

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
10 SEPTEMBER 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, 10 September 2015

PRESENT: **Councillor Clive Carver (Chairman)**

Councillors: Peter Curtis, Andy Dunbobbin, Robin Guest, Ron Hampson, Richard Jones, Brian Lloyd, David Roney, Carolyn Thomas and Arnold Woolley

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors: David Cox (for Vicky Perfect) and Paul Cunningham (for Ian Smith)

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Marion Bateman, Richard Lloyd and Nigel Steele-Mortimer, and the Chief Officer (Governance)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors:

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance; Councillor Billy Mullin, Cabinet Member for Corporate Management; Chief Executive and Corporate Finance Manager

Team Leader - Community Safety, Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator, Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator and Substance Misuse Officer with Chief Inspector Sharon McCairn of North Wales Police (for minute number 30)

Policy & Performance Manager (for minute numbers 31 & 34)
Electoral Services Manager (for minute number 35)

IN ATTENDANCE: Member Engagement Manager and Committee Officer

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

No declarations of interest were made.

29. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 July 2015 had been circulated with the agenda.

Matters Arising

Minute number 18: Matters arising - the Member Engagement Manager agreed to pursue the list of officer contact numbers (including mobile numbers) for circulation to the Committee.

Minute number 19: Medium Term Financial Strategy - the Member Engagement Manager would request an updated figure in response to Councillor Andy Dunbobbin's question on the emerging pressure for software maintenance for Information Technology, and circulate to the Committee.

Minute number 20: Revenue Budget Monitoring 2015/16 - a written response on the projected shortfall in income from the gas engines at Brookhill and Standard Landfill Sites would be circulated by email to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

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

30. CORPORATE COMMUNITY SAFETY PLAN ANNUAL UPDATE REPORT

The Team Leader - Community Safety delivered a presentation on the activities and progress of the Flintshire Community Safety Partnership (CSP) during 2014/15. The range of funding sources utilised to support the CSP included an element from the Police & Crime Commissioner's budget however this amount was reducing year on year. There had been a change in governance arrangements following the CSP merger with the Local Service Board, however the statutory requirements of the CSP continued to be discharged. Information was shared on the various groups and sub-groups which supported the CSP, including the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Tasking group which met monthly.

The Team Leader described Flintshire as a very safe county in general, with relatively low levels of crime and disorder. A 2.7% increase in overall crime in 2014/15 was not viewed as significant, given the total number of offences, and was primarily attributed to an increase in the reporting of historical sexual offences. The activities of the CSP had helped to contribute towards the continuing reduction in ASB levels. Amongst the main achievements in 2014/15 was the 'White Ribbon' accreditation - the first Authority in North Wales to receive this - which demonstrated the commitment to tackling domestic abuse. The presentation outlined the benefits of interacting with the North Wales Safer Communities Board (SCB) which provided a framework to operate more effectively and maximise resources, and where Flintshire was represented by the Chief Executive. The regional priorities of the SCB were detailed in the Plan for 2014-17 and local priorities for 2015/16 were highlighted in the presentation having been identified through a strategic assessment process and informed by intelligence from the various partners, eg Police, Probation, Health etc.

Councillor Paul Cunningham praised the ASB group for their role in helping to resolve a particular issue. The Team Leader highlighted the progress made by that group and spoke about the proactive approach taken in relation to the trigger process.

The Chairman referred to the classification of crimes and asked if the reduction in ASB offences had meant an increase in other types of crime. Chief Inspector McCairn spoke about the increase in reports of sexual offences, mainly received via Social Services, and changes to the recording process which placed North Wales in a strong position. She went on to say that ASB was not recorded as crime, however there were aspects of crime which overlapped ASB and this ongoing trend would be covered by the ASB group. When asked about crime in some larger cities across the border, the Team Leader replied that levels were much higher than in North Wales and frequently involved certain types of crime not seen in this area.

