

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
16 NOVEMBER 2017

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, 16 November 2017

PRESENT: Councillor Clive Carver (Chairman)

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Bob Connah, Paul Cunningham, Patrick Heesom, Andrew Holgate, Dave Hughes, Paul Johnson, Richard Jones, Mike Lowe, Michelle Perfect, Vicky Perfect and Arnold Woolley

APOLOGY: Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance

CONTRIBUTORS: Chief Executive

Representatives of North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority for minute number 42

Dawn Docx, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Councillors Meirick Lloyd Davies and Peter Lewis, Chair and Vice-Chair of the Authority

Corporate Business & Communications Executive Officer - for minute numbers 38-43

Chief Officer, Governance - for minute number 43

Corporate Finance Manager - for minute number 44

IN ATTENDANCE: Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officer

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were received.

39. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 19 October 2017 were submitted.

As a point of accuracy on minute number 30, Financial Forecast and Stage One of the Budget 2018/19, it was noted that there had been a 0.9% reduction in funding for the Council within the Provisional Local Government Settlement.

The Chief Executive agreed to speak to Councillor Jones outside the meeting about a specific case of 'cuckooing' following discussion on this topic at the September meeting.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the amendment, the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

40. VARIATION IN ORDER OF AGENDA

It was agreed that the following item should be brought forward to enable the Deputy Chief Fire Officer to present the North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority Update.

41. FLINTSHIRE PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD REVIEW AND WELL-BEING PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The Chief Executive introduced an overview of the work of the Flintshire Public Services Board (PSB) and development of the Well-being Plan.

The Corporate Business & Communications Executive Officer circulated information on the five themes of the Well-being Plan which had been selected as those where the PSB could add most value. Extensive consultation on the outline Plan was shortly due to commence leading to adoption of the final version by the Council in the New Year.

Councillor Jones raised concerns that the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) website link referred to specific areas of the county which may infer that other areas would not benefit from the Plan. The Chief Executive gave assurance that the themes supported the whole County and cited Single Point of Access under 'Well-being and Independent Living' as an example. The Corporate Business & Communications Executive Officer agreed to raise the matter at the forthcoming Voluntary Sector Compact meeting to ensure that the aims of the Plan were not being mis-represented on the BCUHB website.

In response to a query from Councillor Johnson, the Chief Executive said that it was yet not possible to evaluate the impact of Brexit and other issues outside the Council's control. Actions under each theme would be tracked against specific targets which had been set. He reminded Members of the forthcoming workshop on the North Wales Economic Growth Deal and said that the regional approach would strengthen the Council's position on future funding access and powers. Reference to Holway on the piloting of new ways of working in communities under 'Resilient Communities' reflected the Community Asset Transfers in the area. Officers agreed to change this to Holywell for consistency with the other towns mentioned.

Councillor Woolley commented on the mix of references to 'priorities' and 'themes' which could confuse readers. It was explained that priorities applied to the former Local Service Board and that steps had been taken to simplify language under the five themes of the new Plan.

Councillor Heesom highlighted the importance of ensuring equitable distribution of resources across the county and asked that a response to the point raised by Councillor Jones be shared. He also requested that the agenda for the Compact meeting be shared with the Committee. In response to comments about the contributions of the PSB, the Chief Executive explained that the PSB was not a formal decision-making body and he illustrated the fit between the Well-being Plan and the Council Plan. He also provided details of the PSB membership which had been extended beyond the statutory partners.

During discussion on the report's recommendations, the Democratic Services Manager was asked to summarise the comments and points which had been raised. These were supported by the Committee as resolutions.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee has confidence that steps are in place to have a plan ready by the statutory deadline, subject to:

- Substituting 'Holywell' for the reference 'Holway';
- That the references on the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) website be challenged at Monday's Compact meeting to give Members assurance that BCUHB acknowledges the benefits to the whole county, with a report back in due course;
- The provision of the papers for the forthcoming Compact meeting are made available to Members, as requested;
- Thanking the Chief Executive for his explanation and assurance that the fit between the Council Plan and Well-being Plan does not pose any risk to the Council's decision-making.

42. NORTH WALES FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY UPDATE

The Chief Executive welcomed Councillors Meirick Lloyd Davies and Peter Lewis (Chair and Vice-Chair) and Dawn Docx (Deputy Chief Fire Officer) of the North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority (NWF&RA) to the meeting.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave a presentation on the future of the Fire & Rescue service covering the following topics:

- Community Safety
- Special Service Calls
- Response and Business Fire Safety
- How much does it cost to run?
- Capital Budget
- Reserves 2017/18
- Budget Pressures
- A Steady Strategy

The Chief Executive said that the presentation reflected budget pressures which reconciled with those of the Council.

Councillor Cunningham asked about the possibility of introducing charges to provide much-needed investment in services. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that charges for incidental special services did not generate significant income and that there were difficulties in charging for provision of safety advice due to the conflict of interest.

