

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
22 JANUARY 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, 22 January 2015

PRESENT: Councillor Carolyn Thomas (Chair)

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Paul Cunningham, Peter Curtis, Andy Dunbobbin, Robin Guest, Ron Hampson, Richard Jones and Paul Shotton

APOLOGY:

Councillor: Ian Dunbar

SUBSTITUTIONS:

Councillor Owen Thomas for Councillor Clive Carver and Councillor Mike Peers for Councillor Richard Lloyd.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor Haydn Bateman

CONTRIBUTORS:

Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Chief Executive, Chief Officer People & Resources, Chief Officer Governance, Chief Officer Organisational Change, Chief Officer Organisational Change, Corporate Finance Manager, Finance Manager, Revenues & Benefits Manager, Customer Services Manager

IN ATTENDANCE:

Member Engagement Manager and Overview & Scrutiny Support Officer

64. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

No declarations of interest were made.

65. BUDGET CONSULTATION PROCESS 2015/16

The Chairman welcomed the contributors to the meeting.

The Leader outlined the budget consultation process to date, which included briefing meetings with Group Leaders and Chairs of Overview & Scrutiny Committees, culminating with the Overview & Scrutiny mop-up session scheduled to be held on Friday, 30th January, 2015, prior to the final budget proposals being presented to County Council on the 17th February, 2015. Regular updates had been given to Members over recent months and the Leader commented on the unprecedented financial challenges facing all Councils across Wales. The draft budget report, presented to Cabinet on 16th December, 2015 highlighted a £16.4m budget gap for 2015/16. Following intensive work a balanced budget had been achieved. The risk to frontline services was a unique challenge with no magic formula and no additional money available.

The Leader commented on the consequential revenue provision and briefed Members on his lobbying of Ministers and the Welsh Government (WG).

He expressed his disappointment following the Autumn Statement that no additional funding for service protection was being allocated to Local Government.

The Fire Authority levy was raised by Members and a discussion followed on value for money efficiencies that had been achieved to bring the levy down to 0.21%. The Flintshire Members who sat on this board were praised in helping to achieve this.

A discussion was held on the Police Authority precept with the Chief Executive commenting that Flintshire would be unlikely to influence this as it was set by the Police & Crime Commissioner. Cllr. Richard Jones suggested that a letter be sent through the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) requesting that this be looked at. The Leader agreed saying this needed to be discussed at UK level. It was reported that the Police & Crime Commissioner was scheduled to attend the Community Profile & Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting on 23rd July, 2015. Following discussion, the Committee agreed with the suggestion that the Leader ask the WLGA to write to the Police & Crime Commissioner asking that the level of Police Authority precept be looked at.

The Chief Executive gave a brief presentation which covered the following areas:-

- National Position
- Revised Local Position
- Impacts of 14-15 on 15-16
- Strategy to close the extended gap
- Up to date Strategy position
- Remaining Strategy Actions
- Big Budget Conversation
- Member Involvement
- Overview & Scrutiny
- Final Steps in the Budget
- Medium Term Financial Plan Review

The Chief Officer (People and Resources), Chief Officer (Governance), Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) and Chief Officer (Organisation Change) each gave a detailed presentation on budget proposals within their respective portfolios.

The comments and questions which were raised by Members of the Committee on the presentations, together with the responses given, are detailed in Appendix 1 (attached).

During discussion, the Chair thanked Officers for the openness in which the workshops and verbal updates had been delivered to Members. She felt members of the public were better prepared for the year ahead.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the presentation be received and that the Member's comments and the responses thereto be incorporated into the budget consultation section of the report to Cabinet on 17th February; and
- (b) That the Leader ask the WLGA to write to the Police & Crime Commissioner asking that the level of Police Authority precept be looked at.

66. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were one member of the public and three members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 1.28 pm)

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Chair

Overview & Scrutiny Budget Consultation 2015/16

Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 22 January, 2015

Section	Issue/Question	Response
OVERVIEW		
	Given the reducing price of oil, and its impact on other prices less provision can be made for inflation.	Acknowledged.
	Interest rates for Housing Revenue national subsidy system	A briefing note can be prepared.
	The perceived unfairness at the allocation of the 'consequential' additional finance from the Autumn Statement.	Acknowledged
	Difficulties of local financial planning given that the provisional local government settlement provided no indication of funding for future years	Acknowledged
	The Co-dependency of Accident & Emergency services and the rest of the health and social care provision	Members urged to read the Cabinet report on the Intermediate Car fund.
	Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) and the proposed council tax increase level	Currently the proposed budget is below the SSA. The Council Tax income proposal is currently set at 3%.
	Could a letter be sent to the Police & Crime Commissioner urging restraint in the proposed increased levy, especially as the Fire & Rescue Authority have reduced their precept	This is a UK wide issue. It was agreed that a letter be sent to the Police & Crime Commissioner.
	Could a Council Tax increase be capped?	In Wales, unlike that in England, there is no statutory power to cap. In England,

		there have to be local referenda to increase the Council tax beyond 2%.
PEOPLE & RESOURCES		
	There is a need to demonstrate the reduction in the workforce to the public. Can figures indicating the number in the workforce, both as raw numbers and full time equivalents be provided, so that the reduction can actually be seen?	The way that the information is currently reported to this committee through the Workforce Information quarterly reports can be changed to reflect this better.
	The fact sheets are invaluable. Could the proposals therein have been ranked in some way so that those savings which could be realised soonest were apparent?	
	In relation to the software, how can we as Members get a better understanding of budget detail?	Appropriate reporting to O&S committees.
	Can training be provided for Members on using the new Collaborative Planning Software?	Yes, the intention is to provide training to Finance staff first, then managers, then Members.
GOVERNANCE		
	Could more collaborative work with Wrexham CBC produce mutually beneficial savings?	Yes: there are already many examples of our excellent working relationship. A meeting has been requested.
	How can the loss of the principal solicitor posts be managed?	By a change in the skills mix amongst the remaining team, to enable them to work more effectively.
	How can the number of meetings supported by Democratic Services be reduced?	By withdrawing support from non-core meetings such as SACRE, the Planning Strategy Group and FJTUC.

	Will the additional income in Legal be found by increasing existing charges or introducing new ones?	Both. We will increase our fees in line with other North Wales Authorities. The average income as a % of budget is 4% in FCC and 12% across Wales.
	There have been previous proposals to reduce the length of minutes, which were not supported	This issue will need to be considered by the Democratic Services Committee, which is to consider a report on webcasting at its next meeting and which could have implications for how we minute meetings.
ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE		
	Does the figure for lease renewals include empty properties?	Yes.
	Is the CCTV service going to improve?	The current review project, which is not seeking to increase the levy paid by Town and Community Councils, is likely to produce a combination of peripatetic and fixed cameras.
	There was a proposal previously for the Council to have a development partner for our Assets: how has this developed.	It did not develop as originally envisaged, so we do not have one partner for all the assets, but have specific partners for specific assets.
COMMUNITY & ENTERPRISE		
	Concern at the prospect of losing the staffed switchboard at the same time as the yellow pages information is being discontinued	The yellow pages entry appears to be little used.
	The impact on service users	As there will be service

	of discontinuing the registration out station service: more details should have been provided.	provision from Flintshire Connects office, the impact on service users is mitigated.
	Discontinuation of the payment facility at post offices will cause problems for those in rural areas and where there is no Flintshire Connects or broadband provision.	The post office payment is the most expensive of our current provision. We offer other means, such as Payzone which is available in between 500-600 outlets in Flintshire which includes local shops and garages.
	Impact on staffing numbers within the Registration service	There is one vacant post and one staff member has put in for voluntary redundancy.
CLWYD THEATR CYMRU		
	Could we pursue more funding from the Arts Council?	Clwyd Theatr Cymru (CTC) is already one of the Arts Council's top ten funded facilities.
	Popular touring productions seem to go to other venues, rather than to CTC.	The proposed reduction from 8 to 6 productions will release capacity which could be taken up by touring productions.
	Will the proposed changes affect the viability of the youth theatre?	The proposed changes will not affect the viability of the youth theatre.
	Not all of the premises are in use: there needs to be a more commercial approach.	The Board is aware of this and tone of the qualities sought in the new artistic director will be a greater commercial acumen.