

CABINET
18 OCTOBER 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of Flintshire County Council held virtually via Zoom on Tuesday 18th October 2022.

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chair)

Councillors: Sean Bibby, Chris Bithell, Dave Healey, Dave Hughes, Paul Johnson, Christine Jones and Billy Mullin.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Governance), Chief Officer (Social Services), Chief Officer (Housing and Communities), Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy), Corporate Finance Manager, Corporate Manager – Capital Programme and Assets, and Team Leader – Democratic Services.

APOLOGY:

Councillor Dave Hughes

Councillors Jones and Mullin provided verbal statements on the forthcoming national Safeguarding Weeks, which highlighted safeguarding issues including child sexual exploitation, human trafficking, modern slavery, radicalisation, and serious sexual offences. A key message was “Safeguarding is everybody’s responsibility”, with everybody needing to recognise the signs and know how to report concerns.

There was a shared responsibility to keep people safe and to protect children and adults at risk, with recent cases highlighting that everybody must stay vigilant. During the week 14th – 18th November the Council would be participating in national Safeguarding Week, joining other public bodies in Wales to raise awareness across the country of the importance of people recognising the signs of abuse, the situations in which it could arise and knowing how to make a report. They thanked Members for their support.

55. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

56. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 26th September 2022 were submitted and confirmed as a correct.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings be approved as a correct record.

57. COUNCIL PLAN 2023-28

Councillor Roberts introduced the report and explained that the Council Plan for 2023-28 had been reviewed and refreshed to reflect the key priorities of the Council for the five-year term of the new administration.

The 'super-structure' of the Plan comprised of seven priorities and relevant sub-priorities. The seven priorities took a long-term view of recovery, projects and ambitions over the next five years.

The Chief Executive added that the Council Plan 2023-28 could be published in a similar format to previous years, identifying actions aimed at achieving the Well-being objectives, priorities and sub-priorities. National and regional issues/risks which could impact on the achievement of those priorities would be identified and monitored.

Part 2 of the Council Plan would be considered by the respective Overview and Scrutiny Committees to ensure full coverage of Part 1 of the Council Plan 2023-28 and its respective measures and their targets.

Members welcomed the report, particularly the emphasis placed on well-being of residents.

RESOLVED:

That the Priorities, Sub-Priorities and Well-being objective of the Council Plan 2023-28 be agreed.

58. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2021/22

Councillor Roberts introduced the report and explained that the Annual Performance Report for 2021/22 reviewed progress against the Council Priorities as detailed in the Council Plan 2021/22 and supporting measures document.

He thanked all staff who had maintained service delivery during a very challenging period.

The Chief Executive said performance against the Council Plan measures was positive with 73% of the performance indicators meeting or exceeding their target for the year, compared to 67% the previous year.

Officers were commended on the work that had been undertaken over the previous year which had resulted in some remarkable achievements.

In response to a question from Councillor Bithell, the Chief Officer (Social Services) said he would find out how many children took up the offer of Return Home interview.

RESOLVED:

That the Annual Performance Report 2021/22 be approved prior to endorsement by County Council.

59. CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEE (CJC) UPDATE REPORT

Councillor Roberts introduced the report and explained that the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 gave Ministers the power to create

a new type of regional body called a Corporate Joint Committee (CJC). Ministers had mandated the creation of four CJCs across Wales, each having the same four functions: economic well-being; preparing a Strategic Development Plan; transport and improving education. The precise governance arrangements for each CJC were to be settled by the body itself. He provided a similar example being GwE, the Welsh Education Consortia, and the arrangements for them having representation at Education and Youth Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chief Executive added that progress had been made in line with transitional plans and expectations, and appendix two to the report provided a detailed update on work to transfer the lead officer from the North Wales Economic Ambition Board into the CJC for a time limited period.

The report had been considered at the meeting of Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee the previous week where there had been some opposition in principle to the creation of a CJC. They also noted the secondment of the lead officer from the North Wales Economic Ambition Board.

Also appended to the report was a copy of the letter received from the Minister for Finance and Local Government.

Councillor Roberts suggested a third resolution be added, that the comments made at the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted, which was supported.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the ongoing work to develop the regional Corporate Joint Committee be noted and supported;
- (b) That the proposed secondment of the Economic Ambition Board Portfolio Director from the North Wales Economic Ambition Board in the CJC up to March 2023 be supported; and
- (c) The comments made at the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

60. ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN 2022-2027

Councillor Mullin introduced the report which presented the refreshed Corporate Asset Management Plan 2022-2027 which replaced the previous plan that ran from 2020 to 2026.

The plan had been updated following the Welsh Government Policy for Net zero carbon Public Sector by 2030, the Welsh Government's Future Generation Act and as a consequence the Council's Climate Change Strategy which was adopted by Council in February 2022.

