

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
16 JANUARY 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Thursday, 16 January 2020

PRESENT: Councillor Clive Carver (Chairman)

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Geoff Collett, Bob Connah, Paul Cunningham, Mared Eastwood, Patrick Heesom, Paul Johnson, Michelle Perfect, Vicky Perfect, Aaron Shotton and Arnold Woolley

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor: Veronica Gay (for Richard Jones)

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Bernie Attridge and Andy Williams

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Carolyn Thomas and the Chief Officer (Governance) attended as observers

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Ian Roberts, Leader and Cabinet Member for Education; Councillor Billy Mullin, Cabinet Member for Corporate Management & Assets; Councillor Glyn Banks, Cabinet Member for Finance; Chief Executive; and Corporate Finance Manager

Minute number 71 - Representatives from North Wales Fire and Rescue Service Shân Morris and Helen MacArthur (Assistant Chief Officers) and Stuart Millington (Senior Training and Development Manager)

IN ATTENDANCE: Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officer

68. TRIBUTE TO THE LATE PETER EVANS

As requested by the Chairman, Members of the Committee and officers stood in a silent tribute to Peter Evans, the former Democracy & Governance Manager, who had sadly passed away.

69. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Gay declared a personal interest on agenda item 4 (minute number 71) as a board member of the North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority.

70. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2019 were submitted. Councillor Heesom proposed a slight change to wording on minute number 58 and was seconded by Councillor Cunningham.

RESOLVED:

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

71. NORTH WALES FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY CONSULTATION

Representatives Shân Morris and Helen MacArthur (Assistant Chief Officers) and Stuart Millington (Senior Training and Development Manager) were welcomed to the meeting to give a verbal presentation on the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (NWFRA) developing a long-term Environment and Sustainability Strategy for 2020 onwards.

Whilst the significant financial challenges were highlighted in the previous year, the focus of this year's consultation was to develop an overarching strategy setting out objectives on climate change, environmental and social responsibilities to help inform future planning. The aim would be to adopt a different approach to working with partners and to minimise the impact on the budget of which 75% was apportioned to employee costs. Members were advised that the responsive and preventative services equated to a cost of £50 per head of population across North Wales. An overview was given of the preventative role which included activities to help keep people safe and identify social problems. Amongst future challenges were the continuation of retained firefighting services and working with partner organisations to reduce the risk of flooding.

As a former member of the Fire Service, Councillor Cunningham recognised the value of retained firefighters and the impact of fire prevention activities. On the consultation, he suggested the sharing of transport arrangements to board meetings.

Councillor Heesom highlighted flood risk and climate change as major issues, and said that the NWFRA should be consulted on planning applications, similar to Natural Resources Wales as the statutory consultee on flood risk. It was explained that under current legislation, the service was consulted on two specific areas only - access for fire appliances and water supplies. Councillor Heesom also asked about engagement with young people and was advised of the range of fire prevention and education activities undertaken with schools.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the representatives spoke about environmental responsibilities shared by all public bodies such as increased use of video conference meetings and energy efficient measures in buildings. It was hoped that a switch from diesel fire appliance vehicles could be a future positive change, but this depended on manufacturers developing a suitable alternative. The effective approach taken by the NWFRA to assess before responding, thereby reducing the number of false alarms attended, was viewed as good practice.

Following comments by Councillor Johnson on the potential for more fire prevention measures in rural areas, it was noted that the NWFRA worked with Natural Resources Wales to prioritise areas of risk and engage with landowners

to improve land management, and that the introduction of wildfire teams during 2020 would also benefit.

Councillor Bateman commented on the impact of excessive on-street parking in some areas which could restrict access to fire appliance vehicles. Whilst the NWFRA did not have any specific powers to resolve this, advice and support was available to make any necessary changes.

Councillor Woolley asked about future risks and what could be done to help. Whilst the demography of North Wales and recruitment of retained firefighters in specific areas presented some challenges, councils across the region could help ensure the availability of retained firefighters by encouraging more businesses to release their employees from their workplace to undertake this role.

The Chief Executive commented on Flintshire's stance as a responsible employer in supporting retained firefighters. On the environment strategy, all public services had commitments and the achievement of carbon neutral targets was a significant national challenge which was being prioritised in regional discussions. Work was underway on the Council's response to climate change - discussed at the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee earlier in the week - and identified that changes in procurement practices could make a positive impact on the carbon footprint.