Councillor Robin Guest commented on the good work done by the CSP but questioned the overlap between regional and local priorities. The Team Leader explained that the presentation slides contained an abridged version of the key areas and that the priorities set by the SCB would complement and inform priorities of the CSP with a focus on locality such as tackling crime, reducing ASB and supporting vulnerable victims of crime. In response to comments on mismatched wording used in the template of the report, she agreed to ensure that this was corrected before the report was finalised.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas felt that more powers given to Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), such as dealing with speeding offences, would enable them to be even more effective in the community. Chief Inspector McCairn spoke about the challenges in granting extended powers and advised that although there were no plans to increase powers on PCSOs, they were able to team up with Police Officers to deal with speeding offences.

Councillor Peter Curtis welcomed the report, in particular the focus to tackle domestic abuse, but felt that racial hatred/abuse was also an emerging important issue. He cited a recent example from within his own ward. Chief Inspector McCairn said that this type of crime was a priority for the Police and was often under-reported. She also referred to the likelihood of further budget cuts which had so far not impacted on front-line services.

In response to Councillor Guest's comments, the Chief Executive said that the recent County Council presentation by the Police & Crime Commissioner had highlighted the fit between local and regional priorities. He spoke about the follow-up work in local planning and said that the partnership remained strong despite the challenges and demands in dealing with some very complex issues. He provided details on tackling child sexual exploitation, alongside the specialist Police unit, and the need to increase dedicated Social Worker support to possible victims and share learning on raising awareness to identify and intervene where necessary.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee recognises the strong regional and local alignment of priorities and is assured of the planning and achievement by the local Community Safety Partnership.

31. LOCAL SERVICE BOARD (LSB) AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS PERFORMANCE - END OF YEAR REPORT 2014/15

The Chief Executive introduced an update on the performance of each of the strategic partnerships and the end of year assessments for the progress of the Local Service Board (LSB) priorities. The three current LSB priorities had a good sub-structure in place and reported overall good progress against milestones, activities and confidence in achieving outcomes. There were concerns about financial support for the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, on which guidance was awaited, however governance arrangements were not expected to change.

Amongst the achievements, the Policy & Performance Manager highlighted a significant reduction in the percentage of Jobseeker Allowance claims by 18-24 year olds. She also advised that the various workstreams under the 'People enjoy good health, wellbeing and independence' priority would be monitored by the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Following comments from Councillor Robin Guest, the Chief Executive explained that one body would continue to be responsible for the delivery of outcomes for community safety however there was still a statutory duty to report on performance and strategic delivery at the LSB.

On the appendix to the end of year report, Councillor Richard Jones pointed out that reference to Flying Start had been removed from the published version of the Improvement Plan. The Policy & Performance Manager referred to the list of amendments to the Improvement Plan later on the agenda and agreed to look into this query and respond separately to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee is assured of the level of progress made during 2014/15 in the achievement of the single Integrated Plan priorities; and
- (b) That the Committee supports the future requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the preparation being undertaken.

32. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Councillor Aaron Shotton advised that following publication of Part 1 of the 2015-18 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in the Summer, an update was scheduled for the next Cabinet meeting to table the Part 2 report currently being prepared on plans to tackle the unprecedented gap of £20.8m for 2016/17. A more detailed report would be shared at the Committee's next meeting in October including discussion on financial relief required from Welsh Government (WG). As discussed at the Member workshops, the results of the Comprehensive Spending Review and work by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) were awaited to demonstrate to WG the effects of reduced funding and changes needed to the national funding formula.

The Chief Executive explained that the Cabinet report summarised the high-level strategy with an overview of the content of the Part 2 report to be shared at the meeting. A draft version had been shared with Group Leaders and Chairs, and consideration was being given to including an item on MTFS at the Council meeting in September to maximise public awareness of the significant financial challenges. Some information had also been shared with the local press to show transparency and generate support for more funding and greater flexibility. The Chief Executive spoke about the need for further discussion on the budget consultation process and the Council's principal role in instigating plans for a national case for funding.

