

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 SEPTEMBER 2018

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, 20 September 2018

PRESENT: Councillor Clive Carver (Chairman)

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

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor Rob Davies (for Bob Connah)

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance; Councillor Billy Mullin, Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets; Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection; Chief Executive; and Chief Officer (Governance)

For minute number 40

Community and Business Protection Manager; Regional Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Advisor; Trading Standards Team Leader; Chief Inspector Jon Bowcott of North Wales Police; and Ben Carter, North Wales Substance Misuse Area Planning Board

For minute number 42

Finance Manager, Strategy Accounting & Systems; and Interim Finance Manager - Technical Accountancy

IN ATTENDANCE: Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officer

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

37. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2018 were submitted.

The Vice-Chair, Councillor Johnson, who had chaired the meeting, asked that he be referred to as 'Chair' throughout the minutes.

Minute number 28: Forward Work Programme - Councillor Jones said that it was he who had suggested the workshops on the North Wales Growth Bid.

RESOLVED:

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

38. VARIATION IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman indicated that there would be a change in the order of business to consider the Action Tracking report immediately after the Minutes, and to move the Forward Work Programme to the end of the meeting. The remainder of the items would be considered in the order shown on the agenda.

39. ACTION TRACKING

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report detailing progress on action points from previous meetings of the Committee. This was a reporting mechanism which had proved effective with the Audit Committee.

Councillor Heesom referred to repeated requests for a copy of the survey report on the Flintshire Bridge and its impact on the proposed highways 'red route', which had not yet been shared. The Chief Executive said that the findings of the report posed no financial risk to the Council and would be circulated to any Members expressing an interest. No information had yet been made available on capital spend for the highways route and the adoption of the Flintshire Bridge as part of the trunk road network by Welsh Government (WG) would remove any future liability for the Council. On the North Wales Growth Bid, the draft proposition document was to be discussed at a regional meeting the following day however, he stressed that the A494 was not included in that bid and predated it.

In welcoming the Action Tracking report, Councillor Jones suggested that future actions include completion timescales. The Democratic Services Manager said that the format could be developed over time and that the approach would be extended to the other Overview & Scrutiny committees following the six month pilot, as agreed by Group Leaders.

As an update from discussion at the previous meeting, the Chief Executive explained the formal position being taken by the Council comprising two key actions, which had received support at the recent Member workshop. Firstly, the Council had contributed to a collective case being made by the Welsh Local Government Association on behalf of all Welsh councils to WG for an uplift in Revenue Support Grant (RSG). In addition, the Chief Executive and Leader would be writing to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance to reiterate the Council's specific expectations for a minimum 3% uplift in the RSG or a 4% uplift if the cost of additional teachers' pay was not funded separately.

As Members had received a copy of written representations about the timeliness of grants, Councillor Jones suggested that the Committee make its own case to WG to highlight the cost of out of county placements as a national issue. Councillor Shotton spoke in support of the Committee making a separate response to compliment the formal response by Cabinet. The Chief Executive referred to forthcoming budget discussions and suggested that the Committee may wish to consider making representations at a later stage in the process once Members were satisfied that all options had been exhausted to balance the budget without risk. This approach was supported by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the 'action tracking' approach be approved for a six month trial by the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

40. COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT

The Community and Business Protection Manager introduced the annual report which provided an overview of activities of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) over the past 12 months and reflected on regional work.

The Committee was introduced to Chief Inspector Jon Bowcott of North Wales Police; Ben Carter of the North Wales Substance Misuse Area Planning Board; Rhiannon Edwards, the Regional Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Advisor; and Richard Powell, Trading Standards Team Leader.

A detailed joint presentation covered the following areas:

- Context
- Community Safety Delivery Groups
- Achievements
- Performance
- Interaction with the Safer Communities Board
- Local priorities for 2018/19

Explanation was given on the statutory requirements of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and changes in governance arrangements which had led to a leaner structure. Amongst the achievements were waiting times for substance misuse services where Flintshire was performing well. On interaction with the North Wales Safer Communities Board, it was recognised that some issues were better addressed at regional level. Details of the four local priorities for 2018/19 were set out in the report along with specific actions and their impact:

- Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence
- Organised Crime Groups
- Modern Day Slavery
- Child Criminal Exploitation

Whilst an increase in victim-based crime was reported for 2017/18, Flintshire had experienced the smallest rise in North Wales. Chief Inspector Bowcott explained that a national decrease in anti-social behaviour was due to changes in the way that crime was recorded.

