

RECOVERY COMMITTEE
4TH NOVEMBER 2021

Minutes of the remote attendance meeting of the Recovery Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Thursday, 4th November 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Richard Jones (Chairman)

Councillors: Mike Allport, Marion Bateman, Helen Brown, Clive Carver, Geoff Collett, Paul Cunningham, David Healey, Patrick Heesom, Joe Johnson, Hilary McGuill, Vicky Perfect, and Kevin Rush

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Ian Roberts - Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Christine Jones – Deputy Leader of the Council (Partnerships) and Cabinet Member for Social Services, Councillor Paul Johnson - Cabinet Member for Finance and Social Value, Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Councillor Glyn Banks, Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Transportation, Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Governance), Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy), Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation), Chief Officer (Social Services), Corporate Finance Manager, Senior Manager – Business Support and School Governance, Strategic Performance Advisor, Head of Democratic Services, and Team Leader, Democratic Services.

APOLOGIES:

Councillors Billy Mullin and Dave Hughes and Chief Officer (Education and Youth)

42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

43. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th September were submitted.

Matters arising

On minute number 34, Councillors Jones and Bateman expressed their disappointment that a report was not included in the agenda in relation to resolution (c), “that a status report on businesses across Flintshire, to include information on the economic impact, be presented to a future meeting of the Committee”.

On minute number 36 and the risks in the Planning, Environment and Economy portfolio, Councillor Jones said he would discuss them outside of the meeting with the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy).

The minutes were moved as an accurate record by Councillor Marion Bateman and seconded by Councillor Kevin Rush.

RESOLVED:

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

44. CORPORATE RECOVERY OBJECTIVES

The Chief Executive introduced the report and explained that Wales, and the North Wales region, continued to be in a second phase of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing endemic situation was being managed.

The report provided details on the overall recovery aims of the organisation and were explained in full by the relevant officers:

Finance objectives:

- To ensure financial sustainability of the organisation
- To continue to maximise national assistance from the hardship fund and other government funding
- To continue to recover and restore income to target levels
- To continue to recover and restore debt to target levels
- To maintain reserves and balances at levels that met the Councils needs

Workforce objectives:

- To ensure that the legal and ethical duties of the employer continued to be met in recovery
- To continue to restore and protect the well-being of the workforce over time
- To agree and implement a new operating model and working arrangements which maximised the use of technology and digital workplace solutions
- To continue to review opportunities for organisational re-design based on the learning from the emergency response and recovery phases

Governance objectives:

- To restore collection rates of Council Tax, NNDR, Sundry Debt and housing rents to target levels
- To complete the transition to a settled model for modern meetings
- To restore accessibility to, and participation by, the public in member meetings
- To continue to support and expand digital means of service delivery

On service recovery, the objectives were:

- To ensure the business continuity of all services
- To meet the specific recovery objectives for each portfolio as set out in their respective business recovery plans
- To plan the full recovery of services against any backlogs and temporarily reduced performance standards
- To ensure that contingency planning was in place should there be a return to a third phase of response

On community recovery, the objectives were:

- To protect the health and well-being of local communities
- To support and protect the most vulnerable in society
- To support the recovery of communities and build their resilience
- To support the economic recovery of communities and local business sectors

On regional recovery, the objectives were:

- To fully engage with the regional recovery strategy and as a member of the regional Recovery Co-ordinating Group
- To effectively manage the local implementation of the regional Prevention and Response strategy for the pandemic
- To effectively manage the local operation of the Test, Trace and Protect Programme
- To play a full part in the planning and delivery of partnership programmes e.g. the vaccination programme

On Community Recovery, Councillor Jones reiterated his previous comments that he had expected a report on businesses across Flintshire, including information on the economic impact, to be presented to this meeting. The Chief Executive explained that work was being undertaken on the report which would demonstrate the support for town centres and to stimulate and regenerate those areas. The report would also include details of the take up of business units. It was a complex report which would be ready for submission to the meeting in January. Recovery was over a number of years so a considered response was significant.

Councillor McGuill said she had requested information on the impact on the collection of business rates from businesses closing. The Chief Executive provided a verbal update and explained that for companies that were struggling to pay their rent, arrangements had been made for them to have a break in payments, or to pay less, to be repaid at a later date which meant that they did not have to vacate the units.

