

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
11 FEBRUARY 2016

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, 11 February 2016

PRESENT: Councillor Clive Carver (Chair)

Councillors: Peter Curtis, Andy Dunbobbin, Robin Guest, Ron Hampson, Richard Jones, Brian Lloyd, Richard Lloyd, David Roney, Ian Smith, Nigel Steele-Mortimer and Arnold Woolley

SUBSTITUTION:

Councillor: Paul Cunningham for Carolyn Thomas

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor: Bernie Attridge attended as an observer

APOLOGIES:

Councillor Marion Bateman

Councillor Billy Mullin – Cabinet Member for Corporate Management

CONTRIBUTORS:

Councillor Aaron Shotton – Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Chief Executive and Corporate Finance Manager

IN ATTENDANCE:

Member Engagement Manager and Committee Officer

81. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

No declarations of interest were made.

82. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 January 2016 had been circulated to Members with the agenda.

RESOLVED:

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

83. FLINTSHIRE LOCAL SERVICE BOARD AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP PERFORMANCE – MID YEAR MONITORING

The Chief Executive introduced the report which presented an overview of arrangements for the transition of the Flintshire Local Service Boards (LSB) to a Public Services Board (PSB) in accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. An update of the Flintshire LSB Single Integrated Plan (SIP) priorities was also provided.

The report provided information on the progress in transition from a voluntary to statutory arrangement in accordance with the Act and an update on the work of the board. The Chief Executive explained that there were four LSBs in North Wales (Denbighshire/Conwy, Ynys Môn/Gwynedd, Wrexham and Flintshire) and added that Councillor Arnold Woolley had previously been a member of the LSB.

The Chief Executive felt that the LSB was a very effective partnership and one of its strengths had been the quality of the relationships between the representatives on the Board. It was a very trusting partnership and was highly regarded in Wales as being very successful. He felt that there would be a smooth transition to the PSB as it would consist of the same representatives with the same priorities.

From April 2016 the PSB would have a statutory duty to produce an Assessment of Local Well-being (by March 2017) and a Local Well-being Plan (by March 2018) and these would replace the existing SIP. A risk assessment had been carried out, which had been positive, and had been endorsed by Welsh Government (WG). A report to a future meeting of the Committee would provide information on how the PSB was meeting its statutory duties.

Councillor Richard Jones asked which Overview & Scrutiny Committee would scrutinise the performance of the Board. The Chief Executive said that elements of its work would fall in the remit of the Social and Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee but that this Committee would have an overview scrutinising the PSB. The partners of the Board would also need to consider their own scrutiny arrangements. Councillor Jones proposed that an update report should be considered by this Committee in three to six months. The Member Engagement Manager confirmed that an entry was included on the Forward Work Programme for the meeting on 14 July 2016.

In referring to the comment of the Chief Executive about the strength of the relationships between the representatives, Councillor Robin Guest asked to what extent the PSB was a networking organisation. The Chief Executive said that the PSB had a function to deliver improvements to the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of the area and met four times a year. He suggested that the work of some partners was less understood than others and that the LSB had been a mechanism to sharing information and good practice.

Councillor Arnold Woolley referred to a meeting he had attended the previous week to allow better understanding of the changes that were to take place. This included the proposal to create Community Interest Committees and Councillor Woolley asked if an update on this could be provided on the powers that the Committees would have, how members would be elected and how they would be funded. The Chief Executive explained that this had been suggested in the Local Government Bill and the Council was preparing a detailed response to the consultation. In the Bill, WG had made an assumption that Wales would consist of larger Councils and that area committees would be necessary to allow more local consideration of issues. He suggested that Flintshire already had a solution to this as the County was covered by Town & Community Councils. The Chief Executive reminded Members that the Bill had not been adopted and therefore the proposals may not be implemented. He advised that he did not

have any details on funding or the powers for the area committees. Councillor Woolley disagreed with the provision of such committees as he felt that this would be in conflict with the work of Flintshire County Council and the Town & Community Councils. The Chief Executive suggested that the idea of Area Committees be rejected by Members.

Following a discussion, Councillor Woolley suggested that the recommendation should include that regular updates reports be submitted to the Committee for consideration.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the committee endorses the arrangements for the transition from the Flintshire Local Service Board to the Flintshire Public Services Board;
- (b) That the committee endorses the progress on the two single integrated plan priorities (i) People enjoying good health, well-being and independence and (ii) People are safe; and
- (c) That regular progress reports be made to the committee.

84. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2015/16 (MONTH 8)

The Corporate Finance Manager introduced a report to provide Members with the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2015/16 (Month 8) for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) which was to be submitted to Cabinet on 16th February 2016.

For the Council Fund, the projected net in year expenditure was forecast to be £0.743m lower than budget which was a positive movement of £0.356m from Month 7. Appendix 1 detailed the movements from Month 7 with the main changes being an underspend in Children's Services of £0.091m for Out of County Placements that had ended earlier than anticipated and £0.100m for an allocation of funding from the contingency reserve to partially mitigate for the increase in use of professional support. At the beginning of the financial year, an amount had been set aside in Central and Corporate Finance for inflation costs and an amount of £0.110m for food and pay inflation was no longer required.

The Programme of Efficiencies was reported in paragraphs 1.05 to 1.07 and it was currently projected that £10.702m (83%) would be achieved; appendix 3 provided details on the latest variation to the level of efficiency achievable compared to the budget. Taking into account previous allocations and the current underspend at Month 8, the balance on the Contingency Reserve at 31st March 2016 was projected to be £4.379m. The Corporate Finance Manager commented that it was important to note that this report contained the outturn figures which had been used for the preparation of the 2016/17 budget.

