across the country.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the National Model for Regional Working on School Improvement be supported.

- (b) That a business plan be developed with the intention that the additional services listed in the Model be incorporated into the GwE regional model, in phases, subject to a satisfactory business case for each and a supporting transition plan to ensure service continuity and performance; and
- (c) That the Joint Committee be directed to ensure that its supporting Executive Board has a sufficiently broad membership to represent the interest of the sub-regions/counties.

168. SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA REVIEW

The Cabinet Member for Education introduced the report on the outcome of the consultation regarding the Flintshire Schools' Funding Formula review and to approve the new formula from April 2014.

The Cabinet Member commented that whilst the formula had been incrementally updated there were many factors and elements within it which lacked clear educational or operational rationale and it was acknowledged that a review was long overdue. He commended the Director of Lifelong Learning and his Team on the detailed process undertaken to review both the Primary and Secondary formulae and the development of new principles to underpin the allocation of resources to schools.

The Cabinet Member referred to the formal and informal consultation that had taken place which had been invaluable in developing the final design of the funding models. He explained that individually schools may have an increase or decrease in their budgets in comparison to the current formula, however, transitional arrangements would be implemented over a three year period to allow schools with reduced funding to make adjustments.

The Leader of the Council expressed his thanks to the Director, Officers, and Headteacher and Governor representatives for their hard work and commitment. He commented that the revised formula would put the Authority in a good position to seek national change for funding. The Chief Executive reiterated the comments made by the Leader and also expressed his appreciation for the cooperation of schools and the collaborative work undertaken by other stakeholders. He said the revised formula would remove the risks inherent in the current system, reduce complexity, and ensure a fair and equitable distribution for schools.

The Director of Lifelong Learning thanked all Members who had contributed to the process for their input and referred to the consultation and discussions which had been held with stakeholders through the Schools Budget Forum and Heads Federation Groups. He said a predictable formula had been achieved based on key educational principles which would enable schools to move forward.

RESOLVED:

That the implementation of the revised funding formulas for primary and secondary schools, inclusive of proposed transitional dampening arrangements, be approved.

169. COUNCIL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2014/15

The Head of Finance introduced the report to present the final 2014/15 revenue budget proposals for the Council Fund for recommendation to County Council. She provided background information and advised that the draft proposals had been presented to Cabinet on 21 January 2014 for initial approval and had also been referred to Overview and Scrutiny Committees for consideration and feedback. The formal Council Fund budget setting for 2014/15 and setting of the Council Tax for the year would take place at a meeting of the County Council later in the day.

The Head of Finance advised that the Cabinet's initial budget proposals for 2014/15 had identified a budget gap of £0.915m at that stage. At the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny meeting on 3 February 2014 Members were advised that the budget shortfall had reduced to £0.540m as a result of the net effect of a number of items identified as part of the emerging Month 8 budget monitoring position. Members had also been advised that the following items were still under consideration in an attempt to achieve a balanced budget:

- Further corporate efficiencies (procurement and back to basics)
- Workforce –costs of employment
- Council tax level
- Ongoing review of budget assumptions and intelligence

The Head of Finance reported that following detailed consideration of the above and the inclusion of further corporate and functional efficiencies and efficiencies relating to workforce costs the budget proposals for 2014/15 were now balanced.

In commending the report to Members, the Head of Finance drew attention to the section of the report relating to risk assessment and assurance and some of the risks that would need to be monitored in 2014/15. She also referred to the process undertaken for assessing any potential equalities impact issues.

The Head of Finance outlined the final budget proposals and its funding which was detailed in the report.

The Leader of the Council expressed his thanks to the Cabinet and Corporate Management Team, and all who were involved in the budget process and the work undertaken to close the budget shortfall. He referred to the unprecedented financial challenges facing the Authority at the current time and in the future and expressed his appreciation for the ongoing commitment to protect front line services as far as possible. Members reiterated the sentiments expressed by the Leader and added their thanks to all Members and Officers.

The Chief Executive referred to the assurances given in the statement by the Head of Finance on the robustness of the estimates and adequacy of reserves, and his report in relation to the budget strategy and Organisational Change Programme which were contained in the report. He thanked Senior Officers for their professionalism and diligence in working through the budget process.