Following comments by Councillor Jones, it was explained that due to the financial position of the NWF&RA, decisions had been made to reduce or stop certain services - such as large animal rescue - which were not mandatory, taking into consideration the risk levels involved.

During discussion, it was explained that the budget pressures faced by the NWF&RA had reached a position where a balanced discussion was needed to identify further efficiencies. The options for consideration were to request an increased levy from councils or to reduce provision in the region's station cover.

Councillor Jones said that if residents were made aware of the prospect of further cuts, they may be willing to pay an additional £3 per year per household to protect services. The Chief Executive advised that the NWF&RA levy was paid from the Council Tax and that any increase in the levy would be a cost pressure upon the Council. He said that a recommended further increase to the 2017/18 Council Tax to accommodate the higher levy for the NWF&RA had been dismissed by Members, resulting in a budget pressure for the Council. Councillor Jones felt that residents may support the additional levy if it was ring-fenced within the Council Tax amount.

The Chairman suggested that as legislation did not permit this, a note could be included with Council Tax bills to show the NWF&RA levy.

The Chief Executive said that Members may wish to make a recommendation to give creative consideration to the literature produced to put with the Council Tax bill. He suggested a further recommendation for Cabinet and Council to give due consideration to any suggested increase in the levy charge. Councillor Peter Lewis, the Vice-Chair of the NWF&RA, requested that the Council give an early steer on its response.

The recommendations were supported by the Committee, along with the suggestion to make representations on changes to legislation and Councillor Woolley's proposal that the report be noted for its clarity and brevity.

As this was her last meeting before taking up a new role in Greater Manchester, the Chairman thanked the Deputy Chief Fire Officer for her presentation and took the opportunity to wish her well on behalf of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the representatives of the North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority be thanked for their attendance and contribution to the meeting;
- (b) That the report be noted and its clarity and brevity approved;
- (c) That changes to the material included within Council Tax bills, to explain North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority funding to Council Tax payers, be investigated;
- (d) That a case for necessary changes to national legislation be pursued to provide greater transparency in Fire & Rescue Authority funding;
- (e) That both Cabinet and the County Council be made aware that the Committee has given due consideration of the Fire & Rescue Authority levy charge and the need for an increase; and

- (f) That the Flintshire representatives on the Fire & Rescue Authority be made aware at an early stage of the Council's position on an increase to North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority funding.

43. COUNCIL PLAN 2017/18 - MID YEAR MONITORING

The Chief Executive presented the mid-year progress report on the Council Plan for 2017-23 which had been reviewed and refreshed to reflect the Council's key priorities for the five year term of the new administration.

The Corporate Business & Communications Executive Officer gave an overview of the three performance indicators with a red risk status.

The Chief Executive advised that the figure for the completion of appraisals was provisional and was expected to improve once manual adjustments had been made to the iTrent system. A full update would be provided in the annual report scheduled for December or January.

Councillor Woolley said that the completion of appraisals was a long-standing area of concern and that managers/supervisors should be held accountable for any failure to give their employees an opportunity for a meaningful two-way dialogue. The Chief Executive gave assurance of the commitment to work towards the 100% target noting there were some exceptions such as individuals at risk of redundancy or on maternity leave. He said that appraisals were based on a good model and that managers were encouraged to coach employees throughout the year, thereby reducing the significance of an annual appraisal.

Following comments from the Chairman, the Chief Executive advised that exceptions for appraisals would be shown in the annual report as both percentages and figures.

On the percentage of goods procured through the National Procurement Service, the Chief Officer (Governance) explained that a range of frameworks were assessed to establish value for money and that this was only achieved through the NPS in a low number of contracts.

The percentage of employees completing stress-related programmes was lower than anticipated but was expected to improve during the year. The programme had only recently been introduced and whilst sickness absence rates were improving, stress related absences remained an area of focus.

Councillor Jones said that as part of the Committee's role in overseeing the Council Plan in its entirety, it should receive exceptions reported to all Overview & Scrutiny committees at the mid-year and end of year stages. He also commented on missing wording in the report and reference to the former Improvement Plan.

Councillor Johnson proposed that officers look at the approach taken by the Centre for Local Economic Strategy in Preston which had been successful in supporting small businesses to help improve the local economy.

The Chief Officer (Governance) said that identifying local provision was a key part of contract arrangements and that a range of support was available to help local businesses maximise tendering opportunities.

Councillor Jones said that attempts to boost local businesses were hampered by the introduction of car parking charges, the registration charge for the Council's supplier network and high costs for business waste collection by private companies.

With regard to the supplier network system, the Chief Officer pointed out the advantages in streamlining processes and the range of exceptions available to ensure small businesses were not affected.