In response to comments from Councillor McGuill, Chief Inspector Bowcott explained that it was not always possible to give feedback to members of the public reporting suspicious behaviour. He gave assurance that all intelligence was followed up but that details of sources were removed to protect those individuals. Due to the high volume of calls received, other methods of reporting non-urgent intelligence were being promoted such as LiveChat or email, or through contact with Police Community Support Officers who may be able to provide feedback to residents.

To help manage the volume of calls to the 101 number, Councillor Woolley suggested that an automated message be triggered after five minutes to refer callers to alternative means of contact. Chief Inspector Bowcott agreed to feedback this suggestion. He went on to talk about implementation of the new telephone call system which would be developed over time to reduce call waiting times.

Councillor Johnson asked that his thanks be extended to Gerwyn Davies (Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator) for working with local Members and communities on ward issues. In response to a question on the way in which all forms of anti-social behaviour crime was recorded together, the Chief Inspector gave an example of the complexities in crime recording and said there was a shift in statistics showing a reduction in reported anti-social behaviour and increase in crime. He said that if there was a particular issue on which the Council required statistics, this could be extracted from the system.

Councillor Heesom asked about links with the Youth Justice Board and opportunities for young females to contribute to some of the local priorities. The Community and Business Protection Manager explained that the Youth Justice Manager was a member of the 'People Are Safe' Board and that some regional work was underway to develop a more consistent approach to link with the Youth Justice Service. The Chief Executive said that Flintshire's performance on local and regional priorities was strong and that there were good partnerships between the Youth Justice Service and colleagues in Children's Services. The Regional Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Advisor spoke about engagement with young people to equip them with the tools to help them understand about developing positive relationships and partnership work on Adverse Childhood Experiences to increase awareness amongst teachers, Social Services, etc.

Following comments about liaison with town and community councils, the Chief Inspector agreed to re-introduce quarterly consultations with representatives to provide an opportunity to discuss local issues.

Officers noted the request by Councillor Jones for more clarity on the use of acronyms in the next annual report. He remarked on the list of achievements and felt it would be more useful to show the impact of actions on performance. As one of the key achievements, the Chief Executive referred to the Early Help Hub which was regarded as exemplary practice in Wales.

The Chairman thanked the representatives for their attendance.

RESOLVED:

That the Community Safety Partnership Annual Report be supported.

41. COUNCIL PLAN 2018/19 - CHANGES FROM 2017/18

The Chief Executive presented the report summarising changes to the Council Plan that had been made between years. Full details of the changes were appended to the report.

Councillor Jones sought assurance that measures/targets which had been removed had been subject to consideration by the relevant Overview & Scrutiny committee to give them the opportunity to assess the reasons before submission of the final Council Plan to County Council. He said that the Council Plan determined how money was spent and therefore more clarity was needed on changes to measures.

The Chief Executive clarified that this level of detail had been in the Part 2 document which underpinned the Council Plan. He said that a significant amount of performance data was made available and that a way forward may be for committees to choose their specific areas of performance data to help them carry out their role effectively. This could be a focus of future work including the introduction of more local measures.

Councillor Mullin spoke about the level of work undertaken to produce the report with limited resources, and he pointed out that some changes were due to issues reaching a natural conclusion.

In response to Councillor Woolley's comments on restricted resources affecting the ability to plan, the Chief Executive said that whilst some areas were based on known resources, the sustainability of others outside the Council's control was a greater risk.

Councillor Jones requested an agenda item for the next meeting for the Committee to receive a spreadsheet showing links between budgets, governance, performance etc.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the changes in the Council Plan between 2017/18 and 2018/19 be noted and the officers be thanked for producing the analysis; and
- (b) To make available the full range of performance measures to each respective Overview & Scrutiny committee to give them an opportunity to select areas of regular reporting.

42. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2018/19 MONTH 4 AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING 2018/19 QUARTER 4

The Finance Manager (Strategy Accounting & Systems) and Interim Finance Manager - Technical Accountancy presented a joint report on the revenue budget monitoring position for 2018/19 month 4 for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and an update on the Capital Programme 2018/19 at month 4. Both would be considered by Cabinet on 25 September 2018.

Revenue Budget Monitoring

On the Council Fund, the actual net in-year position expenditure forecast showed a £2.680m surplus which included the positive impact of a £1.400m contribution arising from the approved change to the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) accounting policy and a £1.940m receipt for a VAT rebate. Both

sums were recommended for allocation to the Contingency Reserve to support the Medium Term Financial Strategy as part of strategic budget options discussed at the recent Member workshop. This would leave an operating deficit of £0.660m.