In response to a question from the Chairman regarding an email seeking support for refugees, Councillor Shotton explained that the public statement

previously issued had openly shared the Council's stance on the issue. The first element was to reasonably assess what was achievable in terms of capacity to meet needs, if called upon, and may require more detailed discussion on preparations at full Council.

The Chief Executive reported on the establishment of a working group involving Welfare Rights and Housing colleagues to consider how support could be given, however any impact on Flintshire resources was expected to be low.

RESOLVED:

That the Leader and Chief Executive be thanked for the update on the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

33. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING (MONTH 3)

The Chairman welcomed the new format of report which prioritised the Executive Summary and Recommendations.

The Corporate Finance Manager presented the first detailed Revenue Budget Monitoring 2015/16 (Month 3) for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) which was due to be submitted to Cabinet on 15 September.

For the Council Fund, the first early projection was an overall underspend of £212K. Paragraph 1.04 advised of a projected £573K underspend within Social Care, although £338k of this related to the Independent Living Fund as the amount included in the budget was no longer required following confirmation of the grant. It was recommended that £300k was transferred to be held centrally pending future details on the grant.

The Corporate Finance Manager advised of the position in relation to the programme of efficiencies which he said were being tracked through various programme boards. Appendix 2 provided details on the latest position with regards to the achievement of each of the efficiencies and it was reported that at this stage, £10.876m of the £12.874m included in the budget were expected to be achieved, which equated to 84%.

On unearmarked reserves, the balance of contingency reserves at 31 March 2015 was projected to be £4.958m, however this would be reduced by £210K to meet the costs of the Speed Limit Review as approved by Cabinet in June.

On the HRA, the net in-year expenditure was projected to be £70K more than the budget forecast.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas raised queries on the efficiencies made from Post Office payments and the first phase of the switchboard changes. She also raised concerns about the overspend position in Streetscene and the possible impact of outsourcing services. The Corporate Finance Manager stated that the impact of the efficiencies not expected to be achieved were already assumed in the projections and as such had been offset by compensatory savings. The Chief Executive explained that the eight programme boards (involving Cabinet

Members for their respective portfolios) met monthly to oversee any changes and track the budget, which helped to inform this update report. He said that slippage on efficiency targets could not always be predicted and was taken into account, with the expectation for other efficiencies to be identified.

Following remarks from Councillor Richard Jones on the projected achievement of efficiencies, the Chief Executive said that this was only the latest prediction and that whilst some were achievable in-year, others may not be. He suggested that it could be helpful for future update reports to give analysis on the impact for the next financial year. He confirmed that work was continuing to achieve the remaining 16% of efficiencies whilst also identifying other efficiencies to compensate that gap.

Councillor Thomas said that realistic budgets were needed and asked that her concerns about the overspend in Streetscene be referred to Cabinet. The Chief Executive reiterated his comments about the role of the programme boards in overseeing changes and would request an informal report on the changes to Streetscene to be circulated to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee is assured by the reporting on the Revenue Budget Monitoring (Month 3); and
- (b) That the Committee's concerns at the level of overspend in Streetscene be specifically drawn to the attention of the Cabinet.

34. QUARTER 1 – IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORT

The Policy & Performance Manager presented an update on progress towards the delivery of the impacts set out in the 2015/16 Improvement Plan, focussing on the areas of under-performance relevant to the Committee during the first quarter of 2015/16. She referred to the new format of the sub-priority reports following implementation of the new electronic performance management system CAMMS which was proving to be more efficient. This new format reflected information in previous reports together with additional details such as the percentage completeness of actions and clear Red/Amber/Green (RAG) status.

On the efficient and effective support of front-line services, a progress update on the implementation of the People Strategy had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting. As mentioned at the Member workshop, a 'Helpful Hints' guide was circulated to the Committee to help in scrutinising performance reports.

