

RECOVERY COMMITTEE
15 JULY 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Recovery Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Remote Meeting on Thursday, 15th July, 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, and Kevin Rush

APOLOGIES: Chief Executive

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Sean Bibby for Councillor Vicky Perfect

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Ian Roberts - Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Christine Jones – Cabinet Member for Social Services, Councillor Billy Mullin – Cabinet Member for Corporate Management & Assets, Chief Officer (Governance), Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy), Chief Officer (Education & Youth), Chief Officer (Housing & Assets), Corporate Finance Manager, Senior Manager - Human Resources & Organisational Development, Strategic Performance Advisor, Enterprise and Regeneration Manager, Internal Audit Manager, Benefits Manager, Senior Manager – Integrated Services and Lead Adults, Head of Democratic Services, Environment & Social Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator, and Democratic Services Officer. For Minute no. 19: Julie Luff - Lead Specialist Practitioner, Occupational Health Unit and Vanessa Johnson – Team leader Corporate Health & Safety.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None.

13. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2021 were submitted. The minutes were moved as an accurate record by Councillor Marion Bateman and seconded by Councillor Geoff Collett.

RESOLVED:

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

14. CORPORATE RECOVERY OBJECTIVES

The Chief Officer (Governance) introduced the report to provide an update on the corporate objectives adopted by the Recovery Committee at the previous meeting held on 17 June. He provided background information and advised that the 6 objectives were set out in the report which reflected the current position.

The Corporate Finance Manager reported on the objectives for Finance as detailed in the report. He responded to the questions raised by the Chair on the contingency reserve. The Chief Officer and Corporate Finance Manager also, responded to the questions from Councillor Hilary McGuill concerning debt recovery. It was agreed that the Revenues Manager would circulate information on debt recovery to the Committee following the meeting.

The Senior Manager - Human Resources & Organisational Development reported on the objectives for Workforce as detailed in the report.

The Chief Officer (Governance) reported on the objectives for Governance, Service Recovery, Community Recovery, and Regional Recovery as detailed in the report.

Councillor Hilary McGuill referred to Community Recovery and the priorities listed in the report on poverty. She raised concerns around the consequences of debt and asked how people were being helped to recover from debt. The Benefits Manager acknowledged the points raised by Councillor McGuill and referred to the priorities in the Council Plan and work in the Community Recovery around debt. She said the end of the furlough scheme was expected to have a significant impact on the Authority's income and debt position and referred to a scheme provided by the Welsh Government to support people in the private rented sector who did not qualify for benefits (Tenancy Hardship Scheme) and the discretionary housing payment scheme for people who were receiving benefits to assist people with rent arrears. The Benefits Manager also reported on the work of the Welfare Reform Team which provided an holistic service to support people to recover from debt. It was agreed that the Benefits Manager would circulate the contact details for the Welfare Reform Team to the Committee following the meeting.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Patrick Heesom and seconded by Councillor Hilary McGuill.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee is assured by progress in meeting the recovery objectives.

15. CORPORATE RECOVERY RISK PROFILE

The Chief Officer (Governance) presented a report to provide an update on the Corporate Recovery Risk Register and Mitigations (as shown in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report). He provided background information and explained this was an improving situation. The Strategic Performance Advisor reported on the analysis of the current status and trend of risks as detailed in the report and appendices.

The Corporate Finance Manager provided an overview on the main changes and live issues on risks as reported on the Corporate Recovery Risk Register for Finance.

The Senior Manager for Human Resources & Organisational Development provided an overview of the main changes and live issues on risk and recovery

within the Workforce portfolio. She responded to the query raised by Councillor McGuill regarding the amber rating for risk CW20 and explained this had been merged with CW24. The Senior Manager and Strategic Performance Adviser responded to the queries raised by the Chairman on risks CW20, CW09, and CW14 and agreed to update the Recovery Risk Register as necessary.

The recommendation in the report was moved by Councillor Hilary McGuill and seconded by Councillor Patrick Heesom.

RESOLVED:

That the latest risk register and risk mitigation actions within the corporate portfolios be noted.

16. EDUCATION AND YOUTH PORTFOLIO RECOVERY BUSINESS PLAN

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) presented the Recovery Business Plan for the Education and Youth portfolio. She referred to the recovery objectives as detailed in the report and advised that all schools had been fully operational since April 2021. She said the focus now was on preparation for the new academic year in schools from September and the delivery of central services throughout the portfolio going forward.

The Chief Officer reported that throughout the pandemic the Education & Youth Service had operated successfully and risks had been managed appropriately (as outlined in section 1.05 the report) and there were no major risks to report. She explained that the main mitigation was that schools had well established programmes of digital learning and platforms to maintain continuity of learning at home if required. The Chief Officer referred to the thematic review which was undertaken by Estyn of all local authorities on the response of their Educational Services to the pandemic, and said that following the Councils' letter of endorsement earlier in the year a second letter was following which endorsed the effective approach taken to support schools and deliver services to young people and children across the County. She provided an update on work in progress and commented on the latest developments and key decisions around Covid-19.