RESOLVED:

That the following be recommended to County Council on 18 February 2014:-

- (a) That the 2014/15 Council Fund Revenue Budget Requirement be set at £253.718m (which is £1.423m below the calculated Standard Spending Assessment) (4.01).
- (b) That there be a 3.0% increase in Council Tax at Band D and an assumed 99% collection rate (4.02).
- (c) The inclusion of the Outcome Agreement Grant of £1.458m in the budget (4.03).
- (d) The levels of inflation assumed in the budget (4.04 – 4.06).
- (e) That items of non-standard inflation are only allocated out to services when the actual increase in cost is known (4.05).
- (f) The amount of £0.092m included in the budget relating to a transfer into the settlement (4.07).
- (g) The inclusion of £4.872m of recurring pressures in the budget (Appendix 4) and that any proposals to vary the use of the sums allocated are to be the subject of a further report to Cabinet for consideration (4.08).
- (h) The inclusion of estimated one-off costs totalling £4.800m in the budget (Appendix 5), to be funded in line with the Investment Strategy (section 6).
- (i) The inclusion of efficiencies of £11.950m in the budget (4.10).
- (j) The inclusion of efficiencies of £11.950m and that the achievement of all efficiencies be monitored monthly and reported through the budget monitoring report with any corrective action taken in-year as has been the case in previous years (4.10).

170. COUNCIL FUND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2014/15 AND INDICATIVE FUNDING TO 2017/18

The Head of Finance introduced the report to propose the Council Fund Capital Programme for 2014/15, with indicative funding estimates for future years, following consultation with all Members.

The Head of Finance provided background information and advised that the draft annual Council Fund Capital Programme for 2014/15 and indicative funding to 2017/18 had been considered by Cabinet on 21 January 2014 for initial approval and was referred to Overview and Scrutiny for consideration. A meeting hosted by Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee was held on 3 February 2014 to enable all Members to consider the 2014/15 Capital Programme.

The Head of Finance drew attention to the key considerations in the report and advised that the final budget proposals for 2014/15 and indicative funding to 2017/18 remained unchanged from the draft proposals. Cabinet was asked to consider approval of the recommendations as set out in 8.01 of the report for recommendation to County Council.

RESOLVED:

That the following be recommended to Council on 18th February 2014:

- (a) Note the report.
- (b) Approve the allocation of funding to the core capital programme in 2014/15, as shown in Appendix 1, including the additional items referred to in Section 5.05, and note the indicative funding available for future years; and
- (c) Approve the setting of a minimal capital receipts target for 2014/15 and the process whereby receipts generated in one financial year are used to fund expenditure in the next (See Section 5.02.3 and 5.02.4).

171. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2014/15 & CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2014/15

The Cabinet Member for Housing presented the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) revenue budget proposals for the 2014/15 financial year, including proposed rent and service charge changes, key areas of income and expenditure, and the level of closing balance at the year end. Members were also asked to consider the budget proposals for the HRA Capital programme 2014/15, which is year three of a six year improvement programme, and to note the impact of the proposed revenue budget and capital programme on the HRA 30 year Business Plan.

The Cabinet Member gave an overview of the background to the proposals and referred to the main considerations in the report. She advised that the final HRA subsidy and Item 8 determinations had been received from the Welsh Government on 3 February 2014. There was one minor adjustment in the final determinations for 2014/15 to the proposed guideline rent for Flintshire in the draft determinations that had been received on 20 December 2013, with all other aspects of the determinations remaining unchanged. The final determinations from the WG were to increase the all-Wales average weekly guideline rent by 4.2%.

The Head of Housing referred to the Capital Programme 2014/15. The total proposed capital funding for 2014/15 was £12.106m. This figure was reduced marginally by £0.275m from the initial proposals in the January report to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny. A further assessment of the likely level of capital receipts in 2014/15 had been made which took account of market conditions. As a result the estimate for capital receipts had been reduced from £0.600m, to £0.325m. If further land receipts materialised in 2014/15 then further work could be undertaken.