The HRA was projecting in year expenditure to be £0.149m lower than budget and a projected closing balance as at 31 March 2016 of £1.386m, which at 4.48% of total expenditure satisfied the prudent approach of ensuring a minimum level of 3%.

In referring to page 61, Councillor Richard Jones sought clarification on the efficiency measure for £0.100m which was now considered to be unachievable with regard to minor adaptations. The Chief Executive confirmed that the £0.100m efficiency had not been achieved but work on other efficiencies had funded the development of the means testing approach. The Corporate Finance Manager provided details of another example within the Central Loans and Investment Account (CLIA) which had met a previously reported underachievement of an efficiency of £0.600m through other compensatory savings.. Councillor Jones also queried why the entry for staff car parking was no longer showing in appendix 3 when it had been reported the previous month. The Corporate Finance Manager advised that information sent out by the Member Engagement Manager the previous day explained that the efficiency had been included under both Streetscene & Transportation and Central & Corporate Finance but had now been removed from Streetscene & Transportation. The Chief Executive confirmed that the staff car parking efficiency would achieve a nil return for 2015/16 due to the delay in its implementation.

Councillor Arnold Woolley queried whether the Council would adopt a policy on how to deal with levels of reserves if the proposal to merge authorities took place. The Chief Executive advised that the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) covered the period to 2017/18 and that the next MTFS would cover to 2018/19, with the first elections for a Shadow Authority anticipated for May 2019 if the proposals went ahead, therefore the Council would already have planned financially for a Local Government Review (LGR). He stated that Welsh Government Ministers had powers to direct how Councils should spend their reserves ensuring that they were disposed of appropriately but added that Flintshire County Council was not reserve rich. Councillor Aaron Shotton felt that all Councils should be mindful of the issue of the use of reserves and that this had been raised at a recent meeting he had attended with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). He said that he anticipated some debate at the Council meeting the following week on the use of reserves by the Council to achieve a balanced budget. His understanding was that Ministers would ensure reserves were not spent inappropriately but he did not feel that this would be an issue for Flintshire County Council as it was being proposed for 2016/17 that reserves would be used to protect public services.

Councillor Peter Curtis felt that as the Assembly Elections were being held in May 2016, some or all of the proposals put forward in the Local Government Bill may not be taken forward.

The Member Engagement Manager sought confirmation from the Committee about whether they had any concerns that they felt should be submitted to Cabinet. Councillor Jones felt that the issue of the significant overspend in minor adaptations should be registered.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Month 8 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report be received;
- (b) That no formal recommendations be made to the Cabinet on this occasion, but concern at the significant overspend in minor adaptations be registered; and

- (c) That the Committee notes the Corporate Finance Manager's (Section 151 Officer) comments that this reports contains the outturn figures which have been used for the preparation of the 2016/17 budget.

85. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Member Engagement Manager introduced the report to consider the Forward Work Programme for the Committee.

He referred to the meeting on 17th March 2016 and explained that the main item would be a presentation on the 101 service from Superintendent Alex Goss of North Wales Police. A report on the use of Consultants had been requested and would be submitted to the meeting along with the Quarter 3 Workforce Information. The Welsh Language Standards would not be ready for consideration on 17th March 2016 but would be considered at a future meeting.

On the 14th April 2016, the Regional Director from British Telecom (BT), Alwen Williams, would be in attendance following a request from the Committee in June 2015 to receive an update on concerns raised. The Chief Executive explained that a general update would be provided along with more specific information on fibre-speed. The Chairman indicated that he also required information on problems with nuisance calls. Councillor Peter Curtis suggested that BT had no control over calls from abroad. In response to a question from Councillor Ian Smith, the Chief Executive confirmed that the update would include information on the internet speed on the Deeside Enterprise Zone. He also advised that the Regional Director was also a member of the Deeside Enterprise Zone Board. Councillor Shotton explained that he had held discussions at the Deeside Industrial Park Forum on the issue of internet speed and added that he would continue to raise the issue with the Minister. He welcomed the invitation extended to the Regional Director to attend a meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Richard Lloyd welcomed the attendance at future meetings by Superintendent Alex Goss and Alwen Williams.

The Chief Executive spoke of working with BT as a sponsor on the issue of community access. He explained that the reason for deferring the Welsh Language Standards report was because the Council was awaiting responses on queries relating to the document. The report on the use of consultants would identify costs associated with their use, why they were used and the issue of value for money. He had hoped that the update on Emergency Planning could be considered earlier than June 2016 and advised that there was a need to include the MTFs on the FWP for April and May 2016. In response to a comment from Councillor Richard Jones that there were too many items for consideration at the June 2016 meeting, the Chief Executive suggested that the Emergency Planning update could be considered in April 2016.

The Chairman asked if a briefing on what would be expected by a new WG following the elections in May 2016 could be considered at the 12 May 2016 meeting but the Chief Executive felt that the suggested meeting would be premature.

Councillor Arnold Woolley suggested that a report on 'Age Friendly Societies' could be considered at a future meeting of the committee. The Chief Executive felt that this was part of the Local Service Board priority of wellbeing. Councillor Woolley referred in particular to the concern of how such proposals would be funded and suggested that this could have a budgetary impact in the future. The Member Engagement Manager said that he would consider whether it would be more appropriate for consideration by this Committee or Social and Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The Chief Executive felt that this Committee would have a role in the consideration of cost implications as part of the MTFs. Councillor Shotton concurred and referred to the changing demographic of the County which by 2020 would have the third largest number in Wales of residents aged over 80, which would result in a unique pressure for Flintshire.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the forward work programme as amended at the meeting be approved; and
- (b) That the Member Engagement Manager in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair be authorised to alter the forward work programme between meetings.

86. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 10.57 am)

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Chair