Councillor Johnson moved the report, which was seconded by Councillor McGuill.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee be assured by progress in meeting the recovery objectives but had expected the report on the economic impact in Flintshire sooner than January.

The Chair advised that there would be a change in the order of agenda items. Agenda item number 6 – Risks and Issues Within Portfolios and Feedback from Overview and Scrutiny, would be considered before agenda item number 5 – Corporate Recovery Risk Profile.

45. **RISKS AND ISSUES WITHIN PORTFOLIOS AND FEEDBACK FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

The Chief Executive introduced the report and explained that Portfolio Recovery Business Plans had been developed for exiting the first response phase to the pandemic in 2020.

The Recovery Committee had had oversight of the Recovery Business Plans for all five service portfolios during recent meetings. During each of those meetings the relevant Chief Officers highlighted significant areas of risk. This report presented progress and updates on those areas of risk for each of the portfolios.

Education and Youth

The Senior Manager – Business Support and School Governance said the areas of risk, and the responses from the Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee were:

- Managing uncertainty around operational changes which may need to be implemented
The Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report on 16th September which provided an overview of the revised COVID-19 measures for the safe operation of schools. The Committee were congratulatory of schools for the positive way in which they had re-opened in September and a letter of thanks to all school staff had been sent from the Chair on behalf of the Committee. The Committee also received a verbal update on 21st October. The update was noted but concerns were raised on the shortage of supply teachers, teaching assistants and caretakers at schools.
- The impact the pandemic has had on children and young people, specifically on their health and emotional well-being and their ability to engage with learning
The Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a verbal update on 21st October. Whilst the Committee was concerned on the pressure being put on Officers and Schools, they supported and appreciated that the Chief Officer Team were doing everything in their power to manage the risk.
- The resilience of schools in managing a significant number of changes i.e. the new curriculum, Additional Learning Needs transformation and the introduction of school inspections.
The Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a verbal update on 21st October. Whilst the Committee was concerned on the pressure being put on Officers and Schools, they supported and appreciated that the Chief Officer Team were doing everything in their power to manage the risk.

Councillor McGuill asked for an update on the rollout of CO2 monitors to schools. The Senior Manager explained that all schools would have received their monitors before the end of the month.

Housing and Assets

The Chief Executive said the areas of risk were:

- Rental income continued to be impacted by the pandemic and when furlough and other protections ended the situation could worsen
The Community, Housing and Assets Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be considering the usual update reports on Housing Income and Welfare Reform at its meeting on 8th December 2021. The Committee would also receive and consider the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget for 2022/23 and the HRA Business Plan at its meeting on 12th January 2022.
- Homelessness presentations increased as current protections around evictions and furlough ended and landlords took measures to commence and follow through on stalled evictions
The Facilitator for the Community, Housing and Assets Overview and Scrutiny Committee was liaising with the appropriate officers in order to present a report on Homelessness to a future meeting of the Committee.
- Raw material supplies shortages led to increased costs, programme delays and increased cases of contractual disputes
The Community, Housing and Assets Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a verbal update on 13th October. The Committee were assured that the risk was being adequately managed.

In response to a question from Councillor McGuill, the Chief Executive said he would provide information on the number of tenant hardship grants that had been applied for, and how many had been approved.

Councillor Jones asked a question on the homelessness risk and the Chief Executive explained that the Housing Support Grant of £1.87m would enable the Housing Solutions Team to increase staffing capacity and other commissioned support services to support people earlier and provide a holistic package for people on the brink of presenting as homeless.

Planning, Environment and Economy

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) said the areas of risk were:

- The resilience of various teams due to unprecedented demand to services during the emergency situation
The Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on Planning Enforcement on 14th September which provided an update on the performance of the planning enforcement service and demonstration of the new software system AGILE. A further update would be considered in March 2022 to monitor progress
- The delivery of the Local Development Plan and the implementation of the back-office system
The Facilitator for the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee was liaising with the appropriate officers in order to present a report on the LDP to a future meeting of the Committee. The LDP was driven by the Planning Strategy Group advising Cabinet and the Examination in Public had not yet concluded

- Public Protection service where resources had been in overwhelming demand during the emergency situation
The above risk was to be added to the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Forward Work Programme

The Chief Officer suggested that he could provide a report to the Committee at a future meeting on the risk relating to the Public Protection service, reflecting on the last two years in the service and what they faced in the future.