In thanking the representatives for their attendance and presentation, Councillor Roberts paid tribute to the Fire and Rescue Service for conducting regular safety checks at the high-rise flats in Flint, which provided assurance for residents.

RESOLVED:

That the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service representatives be thanked for their attendance.

72. ACTION TRACKING

The Democratic Services Manager presented a report on progress with actions arising from previous meetings. Since publication of the report, actions had been completed on the Flintshire Bridge report, Community Safety Annual Report and Citrix licensing costs.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Cunningham and seconded by Councillor Johnson.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the progress which has been made.

73. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager presented the current Forward Work Programme for consideration.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Bateman and seconded by Councillor Johnson.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted; 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.

74. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2019/20 (MONTH 8)

The Corporate Finance Manager presented a report on the revenue budget monitoring position for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) as at Month 8 prior to consideration by Cabinet. This reflected the budget position at the close of the financial year if all things remained unchanged.

The operating deficit of £1.892m was a positive movement of £0.301m compared with the previous month. The major variances were the £2.080m overspend on Out of County Placements and the ongoing review on single person Council Tax discount entitlement which had so far generated £0.227m. The most significant overspends were for Out of County Placements and Streetscene & Transportation, as previously reported to the Committee, and any recurring impacts had been built into the 2020/21 budget. Having reviewed the position, the Chief Officer team had set a target to reduce the overspend position to £1.500m-1.750m by the end of the financial year.

On the tracking of planned in-year efficiencies, 91% had been achieved and this was expected to remain unchanged at year end.

On the Medium Term Financial Strategy, the implications of the Provisional Settlement received in December were currently being analysed and the findings would be reported to Council later in the month.

On Reserves and Balances, the projected year-end balance on Contingency Reserves was £2.977m.

On the HRA, a projected overspend of £0.131m would leave a closing un-earmarked balance of £1.192m, which was above the recommended guidelines on spend.

The Chief Executive said that whilst progress had been made on the overspend position, this remained a concern due to changes in demand for Out of County Placements. Whilst significant work had been undertaken to reduce non-essential spend across portfolios, good progress was also being made on reducing school transport costs and the review of single person Council Tax discount. Opportunities on specific grants continued to be explored and the impact of weather conditions on the winter maintenance budget was noted. Whilst pressures had been factored into the 2020/21 budget, Out of County

Placements continued to be the most significant issue, despite the positive impact of local creative solutions.

In response to Councillor Heesom's question on school balances, the Corporate Finance Manager said that the projection was based on the expectation for late notification of specific grants towards the end of the financial year. On another question, the Chief Executive provided information on the level of resources in the Internal Audit team.

Councillor Woolley raised his concerns at an inaccurate date quoted in the covering report and various discrepancies in figures. He also questioned which items of non-essential spend had been deferred so that the impact of those decisions could be considered. On the latter point, the Chief Executive said that suppression of such spend was an expectation and had been summarised in reports. The Corporate Finance Manager said that the discrepancies in the report were due to the necessary rounding of quoted figures and he would check on this for the next monthly report.

Councillor Roberts asked that issues identified in reports be raised with officers in advance. He said that the UK Government bringing an end to austerity, together with Welsh Government decisions, had resulted in a positive position for the Council to move forward into 2020/21. In thanking Members, officers and all those involved, he paid particular tribute to the Pensions team for the positive outcomes contributing to the budget position.

The Chief Executive said that work would continue to reduce the overspend and that creative sub-regional solutions on major factors such as Out of County Placements required investment. On this, he commended the Senior Manager (Children & Workforce) for his involvement.

Officers provided clarification to Councillor Bateman on car parking income where estimates had been revised for the 2020/21 budget. The Corporate Finance Manager agreed to provide a separate response on the reasons for the movement in insurance excess costs under Management and Support Services.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Bateman and seconded by Councillor Johnson.

RESOLVED:

That having considered the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2019/20 (Month 8) report, the Committee confirms that there are no specific matters which it wishes to have reported to the Cabinet.

75. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 10am and ended at 11.20am)

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Chairman