As with the previous plan, it set the Council's medium-term strategy for managing its assets and moving towards an optimal portfolio of assets. The report explained the need for the Plan, its purpose, objectives, key aims and content.

The Corporate Manager – Capital Programme and Assets added that the report had been submitted to Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September where clarification was sought on the carbon strategy and agricultural estates.

RESOLVED:

That the Asset Management Plan 2022 – 2027 be approved so that it can be adopted as the principal document for managing the Council's corporate property and land resource assets.

61. STRATEGIC HOUSING AND REGENERATION PROGRAMME (SHARP) UPDATE REPORT

Councillor Bibby introduced the report which provided information on the progress of the Strategic Housing and Regeneration Programme (SHARP) six years in, and to set the strategy for new affordable homes for the next five years.

The Council entered into a five-year partnership with Wates to help develop new council housing in 2016 and to date had delivered 149 new council homes, 173 North East Wales (NEW) Homes properties, the Maes Gwern development and there were a further 77 in the pipeline.

The report provided an update on the situation since it was last reported to Cabinet in February 2021 and outlined the progress under the new Welsh procurement framework partnership and also the net zero carbon working group, highlighted changes in the Welsh Government (WG) new build priorities, the new funding regime and its implications for Flintshire and NEW Homes. It also suggested an outline programme for further development for the next five years.

The Chief Officer (Housing and Communities) added that the report also covered the changes to the criterion for registration with Tai Teg, the regional affordable housing provider. She also outlined the challenges being faced.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress to date with SHARP be noted;
- (b) That the changes in Welsh Government funding for social housing be noted;
- (c) That the changes to the criterion for registration with Tai Teg for affordable rented housing be noted;
- (d) That the outline development programme SHARP 2 be noted; and
- (e) That the re-allocation of £121K budget for scheme investigation and feasibility works to support new delivery routes be supported.

62. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT

Councillor Bibby introduced the report and explained that the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 placed a mandatory duty on Local Authorities to provide Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). The grant was available for adapting or providing facilities for a disabled person in a dwelling.

The Chief Officer (Housing and Communities) explained that due to the current climate since Brexit and Covid-19, there had been an increase in costs in the construction industry. Although a new Discretionary Policy was developed last year, it had been recognised that a review of the policy was required to ensure the needs of the customer were still being met.

The current policy had an agreed limit of £10,000 for non means testing of medium sized adaptations. That discretionary grant was created to meet the request of Welsh Government (WG) in the revised Housing Adaptations Service Standards.

However, due to the current climate and rise in costs in the construction industry, it seemed unreasonable as the majority of medium adaptations could not be delivered within that cost limit. Therefore, to fully remove the means test for all medium sized adaptations would not only meet WG guidelines, but would also be more equitable and consistent.

As it was a Discretionary Grant, it would still be at the discretion of the DFG Manager to determine whether to means test a case or not particularly if the works were complex in nature, resulting in a combination of medium adaptations which were comparable to the cost of large scale works around £20,000 or above.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the updated Disabled Facility Grant policy be supported and the ongoing work to improve the service be noted;
- (b) That the amendment to Appendix 2 in the policy for removal of the means test for medium sized adaptations be noted; and
- (c) That the changes to the Land Charges be noted, whereby they now only apply to large adaptations in-line with Welsh Government Revised Housing Standards, previously they applied to any adaptation over £20,000, be noted.

63. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2022/23 (MONTH 5)

Councillor Johnson introduced the report which provided the latest revenue budget monitoring position for 2022/23 for the Council Fund and the Housing Revenue Account.

The projected year end position was:

Council Fund

- An operating deficit of £0.680m (excluding the impact of the pay award which would need to be met by reserves)
- A projected contingency reserve available balance as at 31st March 2023 of £7.724m (before the impact of final pay awards)

Housing Revenue Account

- Net in-year revenue expenditure forecast to be £3.308m higher than budget
- A projected closing balance as at 31st March 2023 of £3.166m

Hardship Funding from Welsh Government (WG) helped secure £16m of direct financial help the previous year and the authority would continue to claim for payments to Self-isolation and Statutory Sick Pay Enhancement payments, along with Free School Meals direct payments within their eligible periods.

A brought forward amount of £2.066m remained available from the original £3m emergency ring-fenced fund. The 2022/23 budget approved in February included a further top up of £3.250m to the Reserve to provide a prudent safeguard against any ongoing impacts of the pandemic. Early indications were that whilst the risks due to COVID-19 had diminished considerably, the inflationary risk had increased. The position would be monitored closely over the coming months and any impacts would be reflected in future reports.

The Corporate Finance Manager provided details on the pay award (Teacher and Non-Teacher), and the earmarked reserves.

RESOLVED:

That the report and the estimated financial impact on the 2022/23 budget be noted.

64. TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

Councillor Healey introduced the report and explained that smaller town centres across the United Kingdom had been facing challenging economic circumstances for many years due to changing customer behaviours. The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated those trends and although it remained too early to understand the long term impacts it was important that future proofing towns was addressed by creating more sustainable use of properties within town centres.

The report provided an update on the strategic context for town centre regeneration and the programmes of work currently underway. Furthermore, it provided details about the development of Place Plans and the enforcement action required to tackle empty properties within town centres.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) added that as a result of Cabinet approving extra staff resource in 2021, three appointments had been made. Two posts were currently being secured which would see the team increase to seven staff from December 2022. The additional resource brought a broader range of skills, knowledge and experience to the regeneration team

particularly in property-related regeneration work and the delivery of loan investments.

A series of public meetings and digital consultations would need to be carried out as part of the development process for each of the seven Place Plans. Local residents, businesses, internal and external colleagues would have the opportunity to participate over the next two years. Information gathered from the consultations would directly inform the content of Flintshire's Place Plans and actions contained within future delivery plans of both the Council and its partners.

The report had been submitted to the recent Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee where it was supported.

In response to a question from Councillor Bithell, the Chief Officer explained that the details of the Welsh Government (WG) funding had not yet been made available but when it was, it would be applied to each of the seven towns.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the requirements to develop Place Plans for the seven towns (Buckley, Connah's Quay, Flint, Holywell, Mold, Queensferry and Shotton) in Flintshire be noted and the sequence in which the proposed work is delivered within the constraints of resource available be noted; and
- (b) That the requirements to address vacant town centre properties through an enforcement action plan be noted, and that the criteria and approach to be used be approved and that delegated authority be given to the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) and the Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economy to implement the action plan.

65. FLINTSHIRE COASTAL PARK

Councillor Healey introduced the report and explained that in 2014 a strategic framework of opportunities along the Dee Estuary foreshore was produced. The proposal of a coast park sought to identify the estuary foreshore as a single entity akin to a Regional Park.

The concept of a Flintshire Coast Park had been re-explored through the commissioning of a scoping study which reviewed case studies before analysing the benefits and constraints. The study suggested potential coast park footprints and steps for implementation.

A Flintshire Coast Park for Flintshire would provide a fresh impetus and focus for the coast, raising the profile of the foreshore and enable communities and businesses to work sustainably and innovatively to help deliver environmental, economic and social prosperity.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) added that the report had been considered at the recent Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee where option two had been supported.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the content of the scoping study be noted and that the Flintshire Coast Park as a local, informal entity, be taken forward;
- (b) That option two be agreed as the preferred coast park footprint to take forward; and
- (c) That the Assess & Natural Environment Manager be tasked with establishing a Flintshire Coast Park Steering Group to move forward on the next steps for implementation.

66. PERFORMANCE OF THE WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARD (WHQS) CAPITAL PROGRAMME – DELIVERY REVIEW UPDATE

Councillor Bibby introduced the report which provided an update on the Council's delivery of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) through the Capital Investment Programme.

The Council had been successful in delivering the WHQS Programme of Works to all Council stock, a major capital investment of over £100m. The Council was now in the maintenance phase of the programme, delivering further investment works to those components within properties where required.

The Chief Officer (Housing and Communities) said the report focussed on what had been delivered to date and what the next phase of the Councils WHQS investment programme would focus on.

RESOLVED:

That the Capital Investment Programme in its next phase of compliance as it moves towards the updated Welsh Housing Quality Standards and requirements be noted.

67. EXERCISE OF DELEGATED POWERS

An information item on the actions taken under delegated powers was submitted. The actions were as set out below:-

Education & Youth

- **Local Authority Appointed School Governors**
Appointment of Local Authority Governor(s) representatives on school governing bodies in accordance with The Government of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2005.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 – TO CONSIDER THE EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded for the remainder of the meeting for the following items by virtue of exempt information under paragraph(s) 14 and 16 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

68. WHOLE HOUSE ENERGY EFFICIENCY RETROFIT 2022

Councillor Healey introduced the report and explained that the Housing Regeneration Team had completed the competitive procurement process to appoint a Principal Contractor to delivery energy efficiency installations for Council and private households across Flintshire.

RESOLVED:

That the contract to Wall-lag (Wales) Ltd. be approved.

69. DATACENTRE TECHNOLOGIES CONTRACT EXTENSION

Councillor Mullin introduced the report and explained that the Council's Datacentre Technologies Framework contract was due to expire on 30th October 2022 and the IT service was seeking a contract extension to 31st March 2023.

That would allow for the completion of a collaborative procurement with Denbighshire and enable key IT infrastructure procurements to be made.

RESOLVED:

That it be approved that the Council's Datacentre technologies contract be extended up to 31st March 2023.

70. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and ended at 11.22 a.m.)

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Chair