In summary the Chief Officer reported that schools in Flintshire were well prepared for the start of the next academic year; risk assessments were robust; and a national framework would be in place from September to quickly escalate or de-escalate in response to the local position around the pandemic.

In response to a question from the Chairman on the 3 most significant potential risks to be addressed by schools at the start of the academic year, the Chief Officer advised that the first was managing the uncertainty of position during the next 6-7 weeks; the second was the impact of the pandemic on children and young people and their emotional health, well-being, and ability to engage with learning; and the third was the resilience of schools to manage the significant number of changes imposed. She explained that all three potential risks were included in the Corporate Risk Register.

Councillor David Healey raised concerns around the impact on schools in September due to a lack of social distancing by young people and children during

the summer recess and the risk when visiting other areas whilst on holiday. The Chief Officer explained that a national framework was in place where the level of risks were offset by the ability to escalate or de-escalate specific mitigations. She said she had shared this assurance with headteachers and the national lead for Primary Headteachers Association and advised that a multi-service emergency response would be taken to any significant development concerning the pandemic and the impact on schools. She reiterated that headteachers would be fully supported at a corporate level and multi-service responsibility would be taken in response to the pandemic.

Councillor Hilary McGuill expressed concerns about how the need for parents and visitors to wear a mask on school premises would be enforced. She also expressed concerns around the welfare of staff if unable to leave the classroom during the day. The Chief Officer explained that the issue of masks had been managed by headteachers and reinforced at a corporate level throughout the pandemic. She also confirmed that schools had robust arrangements in place, through risk assessments, to ensure staff were getting appropriate breaks during the school day. The Chairman suggested that a letter be sent by the Chair of Governors for each school to reinforce the guidance that parents and visitors must wear a mask whilst on school premises. The Chief Officer agreed to draft a suitable letter for use by school governing bodies. She advised that pupils would be actively encouraged to take a Lateral Flow Test (LFT) before the start of the new term.

The Chairman suggested that the specific risks identified by the Chief Officer be referred to the Education & Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee and this was agreed by the Committee.

The recommendation in the report was moved by Councillor Hilary McGuill and seconded by Councillor David Healey.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Education and Youth Portfolio Recovery Business Plan content be noted; and
- (b) That the Committee is assured by the Education and Youth Portfolio Recovery Business Plan, and will refer any further and specific risk management work to the respective Overview and Scrutiny Committees as is necessary.

17. SOCIAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO RECOVERY BUSINESS PLAN

The Senior Manager – Integrated Services and Lead Adults presented the Recovery Business Plan for the Social Services portfolio. She advised that the recovery objectives, performance targets, risks and issues had been reviewed and updated, and she reported on the key considerations detailed in the report.

The Chairman asked the Senior Manager what she thought were the three most significant risks to service across the social services portfolio. The Senior Manager said the first risk was recruitment of a sufficient workforce and explained recruitment of staff was difficult in terms of social care work, occupational

therapy and direct care work; the second risk was around the fragility of the market and specifically around Elderly Mentally Infirm (EMI) nursing and care; and the third overall risk to the Council was funding and fees. The Senior Manager confirmed that all risks were included in the Corporate Risk Register.

Councillor Hilary McGuill asked that the Senior Manager pass on the Committee's thanks to all staff for their work and dedication in caring for people throughout the pandemic. She asked how staff working in nursing homes would be fully vaccinated. The Senior Manager explained that there had been a good take up of the vaccination programme across the sector and most staff had received two jabs and there were known reasons and understanding for those staff who had received only one vaccination or none. The Council was encouraging people to have a vaccination but could not enforce the decision.

Councillor Paul Cunningham expressed concerns around a lack of capacity to cope with the increase in referrals to child and adult services promptly. The Senior Manager explained that the service was coping with current demand but work was ongoing across North Wales and with the Council's own Human Resources Service on a recruitment programme and on how to retain existing and attract new staff.

Councillor Christine Jones expressed praise for all staff in Social Services for their hard work, care, and commitment throughout the pandemic. ..

The Chairman referred to the Social Services Business Plan and said risk CW06 was closed in the Corporate Risk Register but was still being considered as a risk in the recovery objectives. The Senior Manager said she would provide a response to the Chairman following the meeting. The Chairman also commented on the effect of the pandemic on the sensory and emotional development of babies and young children. The Senior Manager explained that the Early Years service was looking at this and work was in progress to support parents through the Early Years and Flying Start programmes.

The Chairman suggested that the 3 specific risks identified by the Senior Manager be referred to the Overview & Scrutiny Committees and this was agreed by the Committee. It was also agreed that the impact of the pandemic on babies and young children be referred to the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The recommendation in the report was moved by Councillor Sean Bibby and seconded by Councillor Marion Bateman.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Social Services Portfolio Recovery Business Plan content be noted;
- (b) That the Committee is assured by the Social Services Portfolio Recovery Business Plan;

- (c) That the following risk areas highlighted by the Senior Manager - Integrated Services and Lead Adults be referred to the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee:-
- 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; and
 - Funding and fees linked to market stability
- (d) That the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee be asked to consider a report on the work of the Early Years and Flying Start programmes to address the impact the pandemic has had on babies and young children and what support was being provided to parents.

