

**CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**12 MARCH 2015**

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, 12 March 2015

**PRESENT:** Councillor Peter Curtis (Vice-Chairman in the Chair for the start of the meeting)

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Clive Carver, Paul Cunningham, Andy Dunbobbin, Ron Hampson, Joe Johnson, Tim Newhouse, David Roney and Paul Shotton

**SUBSTITUTION:**

Councillor: Vicky Perfect for Ian Dunbar

**ALSO PRESENT:**

Councillors: Bernie Attridge and Haydn Bateman attended as observers

**APOLOGY:**

Chief Executive

**CONTRIBUTORS:**

Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Finance, Chief Officer (Governance), Chief Officer (Organisational Change)

Finance Manager Strategy Accounting & Systems for agenda item 6 – Revenue Budget Monitoring 2014/15 (Month 9) and Finance Manager – Technical Accounting for agenda item 6 – Capital Programme 2014/15 (Month 9)

Managed Agency Contract Manager and Human Resources Manager for agenda item 7 (Workforce Information Report – Quarter 3 2014/15)

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Housing and Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

**77. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR**

The Vice-Chairman sought nominations from the New Independent and Liberal Democrat Groups for a Chair for the remainder of the municipal year. Councillor Paul Shotton nominated Councillor David Roney and this was duly seconded. On being put to the vote, the nomination was carried. Members congratulated Councillor Roney on his appointment as Chairman.

**RESOLVED:**

That Councillor David Roney be appointed Chairman for the Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

**78. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**

No declarations of interest were made.

## 79. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 22 January 2015, 30 January 2015 and 12 February 2015 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

### Matters Arising

Councillor Paul Shotton referred to the former Euticals site in Sandycroft and asked whether a response had been received from Welsh Government on the issue of funding. In response, the Leader of the Council explained that a letter had been sent to the Minister on costs incurred by the Council and a response was awaited.

### **RESOLVED:**

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

## 80. **QUARTER 3 IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORT (CORPORATE RESOURCES)**

The Chief Officer (Governance) introduced a report for the Committee to note and consider elements of the 2014/15 Improvement Plan Monitoring report relevant to the Committee for the period October to December 2014.

He provided a detailed explanation on the following areas:-

- Welfare Reform
- Organisational Change
- Financial Strategy
- Procurement Strategy
- Asset Strategy
- Access to Council Services
- People Change & Development

The Leader of the Council thanked the Chief Officer for his presentation and apologised for the limited number of Chief Officers in attendance at this meeting; he provided assurance that this would not be replicated in the future. He explained that the Council had agreed the Improvement Priorities in June 2014 and the Wales Audit Office Corporate Assessment report, that was to be submitted to Cabinet on 17 March 2015, provided positive comments on how the priorities had been applied. He commented on the two additional Extra Care schemes proposed for Flintshire and of the commitment to the continued roll out of the Flintshire Connects service in Buckley and Mold. Risks had also been identified which included Welfare Reform and the roll out of Universal Credit to families in the Shotton Jobcentre Plus catchment area in addition to the single claimants that were involved in the pilot scheme. There was a high level of confidence that the improvement objectives would be achieved and there were no concerns about non-achievement of the priorities. It was a positive report even though more work was required.

In commenting on the roll out of Universal Credit to families in the Shotton area, Councillor Paul Shotton queried whether assurance had been sought from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) on the level of funding to be provided to continue the service currently provided to those individuals involved in the pilot scheme. In response the Leader confirmed that funding was currently received from DWP which had allowed one-to-one support to the small number of Universal Credit claimants involved in the pilot scheme. As the number of families that would be affected by the roll out of Universal Credit was not yet known, the funding would be monitored to ensure that an adequate level was received to continue the excellent service provided to those claimants. Councillor Shotton also raised concern at the note on the introduction of the spare room subsidy highlighted in the report.

Councillor Peter Curtis agreed with the concerns about the level of funding for the roll out of Universal Credit to families. Councillor Curtis also raised significant concern about the changes to the Blue Badge scheme, particularly about the form that applicants were required to complete and that staff, who were not medically trained, would be determining whether individuals were entitled to a Blue Badge. He welcomed the decision by Welsh Government to reconsider the guidelines that had been produced for Councils on the implementation of the scheme and highlighted concerns raised by residents. Councillor Curtis also referred to workshops for Members that had taken place on the changes to the scheme and the Chairman commented that he felt that the workshops had not been helpful and spoke of similar comments from residents on the scheme.

In response to a question from Councillor Ron Hampson, the Chief Officer (Governance) confirmed that Housing Benefit would cease to exist under Universal Credit and that claimants would receive a single benefit payment which could include an element for their housing. The Leader said that concerns had been raised about the impact of Universal Credit roll out and whether this would result in an increase in rent arrears. It was reported that there were currently 180 live Universal Credit claims and that 19 claimants had been referred to the Citizens Advice Bureau for personal budgeting support and 88 claims had been referred from Jobcentre Plus to the Council's Housing Benefit Service.

Councillor Marion Bateman concurred with the comments on the Blue Badge scheme and sought clarification on the progress of the Mold Flintshire Connects service. Councillor Bernie Attridge explained that concerns had been raised with the Minister on the provision of the Blue Badge scheme and a response was currently awaited that would be shared with Members once it had been received. On the issue of Mold Connects office, the Leader explained that a report was to be submitted to Cabinet on 17 March 2015. It was proposed that the service could be provided within the Mold Library building and that a further Connects office could be progressed in Buckley.