The points raised by Members were summarised by the Democratic Services Manager and agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That having considered that Council Plan 2017/18 mid-year monitoring report, the Committee would like to impress upon the Cabinet the need for a higher percentage of employees receiving appraisals (notwithstanding the Appraisals update report which the Committee is to receive in due course);
- (b) That recognising the wide terms of reference of the Committee, it should receive the full Council Plan performance monitoring reports at the six and twelve month intervals; and
- (c) That the Procurement team be asked to look at the work done on local spending in Preston by the Centre for Local Economic Strategy.

44. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2017/18 (MONTH 6) AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING (MONTH 6)

The Finance Manager introduced a report on the revenue budget monitoring position for 2017/18 as at Month 6 for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Capital Programme, prior to consideration by Cabinet.

Revenue Budget Monitoring

On the Council Fund, the net in-year position was forecast to be £1.147m higher than budget, which was an increase of £0.201m from Month 5. On projected variances for Social Services, there was positive movement due to increased client contributions for residential placements and increased Continuing Health Care funding. An increase in costs for Out of County placements had arisen mainly due to two specific cases. It was estimated that 93% of planned efficiencies would be achieved by year end which was slightly below the Medium Term Financial Strategy target. On the monitoring of risks, some of the emerging in-year risks would need to be assessed for recurring impacts on the 2018/19 budget.

On the HRA, in-year spend was projected to be £0.035m lower than budget, leaving a year end balance of £1.081m which was above the recommended minimum level.

In response to queries raised by Councillor Jones, officers advised that the closure of the public convenience in Mold had been discussed by the town council and the cost would not continue beyond this year. On school delegated budgets, the Corporate Finance Manager explained that there were no variances as these were fixed amounts passported to schools through the formula. He noted the request for more clarity on under and overspend in the explanations for projected variances and said that analysis on movements was detailed in the appendices. He added that any specific queries on these figures be referred for officers to look into. Clarification was also given on variances for the Council's share of social care funding from Welsh Government and the Household Recycling Centres. The projected underspend for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme was referred to and was due to reduced client demand. It was agreed that this would be subject to further discussion including the forthcoming Member workshop.

On the format of the report, Councillor Jones requested that officers look into whether the orientation of appendices could be displayed to be consistent with the reports.

Capital Programme

A table showing changes to the programme during 2017/18 indicated a revised budget of £58.674m. Changes during the period were summarised, the most significant being the commencement of the street lighting programme funded through an interest-free Salix loan. A total of £0.497m recommended for carry forward into 2018/19 was summarised in Table 4.

Paragraph 1.20 reported the overall position on the availability of funding including the level of capital receipts and impact of the Provisional Settlement. Taking all areas into account, there was a £0.567m shortfall in the total programme although the 2017/18 budget was fully funded.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee notes the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2017/18 (Month 6) report and confirms on this occasion that the issues which it wishes to have brought to the Cabinet's attention are:
 - the need for clarity of language on under and overspending so that such issues are readily understood;
 - the underspend on the Council Tax Reduction scheme be investigated and budget allocation be remodelled if necessary.
- (b) That the Committee notes the Capital Programme Monitoring 2017/18 Month 6 report and confirms on this occasion that there are no issues which it wishes to have brought to the Cabinet's attention.

45. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager presented the Forward Work Programme for consideration and confirmed that the appraisals report would be scheduled for December or January. As requested by the Constitution & Democratic Services Committee, Members' views were sought on their preferred meeting pattern for this Committee.

Councillor Cunningham expressed a preference for the meetings to remain on a Thursday morning, which was seconded by Councillor Johnson. On being put to the vote, this option was agreed.

Councillor Michelle Perfect spoke in support of meetings starting at 5.30pm or 6pm to allow Members in full-time employment the opportunity to attend. Although this was not endorsed by other Members, it was agreed that all individual views should be reflected in the consultation response.

The Chairman supported the continuation of current arrangements but pointed out the advantages of an earlier starting time in respect of car parking availability.

A reminder was given of the forthcoming budget workshop and subsequent Council meeting on 12 December. Councillor Jones indicated that he was unavailable for the special meeting on 6 December to consider the Stage 2 budget proposals and remarked that an evening slot could have accommodated more Members. Apologies for the meeting were also submitted by Councillor Woolley. The Democratic Services Manager referred to other meetings attended by Members which were generally held in the evenings.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme as submitted, be approved with amendments;
- (b) That the special meeting on 6 December 2017 be noted;
- (c) That an update report on appraisals be made to the December or January meetings;
- (d) That the Democratic Services Manager, in consultation with the Chairman, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, should this be necessary; and
- (e) That the Committee would prefer to continue to meet at 10am on Thursdays, but that Councillor Michelle Perfect's comments about evening meetings being more suitable to accommodate Members in full-time employment be included in the report back to the Constitution & Democratic Services Committee.

46. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 10am and ended at 12.25pm)

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Chairman