Referring to Flintshire's 30 year HRA business plan, the Head of Housing advised that the most up to date estimate of the business plan, based on the proposed 2014/15 revenue budget and capital programme, was appended to the report. The plan showed a projected funding shortfall of £8.005m to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) by 2020 a reduction of £6.520m on the funding shortfall projected in the 2013/14 business plan submitted to the WG. This was a change from the initial proposals to Cabinet and Scrutiny in January which reflected the reduced level of capital receipts. A revised business plan and revised capital programme would be submitted to Welsh Government following approval by Council.

The Cabinet Member for Housing proposed that Cabinet supported the recommendations as set out in the report.

RESOLVED:

That the following be recommended to County Council:-

- (a) The proposed HRA budget for 2014/15 as set out in Appendix 1, incorporating the financial assumptions in Appendix 2 and the service Improvements and Efficiencies in Appendix 3.
- (b) The level of rent and service charges for 2014/15 as set out in paragraphs 3.01 to 3.07.
- (c) The level of projected balances at 31st March 2015 at 3.20% of total expenditure.
- (d) The proposed HRA Capital Programme as set out in Appendix 4.

172. PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2014/15

The Head of Finance introduced the proposals for setting a range of prudential indicators in accordance with the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (the Prudential Code). She explained that the prudential indicators required by the Prudential Code were to support and record local decision making and were not designed to be used as comparative performance indicators. The Prudential Code recognised that in making capital investment decisions and in reviewing the prudential indicators the Authority had to take into account certain factors. However, the Code concentrated on the means by which the Authority demonstrated that its proposals were affordable, prudent and sustainable.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet approve and recommend to County Council on 18 February 2014:-

- (a) the prudential indicators as detailed in Section 3 of the report
- Capital expenditure (3.05)
 - Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream (3.06)
 - Incremental impact of capital investment decisions on the council tax (3.07)
 - Incremental impact of capital investment decisions on housing rents (3.07)
 - Capital financing requirement (3.08)
 - Gross debt and the capital financing requirement (3.10)
 - Authorised limit for external debt (3.11, 3.13)
 - Operational boundary for external debt (3.12)
 - Adoption of the CIPFA Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice and Cross-Sectoral Guidance Notes (3.14)
- (b) delegated authority for the Head of Finance to effect movements between the separately agreed limits within the authorised limit for external debt and the operational boundary for external debt (3.11, 3.12)

173. MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION 2014/15

The Head of Finance introduced a report on the proposals for the setting of a prudent minimum revenue provision for the repayment of debt in 2014/15, as required under the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2008 ('the 2008 Regulations').

The Head of Finance explained that Local Authorities are required annually to set aside some of their revenue reserves as provision for the repayment of debt in respect of capital expenditure financed from borrowing or credit arrangements. Regulation 22 of the 2008 Regulations requires Authorities each year to make an amount of Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) which it considers to be 'prudent'. She outlined the options for prudent provision which were detailed in the report and the conditions for using the options.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet approve and recommend to the County Council on 18 February 2014:-

- Option 1 (Regulatory Method) be used for the calculation of the minimum revenue provision in 2014/15 for all supported borrowing; this represents a continuation of the approved and adopted policy for 2013/14.
- Option 3 (Asset Life Method) be used for the calculation of the minimum revenue provision in 2014/15 for all unsupported (prudential) borrowing;

this represents a continuation of the approved and adopted policy for 2013/14.

174. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2014/15

The Head of Finance presented the draft Treasury Management Strategy for 2014/15 for recommendation to Council. She explained that the changes made from the 2013/14 Strategy were summarised in the report.

The Head of Finance advised that at a meeting of the Audit Committee on 29 January 2014, Members reviewed the draft Treasury Management Strategy for 2014/15 and discussion had taken place around the concerns raised on investments and debt. The Head of Finance referred to the detailed briefing paper which had been provided to all Members in the last few days providing detailed answers to the questions raised by Members at the training session prior to the Audit Committee and subsequently. The Chief Executive commented that assurance had been given that the debt balance was appropriate for the size of the Authority. The Audit Committee had recommended to Cabinet that the Council approved the Strategy for 2014/15.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Cabinet considers the enquiry put forward by the Audit Committee outlined in 3.03; and
- (b) That Cabinet approves and recommends to the County Council the Treasury Management Strategy 2014/15.

175. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S HOUSEHOLD WASTE COLLECTION POLICY AND HRC/BRING SITE ARRANGEMENTS

The Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection and Leisure introduced the report to seek approval of the Council's Household Waste Collection Policy and the arrangements at the Council's HRC and 'Bring sites'.

The Cabinet Member provided background information and referred to elements that were not being implemented within the current waste policies and therefore they required amendment. He explained that to provide clarity and a single document on the Council's complete waste collection service the new policy included detailing operations at the Council's Household Recycling Centres (HRCs) and 'Bring Sites'.

The Cabinet Member advised that the proposed new policy relied on the continuing participation of Flintshire residents to ensure recycling levels remained high. He expressed his thanks for the cooperation and commitment which had already been demonstrated by the majority of residents in this respect. The Cabinet Member gave an overview of the main changes to the Policy as detailed in the report.

RESOLVED:

That the Council Household Waste Collection Policy and the proposed arrangements at Council operated HRC and 'Bring Sites' be approved.

176. HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the report to seek approval for a Council Housing Asset Management Strategy. She advised that the Strategy covered the period 2014 to 2020 and would see housing stock meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS) at the end of that time. Programmes of work would be developed to ensure that the housing stock was able to meet the changing needs of the population and had a sustainable future; meeting issues identified through Welfare reform and household income pressures. The Strategy would create 20 apprenticeships and 200 local jobs. In addition the Strategy considered the legislative responsibilities that needed to be met and how it could support delivery of the Council's Improvement Plan objectives, particularly around alleviation of fuel poverty.

The Cabinet Member referred to the key considerations in the report and the four main work stream requirements to achieve all the investment needs by 2020. She advised that the Asset Management Team would complete a consultation programme with elected Member, tenants and other stakeholders to develop a revised investment plan commencing in April 2015. Members were asked to note that the 2014/15 programme would continue as previously agreed.

The Head of Housing commented on a review of stock condition and the start of area by area consultations. She outlined the next steps and referred to additional capital funding from the WG to undertake further development in the Deeside area which was in addition to the Authority's own £100m investment.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Asset Management strategy attached to the report as Appendix 1 be approved; and
- (b) That the detailed consultation work needed with local Councillors and tenants during the Spring and Summer of 2014 to produce an investment plan to achieve WHQS for each of the programme years up to 2020, be agreed; and
- (c) That it be noted that the 2014/15 programme will continue as previously agreed.

177. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2013/14 (MONTH 8)

The Head of Finance presented the latest revenue budget monitoring information (Month 8) for the Council Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for 2013/14.

The Head of Finance reported that the projected year end position, as estimated at Month 8, on the Council Fund was a net in year expenditure forecast to be £1.068m less than budget and a projected contingency reserve balance at 31 March 2014 of £3.709m. The projected year end position on the HRA was a net in year expenditure forecast to be £0.212m less than budget and projected balances at 31 March 2014 of £1.646m.

The Head of Finance referred to the underspend on the Council Fund, and drew attention to the key variances to note which were detailed in the report, and the programme of efficiencies and requests for carry forward. Commenting on the HRA and the projected underspend of £0.212m and projected closing balance, the Head of Finance reported that details of the reasons for significant variances occurring to date and the actions planned to address them were appended to the report.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the overall report be noted;
- (b) That the projected Council Fund contingency sum as at 31 March 2014 (paragraph 6.02) be noted;
- (c) That the carry forwards detailed in paragraphs 3.10 – 3.12 be approved; and
- (d) That the projected final level of balances on the Housing Revenue Account (paragraph 7.03) be noted.

178. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME CONSULTATION

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Management introduced a report to provide information on a Welsh Government (WG) consultation seeking views on the review of options for the future of Council Tax support in Wales. The report also provided recommended responses, drafted by Officers, on the proposals. The deadline for responses to the consultation was 5 March 2014.