18. COMMUNITY RECOVERY

The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager presented a report to provide an update on community recovery on the theme of economic recovery. He advised that the UK economy was undergoing a major transition as a result of the UK departure from the European Union (BREXIT) and the Covid-19 pandemic and said the report summarised some of the work to date on these topics and highlighted the areas of particular risk for Flintshire. The report also sets out the governance structure at both regional and county level to support economic recovery and the programmes of work emerging in response.

The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager reported on the key considerations as detailed in the report and referred to the analysis produced by Hatch on behalf of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board and by Grant Thornton on behalf of the Welsh Local Government Association.

Councillor Hilary McGuill commented on the increasing trend of on-line shopping and asked what was being done to encourage people to visit town centres to shop or for social purposes. Councillor McGuill also referred to the information that unemployed claimants had doubled compared to pre-Covid levels and young people had been disproportionately impacted, and suggested that training courses be offered to enhance existing skills or provide new skills to improve future employment prospects.

Responding to the comments about regeneration of town centres, the Enterprise and Regeneration Manager advised that a number of priorities and programmes were being progressed to support town centres and referred to the help provided to support local businesses and encouraging change of use of town centres to lessen dependence on retail trade. He advised that work was being undertaken with Welsh Government Business Wales to help entrepreneurs take up opportunities in town centres. He reported that the Welsh Government (WG) was piloting a loan fund for entrepreneurs in a number of North Wales towns which it was hoped would be expanded in the future.

Responding to the comments about unemployment the Enterprise and Regeneration Manager commented on the impact of the pandemic and said that the WG had announced a youth guarantee programme which provided a range of

support for young people. Locally he advised that the Communities 4 Work Team supported young people and provided short focused training courses to meet the needs of employers and give access to local employment opportunities.

Councillor Marion Bateman asked for information on the uptake of industrial units as she felt this would be an indication of economic recovery. The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager advised that the position was positive, almost all units had been taken up, and there was not enough commercial estate to meet current demand. The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) confirmed that demand for industrial units had been extremely high and young entrepreneurs were seeking large units for production and storage. He said the position was encouraging and bode well for the local economy and workforce.

The Chairman asked if Welsh Government Business Wales could be lobbied to ask for support to be provided to Flintshire. The Enterprise and Regeneration Manager reiterated that it was intended to expand the pilot scheme and agreed that it could be asked if the roll-out could be accelerated. The Chairman suggested that the Committee might wish to ask the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee to pursue this and this was agreed by Members.

The recommendations in the report was moved by Councillor Marion Bateman and seconded by Councillor Patrick Heesom.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the potential economic outlook projections and recovery structures established to steer future actions be noted;
- (b) That the current and proposed work programmes established to support economic recovery in Flintshire be noted; and
- (c) That the Committee request that a report on entrepreneurial grant support from Welsh Government and how the Local Authority could be involved with this be presented to a future Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

19. REGIONAL RECOVERY UPDATE (PRESENTATION)

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy), Internal Audit Manager, Benefits Manager, Lead Specialist Practitioner - Occupational Health Unit, Team Leader Corporate Health & Safety, gave a joint presentation entitled Regional Work on Response and Recovery which covered the following areas:

- regional working
- key roles
- prevention and response
- test, trace and protect
- surge testing
- testing
- enforcement
- support to Deeside Mass Vaccination Centre
- protect and support

- personal protective equipment (PPE) - corporate/regional support
- personal protective equipment (PPE) - strategy/assurance of supplies

The Chairman thanked officers for their presentation and paid tribute to all involved in the response to the Covid-19 emergency and expressed appreciation for the work undertaken.

Councillor Ian Roberts fully endorsed the sentiments and expressed praise for the hard work and dedication of officers, employees, volunteers and local community groups. Councillor Roberts took the opportunity to comment on the need for well-funded public services.

Councillor Marion Bateman also expressed thanks to all volunteers and voluntary groups which had given service to assist others. Councillor Bateman also acknowledged the work of the North Wales Clinical Research Centre.

Councillor David Healey paid tribute to the achievements of all staff involved in the response to the pandemic and commented on the success of the vaccination programme in Flintshire.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Marion Bateman and Joe Johnson.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee is assured by the presentation and update and offer it's thanks to all officers involved with the work on response and recovery.

20. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME (VERBAL)

The Facilitator reported that the following items were listed for the next meeting to be held on 5 August:

- Corporate recovery objectives
- Corporate recovery risk profile
- Summarised Recovery Business Plans for Streetscene & Transportation and Housing & Assets; and
- Benefits Manager to present on the work of the Poverty and Vulnerability Recovery Tactical Group.

This was moved by the Chairman and seconded by Councillor Patrick Heesom

RESOLVED:

That the agenda items for the next meeting on 5 August be agreed.

21. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS

There were no members of the press in attendance

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Chairman