The table set out the projected position by portfolio, prior to the transfer of the above two sums, with the projection for Out of County Placements shown on a separate line for greater clarity. Progress against the planned in-year efficiencies showed that 98% were expected to be achieved, which was above the target. An update on other in-year issues highlighted an additional amount of £1.084m to be requested from the Contingency Reserve to meet the cost of the nationally agreed pay award, over and above the 1% uplift provided for within the budget for 2018/19. The end of year balance of Contingency Reserve was projected to be £8.145m although £0.100m would be requested to support ongoing work on child protection. It was to be recommended that an underspend in the Carbon Reduction Commitment budget should be ringfenced to support the development of solar farms, as previously reported to Cabinet.

The Chief Executive welcomed progress on efficiencies and explained that there was some uncertainty on the timing of County Hall cost reductions due to the timing of the demolition work. Reflecting on previous discussion on the importance of maintaining adequate Contingency Reserve levels, he referred to the additional budget pressure on the national pay award which was a liability on all councils as there had been no financial support from the UK or Welsh Government (WG) as yet.

On the HRA, in-year spend was projected to be £0.007m higher than budget, leaving a year end balance of £1.165m which was above the recommended minimum level.

Councillor Jones welcomed the separation of Out of County Placement costs and drew attention to an inaccuracy in the total overspend for Streetscene & Transportation. In response to questions, clarification was given on the timing of the MRP policy change and notification of VAT rebate, both of which were unallocated one-off amounts for 2018/19 to be allocated to Contingency Reserves.

The Finance Manager agreed to provide Councillor Bateman with further details of the additional cost of waste leased vehicles. She also agreed to respond to Councillor Johnson's request for more information on Pest Control service costs which he said were difficult to track. It was noted that this may be due to portfolio changes.

The Chief Executive provided clarification to the Chairman on the one-off additional transport costs following the closure of John Summers High School.

Councillor McGuill asked whether dual-use sports centres met the criteria for the VAT rebate on some sporting exemptions. The Chief Executive said that this would be followed up.

Capital Programme

A net increase of £8.420m was reported in the Programme for 2018/19 which resulted in a revised budget of £76.394m. The main changes during the period took account of notification of funding allocations not available at the time of budget-setting, such as the Local Transport/Road Safety grant from WG. An update was given on a change to availability of the Affordable Housing grant which had been replaced by revenue support for equivalent borrowing over a 29 year period.

An update on capital expenditure compared to budget showed a projected underspend of £0.047m on the Council Fund and a break even position on the HRA. At this stage, no significant changes were anticipated by year end. Also highlighted were a carry forward amount of £0.074m for Theatr Clwyd into 2019/20 and an additional capital allocation of £0.500m towards ventilation systems at Unity House in Ewloe in advance of the office move. Table 5 indicated a current funding shortfall of £8.719m for approved schemes over the three year period, which did not include unreleased capital receipts. As requested in the Notice of Motion to Council, a breakdown showed investment in county towns also noting additional expenditure allocated in the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.

On the latter, Councillor Jones gave a reminder of the need to report on both revenue and capital expenditure. Officers explained that both would be reviewed and reported as the year progressed.

Following a query by the Chairman, it was explained that the additional funding for Unity House was to undertake essential work to support a different type of use for the building.

In response to Councillor Heesom's query on the approach to prudential borrowing for Unity House, officers explained that this was subject to ongoing review and that the release of any capital receipts would offset the need to borrow and would be reported through treasury management as they concluded.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee notes the recommendations in the Cabinet report for Revenue Budget Monitoring 2018/19 Month 4 and confirms that there are no other issues which it wishes to have raised at Cabinet; and
- (b) That the Committee notes the Capital Programme 2018/19 Month 4 report and confirms on this occasion that there are no issues which it wishes to have brought to the Cabinet's attention.

43. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager presented the current Forward Work Programme for consideration. The following changes were agreed:

- The provisional Stage 1 budget consultation meeting scheduled for 5 October 2018 to take the form of a Member workshop specifically for the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- The Council Plan item was likely to be moved to the October meeting.
- The Community Endowment Fund Annual Report was likely to be moved to November.
- An item on the North Wales Growth Bid to be scheduled for November. The Chief Executive said that the draft proposition document would be circulated to all Members following the regional meeting to be held on the next day.

The Chairman recalled discussion at the recent County Council meeting on the Notice of Motion on officers' responses to Members. The Chief Executive advised that a report would be included on the Forward Work Programme once work had concluded.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be approved with the above changes; and
- (b) That the Democratic Services Manager, in consultation with the Committee Chairman, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

44. 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 12.10pm)

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Chairman