The Cabinet Member provided background information and referred to the increasing financial pressure on the WG and local authorities which would be difficult to sustain. He advised that WG was reviewing the options for the future of Council Tax Support (CTS) in Wales, with a view to providing a scheme which was equitable, sustainable, and delivered the maximum protection for low income and vulnerable households within the financial constraints.

The Cabinet Member and Head of Finance commented on the main considerations in the report. The range of options identified by the WG for reducing entitlement were appended to the report and the recommended response to the consultation detailed in Appendix 2. Members were advised that the options would impact in different ways on households currently in receipt of CTS and on local authority revenue. The Cabinet Member and Head of Finance outlined the financial implications to the Authority and advised that the expected additional cost to Flintshire in 2014/15 was £0.633m.

The Cabinet Member reported that the draft responses to the consultation had been endorsed by the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a meeting held on 13 February 2014.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the consultation be noted; and
- (b) That the recommended responses, as prepared by senior officers within the Revenue and Benefits services, and detailed in Appendix 2 to the report, be noted.

179. INTERMEDIATE CARE FUND

The Cabinet Member for Social Services introduced the report to advise of the purpose of the Intermediate Care Fund, the application process, and to outline proposals for Flintshire's bid. She explained that as the Authority was at the initial planning and development stage of the bidding process the report was presented for information. She continued that Members may wish to consider arrangements for securing political endorsement of the final bid which needed to be made within tight timescales.

The Cabinet Member explained that the Welsh Government (WG) had developed an Intermediate Care Fund to encourage integrated working between local authorities (including Housing and Social Care), Health, and other partners. Funding was targeted at supporting older people to maintain their independence and remain in their own home. The Fund was available for 2014-15 only and could not be used to substitute existing funding streams. The indicative allocation for Flintshire was £1,926m. The Authority was required to develop its bid in close partnership with Local Health Boards and third and independent sector partners which would have a critical role in delivering services associated with the fund. The Cabinet Member advised that there were no definitive proposals or costed models developed as yet but the initial areas of dialogue with partners had been included in the report.

Councillor Chris Bithell referred to preventative and wellbeing services and sought clarification on the areas within the East and South locality in relation to the expansion of provision of Falls prevention.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the availability of the Fund and initial proposals be noted; and
- (b) That authority be delegated to the Chief Executive and the Director of Community Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Social Services to finalise the bid.

180. PLAY PROVISION: SUMMER PLAYScheme 2014

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced a report to present the recommendations of the Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee in order to provide sustainable play provision from April 2014 with reference to the Summer play scheme programme.

The Head of Service advised that a Task and Finish Group had been set up to consider arrangements for Playschemes for 2013 and beyond. Following a meeting of the Task and Finish Group held on 18 November 2013, the recommendations of the Group were presented to the Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 19 December 2013, where they were supported to be recommended to Cabinet. The recommendations of the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee were detailed in the report. The recommendations included a pressure bid of £12,000 to be allocated to support match funding for Town and Community Councils.

The Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection and Leisure expressed a number of concerns around the recommendation that £12,000 be allocated to support match funding for Town and Community Councils. He referred to the proposals for 2014/15 which had been introduced by Cabinet following a major review of the Service and proposed that it affirmed its intention to proceed in accordance with its decision at the meeting of Cabinet held on 16 July 2013.

RESOLVED:

Cabinet noted that its proposals for 2014/15 had been introduced following a major review of the Service, and it affirmed its intention to proceed as per its decision of 16 July, 2013.

181. WORKFORCE INFORMATION QUARTER 3 (OCT - DEC 2013)

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Management introduced the report which provided an update for the third quarter 2013/14 on establishment, headcount, agency, early retirements, turnover, diversity and absence.

Members welcomed the savings achieved on use of agency workers and the significant reduction in staff absence from the comparative quarter last year. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development referred to the improved trend for absence levels compared to the last two quarters and the continuing programme of attendance management reporting and action planning being undertaken across each Directorate. Members also noted that there had been an increase in the number of staff who had attained 100% attendance when compared to the same quarter last year.

RESOLVED:

That the Workforce Information Report for quarter three for 2013/14 be noted.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.25 am)

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Chairman