On the LDP, the Chief Officer explained that a letter had been received from the Inspector formally asking that the housing element, consisting of 300 homes, be removed from the Plan as she felt that the site was not in a suitable location for housing development. It was to be retained as an allocation in the LDP but for employment uses and a commercial hub only. Councillor Jones asked if an alternative site would be requested for 300 homes and the Chief Officer said he thought that was very unlikely.

A report would be submitted to Planning Strategy Group on 19th November then to a special Cabinet meeting on 30th November prior to a six week consultation period.

Councillor Bateman asked for an update on whether Planning Committee site visits would be recommencing. The Chief Officer explained that they were due to be re-introduced from November however he emphasised that it was the decision of the Chair as to whether a requested site visit was required.

Social Services

The Chief Officer (Social Services) said the areas of risk were:

- Recruitment of staff to work in the sector, encompassing social work, occupational therapy and direct social work
- The fragility of the market around Elderly Mentally Infirm (EMI) nursing and the recruitment of staff
- Funding and fees linked to market stability
The Social and Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the stability of the social care market (to include fees and funding) and Social Care workforce pressures and response at a special Committee meeting on 30th September. Assurance was given that work was ongoing locally, regionally and nationally to respond to the challenges faced.

Councillor Jones expressed his concern on the wording “However, despite all that is being done, health and social care services are in a serious and deteriorating position” in the report, and asked if that position could be mitigated. The Chief Officer explained that what was described in the report was the national position and was recognised. He gave assurance that despite those challenges the services were bearing up due to the resilience of officers. The situation had however improved slightly since the report was written, with extensive and comprehensive steps being taken to address the issues. Councillor Jones asked if there was anything Members could do to assist and the Chief Officer responded that recognition of the fact it was very difficult to recruit in social care, and ensuring a long term sustainable package for social care which

was key. He emphasised the importance for management teams and the workforce to have respect and recognition for their work. Councillor Jones said the service was to be applauded. The Chief Executive explained that he and the Chief Officer met on a regular basis with health colleagues and Welsh Government (WG) and a strong case was being made to WG who were being supportive.

Councillors Roberts and Christine Jones reiterated the details about the discussions underway with WG and the need to praise and encourage staff.

Councillor Bateman expressed her thanks to the Chief Officer and his team, and referred to a meeting of Social and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee that had taken place that morning where Betsi Cadwaldr University Health Board were present. She was pleased to pass on that of 370 patients ready for discharge across the three hospitals who required care packages, only 10 of those were in Flintshire.

Councillor McGuill said the care profession needed to be shared in schools, including details on the Microcare scheme.

In response to a question from Councillor Carver, the Chief Officer said that the vast majority of carers in Flintshire had received their COVID-19 vaccinations.

Streetscene and Transportation

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) said the areas of risk were:

- Reduced numbers of frontline workers and contractors to deliver services safely due to the requirement for self-isolation
- *The Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be considering a report on this risk on 9th November.*
- Unable to progress with key infrastructure improvement projects due to lack of resilience in staff, contractors and supply chain
The Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be considering a report on this risk on 9th November.
- Unable to gain regulatory approval (planning; drainage; environmental permitting) to progress key infrastructure projects in a timely manner due to delays in processing applications
- *The Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be considering a report on this risk on 9th November.*
- Public bus services (commercial and subsidised) were financially unsustainable due to reduced passenger numbers
- *This risk was to be added to the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme*
- Increased transport operating costs due to reducing number of available transport operators to provide services
- *This risk was to be added to the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme*

Councillor Bateman praised the service and asked how remuneration compared to counties across the border. The Chief Officer said that analysis had not been undertaken but she was aware that office based staff were paid less in

Wales. The Senior Manager – Human Resources and Organisational Development said the remuneration in border counties could be looked into. In addition, the private sector offered incentive and retention payments which the Council could not compete with.