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin referred to the low number of customers who had responded to a survey via a mobile device to say they had successfully navigated the website. He suggested that the website homepage could provide an opportunity to download the Flintshire app to encourage its use. The Chief Executive agreed to pass on this suggestion.

Councillor Richard Jones felt that an exception-based report was not sufficient and highlighted a number of discrepancies with the Improvement Plan published on the website. The Policy & Performance Manager agreed to liaise with Councillor Jones to ensure that all the changes had been correctly logged.

Councillor Jones felt that the Committee should receive monitoring reports on the entire Improvement Plan at various stages. The Policy & Performance Manager agreed that these could be shared at half-yearly stages.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee is assured by the Quarter 1 Improvement Plan Monitoring Report, subject to an analysis of the variations between versions being carried out and half-yearly progress reports on the whole of the Improvement Plan being made to the Committee.

35. FUNCTIONS OF THE ELECTIONS TEAM AND INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

The Chief Executive introduced a report on the functions of the Elections team, in response to a request from Councillor Robin Guest. He provided an overview of the arrangements and key personnel used in the efficient running of elections in Flintshire which had built up a good track record. The Chief Executive spoke about the differing roles and responsibilities on elections, and advised that he had been appointed as the Regional Returning Officer for the North Wales region in next year's Assembly elections.

The Electoral Services Manager provided an update on progress in the implementation of individual electoral registration (IER). She provided information on work undertaken by the team to date in encouraging households to register and obtaining the additional information as required by the legislation. Work on the annual canvass had so far resulted in a good return rate of 66% of households submitting their information mainly by post, with reminders issued to the remaining households. A change to the process meant that those unconfirmed under IER at the end of the year would need to be removed from the register.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas said that reminders sent by post were more likely to be returned the same way, and suggested that social media could be an alternative method of publicising registration. The Electoral Services Manager explained that the legislation required a paper form to be issued but that other means of reply were signposted.

The Chief Executive said that a refresh was needed to update some practices in electoral registration law, and that the Council was using a range of creative ways to encourage and remind householders about their responsibility to register.

In response to comments from Councillor Peter Curtis on the potential for more younger people to vote electronically if this was introduced, the Chief Executive spoke about the high turnout from the Housing Ballot where a good minority had cast votes online with the vast majority replying by post.

Councillor Aaron Shotton said that everyone had a role in encouraging individuals to register to prevent exclusion from the political process.

The Chairman commented on the potential for unregistered households to experience difficulties in obtaining certain services such as internet connections. Councillor Richard Jones felt that such restrictions should be highlighted to individuals. The Electoral Services Manager said that monthly updates on the rolling register were made available.

Following a query from Councillor David Roney, the Electoral Services Manager provided explanation on the data-matching exercise to assist in the transfer to IER and the challenges in obtaining National Insurance numbers.

The Chairman thanked the Electoral Services Manager and her team for their work.

RESOLVED:

That the work of the Elections team and the attempts to encourage greater individual electoral registration be endorsed.

36. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Member Engagement Manager introduced the report to enable the Committee to consider the Forward Work Programme. He agreed to incorporate the suggestion made by Councillor Richard Jones earlier in the meeting on the Improvement Plan.

Members discussed preparations for the next meeting where the Police & Crime Commissioner was scheduled to attend to consult on the Crime & Policing Plan for 2016/17. The Chief Executive advised that he had asked Mr. Roddick to provide brief responses to the questions which had remained unanswered after the County Council meeting in July 2015.

The Committee agreed to the suggestion made by the Member Engagement Manager that he liaise with the Chairman and officers to schedule further items at future meetings.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme, as submitted, be approved, with progress on the whole Improvement Plan being added as a half-yearly item; and
- (b) That the Member Engagement Manager, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair and officers, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings.

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

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

(The meeting started at 10.30 am and ended at 12.50 pm)

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Chairman