In response to a question from Councillor Andy Dunbobbin on the number of sanctions that had been issued to Universal Credit claimants, the Chief Officer advised that he would speak to the Revenues & Benefits Manager and would provide a response to Committee Members.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Committee notes the Quarter 3 Improvement Plan Monitoring Reports and will continue to highlight and monitor poor performance and feedback details of any challenge to the Policy, Performance & Partnerships Team for reporting to Cabinet where appropriate.

**81. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2014/15 (MONTH 9)**

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2014/15 (Month 9)

The Finance Manager introduced a report to provide Members with the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2014/15 (Month 9) for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) which was to be submitted to Cabinet on 17 March 2015.

For the Council Fund, the projected net in-year expenditure was forecast to be £1.978m lower than budget and was an increase of £0.964m on the underspend at Month 8. Appendix 1 detailed the reasons for the changes which included a net reduction in the projected underspend for Social Services due to additional income and additional one-off vacancy savings which had contributed to an improved position on workforce efficiencies. Section 3.06 detailed the efficiencies and it was currently projected that £7.588m of the £8.840m (86%) would be achieved. Details of the un-achieved efficiencies were reported in appendix 3.

Section 4 detailed the provisions for inflation and section 5 reported the existing risks and changes to previously reported risks. Taking into account amounts needed to be used from the unearmarked reserves and the current projected outturn at month 8, the projected balance on the contingency reserve at 31 March 2015 was £4.919m; details were summarised in appendix 4.

The HRA was projected to have an overall underspend of £0.304m and a projected balance at month 9 of £1.470m, which at 4.89% of total expenditure satisfied the prudent approach of ensuring a minimum level of 3%.

Councillor Tim Newhouse welcomed the projected underspend of £1.978m.

Capital Programme 2014/15 (Month 9)

The Finance Manager – Technical Accountancy introduced a report to provide Members with the Month 9 (end of December) capital programme information for 2014/15 which would also be submitted to Cabinet on 17 March 2015.

The table at paragraph 3.01.1 set out how the programme had changed during 2014/15 with the revised figure being £30.194m for Council Fund and £12.431m for HRA. The changes during this period were reflected in the table at paragraph 3.03.1 and full details were provided in appendix A. The capital expenditure compared to budget and a required rollover to 2015/16 of £2.225m,

were reported and details were shown in appendix B. The overall position showed a projected underspend of £0.090m.

In response to a question from Councillor Ron Hampson about the offices at Ewloe, the Chief Officer (Organisational Change) advised that Unilever's lease on the building would terminate in July 2016 and added that the building was currently empty.

Councillor Tim Newhouse referred to capital receipts that had been received by the Council following the sale of land and suggested that future Capital Programme update reports include specific information on any large receipts received by the Council.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be noted.

**82. WORKFORCE INFORMATION REPORT - QUARTER 3 2014/15**

The Managed Agency Contract Manager introduced a report to provide Members with an update for the third quarter for 2014/15 for the following:-

- Headcount and Full Time Equivalent
- Organisational Age Profile
- Employee Turnover and Stability (including redundancies and early retirements)
- Attendance (including 100% attendance)
- Performance Appraisals and Development
- Resource Management (including recruitment and agency workers)
- Equality and Diversity

He explained that the information was being presented in a dashboard format to provide a visual presentation of the data showing the current status and historical trends of the Council's performance against key performance indicators. He provided details of the total headcount, turnover, agency spend and days lost for sickness and explained that the agency spend for 2014/15 had exceeded the target of £1.83m at the end of quarter 3. This was due to the increased need for agency workers within Streetscene and Transportation as the vacancies at operative level currently stood at 57. The days lost per full time equivalent (FTE) was 9.78 at 31 December 2014, which exceeded the target of 9.60 days, and was an increase of 1.30 on the figure at 31 December 2013.

Councillor Clive Carver queried the high numbers of employees who were shown as 'not stated' under Ethnicity and Sexual Orientation on pages 160 and 169 and asked whether a form could be issued to all employees during their appraisal to encourage them to provide the information. In response, the Managed Agency Contract Manager explained that the information was recorded by employees on the Itrent Self Service database but a large number of employees did not have access to Itrent to allow them to input the information. The Chief Officer (Governance) agreed that officers would consider ways to increase the coverage of the data and would provide details of the findings to the Committee.

In referring to the sickness figures reported of 10.34 days per FTE, Councillor Peter Curtis raised significant concern about the high target and suggested that this should be reduced to a maximum of 3 days. He felt that productivity would be affected by the high rates of sickness and could also affect service delivery. The Human Resources Manager explained that work was undertaken with services, particularly those with a high rate of sickness, on how to reduce sickness rates and she added that a number of services had levels of sickness lower than the target figure. Councillor Marion Bateman highlighted the high rate of sickness within the Streetscene directorate. She also queried why the information on the sexual orientation of employees was required and in response, the Managed Agency Contract Manager explained that the Authority was expected to provide data on ethnicity and diversity on an annual basis. He added that the information was requested when applicants completed an application form for vacancies with the Council. The Chief Officer (Governance) explained that recruitment was currently low and that a large number of staff had commenced employment with the Authority prior to information on ethnicity and diversity being requested with application forms. The Human Resources Manager explained that individuals would be encouraged to provide the data but could not be forced to do so.

Councillor Curtis welcomed the dashboard format of the report but agreed with the concerns raised about the levels of sickness in Streetscene and Social Services, particularly in relation to lifting.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Workforce Information report for Quarter 3 be noted.

**83. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Housing and Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator introduced the report to consider the Forward Work Programme for the Committee.

She detailed the items for the forthcoming meetings and asked Members for any suggestions of items for consideration at future meetings.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Forward Work Programme be approved.

**84. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE**

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

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.13 am)

.....  
**Chairman**