Councillor Cunningham welcomed that Flintshire was training HGV drivers. The Chief Officer and Senior Manager explained that once drivers were trained, if they left the authority soon after becoming qualified, the cost of the training would be recuperated either from their salary or debt collection.

The recommendation in the report was moved by Councillor Jones and seconded by Councillor Bateman, including two further recommendations:

- That thanks be expressed to all of Flintshire's front line staff, but especially those in Social Care and Streetscene & Transportation, whom it is recognised have been under immense strain and pressure;
- That all of the Council workforce is assured that they are appreciated for the work which they do; and

It was also agreed that the First and other key Welsh Ministers be written to by the Chair of the Committee, the Chief Executive, the Chief Officer (Social Services) and the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation), to impress upon them the concerns which had been expressed, especially in terms of retaining staffing in the healthcare sector and the retention of other key personnel as the employment market became more buoyant.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress of the highlighted areas of risk within all five portfolios identified at earlier meetings of this Committee be noted;
- (b) That thanks be expressed to all of Flintshire's front line staff, but especially those in Social Care and Streetscene & Transportation, whom it is recognised have been under immense strain and pressure;
- (c) That all of the Council workforce is assured that they are appreciated for the work which they do; and
- (d) That the First and other key Welsh Ministers be written to by the Chair of the Committee, the Chief Executive, the Chief Officer (Social Services) and the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation), to impress upon them the concerns which had been expressed, especially in terms of retaining staffing in the healthcare sector and the retention of other key personnel as the employment market became more buoyant.

46. CORPORATE RECOVERY RISK PROFILE

Jay Davies introduced the report which provided an update on the Corporate Recovery Risk Register and Mitigations, which were detailed in appendices 1 and 2 of the report.

Risks continued to be managed well as they had been throughout the pandemic. There were 34.3% of risks rated green, 65.7% rated as amber and 0% rated as red.

There were a total of 35 risks that had previously been closed; 34 of those closed due to reaching target risk rating. One risk was closed due to duplication and there were no risks to be closed at this review.

'CF14 Increase in rent arrears impacts on the stability of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan' had been removed following agreement by the Committee at the last meeting, due to the risk being reported through the Housing and Assets risk register which would reduce duplication.

The Senior Manager – Human Resources and Organisational Development explained that three risks which were increasing in risk trend were:

- CW14 - increase in workforce turnover due to employees making personal life choices and impact of volatility and change in the employment market which impacted on successful recruitment to vacancies
- CW16 – increased sickness absence both COVID and non COVID related
- CW17 – increased numbers of mental health related absences

The Chief Officer (Governance) explained two further risks increasing in risk trend were:

- CG04 – Diversion of resource to emergency management response and recovery work delayed implementation of key digital and infrastructure projects
- CG14 – delay in or increased cost of obtaining digital devices due to continued demand arising from the response to the pandemic.

In response to a question from Councillor McGuill on attracting people to work at the Council, the Senior Manager – Human Resources and Organisational Development explained there was a suite of benefits available to employees and they would be advertised further.

Councillor Jones moved the report which was seconded by Councillor Cunningham.

RESOLVED:

That the latest risk register and risk mitigation actions within the corporate portfolios be noted noting increased risks relating to recruitment, sickness absence and resources.

47. COMMUNITY RECOVERY UPDATE

The report and presentation was deferred until the meeting in January. The presentation slides would be sent to Member and any questions should be submitted to the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy). An updated version of the slides would be presented at the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the report and presentation be deferred until January.

48. REGIONAL RECOVERY UPDATE

The Chief Executive provided a verbal update on regional recovery. He explained that infection rates were falling however there were two areas of community transmission – young children and young adults where higher infection levels were seen in those groups.

He expressed the need to encourage eligible people to take up the vaccination.

RESOLVED:

That the information be noted.

49. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

It was agreed that the following reports be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on 6th January 2022:

- Economic impact report on businesses across Flintshire
- Risk update from Overview and Scrutiny Committees
- Portfolio risk registers

Authority was given to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, if required.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That reports be received on (1) Economic impact on business across Flintshire (2) risk update from Overview and Scrutiny Committees; and (3) portfolio risk registers; and
- (b) That authority be given to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, if required.

50. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS

None.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 p.m. and finished at 5.08 p.m.

.....
Chairman