

CABINET
18TH JUNE 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of Flintshire County Council held as a remote meeting on Zoom, on Tuesday, 18th June 2024.

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chair)

Councillors: Sean Bibby, Chris Bithell, Mared Eastwood, Dave Healey, Dave Hughes, Paul Johnson, Christine Jones, and Linda Thomas.

IN ATTENDANCE:

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

OTHER MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Helen Brown, David Coggins Cogan and Chrissy Gee.

APOLOGY:

Councillor: Dave Healey

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bithell declared a personal interest in agenda item number 9: Social Services Care Inspectorate Wales, Performance Evaluation Inspection November 2023 – Action Plan Update.

5. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 12th March, 24th April and 30th May were submitted.

RESOLVED:

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

6. HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN PERFORMANCE UPDATE

Councillor Bibby introduced the report which provided an update on delivery of the Housing Strategy Delivery Plan 2019 - 2024 with a particular focus on the financial year 2023/24.

The Housing Strategy had a delivery plan which set out three strategic priorities and related activity to achieve those priorities:

- Priority 1: Increase supply to provide the right type of homes in the right location.

- Priority 2: Provide support to ensure people live and remain in the right type of
- home.
- Priority 3: Improve the quality and sustainability of homes.

The Chief Officer (Housing and Communities) added that this was an annual report which provided an update for Members. Appended to the report was the latest update against each of the priorities. The report had been submitted to Community and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee where the recommendations had been supported.

In response to a question from Councillor Bithell, the Chief Officer explained that the statutory homes service delivery was funded via the Council Fund.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress on delivery of the Housing Strategy Action Plan 2019-2024 be noted; and
- (b) That the challenges outlined in the report to the following be noted:
 - The alignment of standards and intervention rate for acquisitions under the Social Housing Grant (SHG) with those under the Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP)
 - The updated timeframe for renewal of the current Housing Strategy

7. 'TOGETHER WE CAN' COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND SELF-RELIANCE

Councillor Johnson introduced the report which provided an overview of the Audit Wales report “‘Together we can’ Community resilience and self-reliance”, which highlighted how building community resilience and self-reliance could help reduce reliance on local authority services in future, if local authorities shifted from being a ‘direct provider’ to ‘enabler’.

‘Together we can’ was the third report published by Audit Wales in a series focused on poverty and what local government was doing to tackle it. The report also highlighted the recommendations and expectations of Audit Wales in terms of local authorities next steps.

The Chief Officer (Housing and Communities) explained that the recommendation in the report would require cross organisational work and financial support at a time when the Council faced a significant budget pressure and it would need ongoing investment for it to be a success.

The report had been submitted to Community and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee who moved a further recommendation of *“That the Committee recognises the work of numerous voluntary organisations and individuals across the County and that be fed back to Cabinet when considering the report at its meeting on 18th June”*.

Councillor Roberts said that such recommendations needed financial investment from both the UK Government and Welsh Government. He thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their additional recommendation.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the findings and recommendations of the Audit Wales 'Together we can' Community resilience and self-reliance' report be noted; and
- (b) That the recommended response in relation to Audit Wales recommendations be noted and it being reported to appropriate Committees in June 2024 be supported.

8. AUDIT WALES REPORT (USE OF PERFORMANCE INFORMATION SERVICE USER PERSPECTIVE AND OUTCOMES)

Councillor Thomas introduced the report which provided details on the Service User Perspective and Outcomes audit.

It was a national study and Audit Wales undertook this work at Flintshire County Council during July and September 2023 and the report was issued in December 2023.

The audit sought to:

- Gain assurance that the performance information the Council provides to senior officers and elected members enables them to understand the service user perspective and the outcome of its activities;
- Gain assurance that this information forms part of the Council's arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources and its application of the sustainable development principle; and
- Identify opportunities for the Council to strengthen its arrangements.

The Chief Officer (Governance) explained that no formal recommendations were identified and three recommendations for improvement had arisen from this audit, with the Council providing a planned action in response to the recommendations for improvement. He added that the Council had already started work on what had been recommended in the action plan and referred to examples of stakeholder and customer feedback being included in Cabinet reports.

The report had been submitted to Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee which recommended that *"In relation to key policy and service decisions, including any changes to services, that reports include Service User Perspectives on the outcomes currently being delivered". And, "That Cabinet considers and annual survey of service users to be captured with the issuing of Council Tax bills."*

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Council's planned action in response to the recommendations for improvement be endorsed;

- (b) That in relation to key policy and service decisions, including any changes to services, that reports include Service User Perspectives on the outcomes currently being delivered; and
- (c) That the recommendation that an annual survey of residents be undertaken is considered at the same time as a forthcoming report on a national survey of residents being proposed by the WLGA.

9. WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2023/24

Councillor Eastwood introduced the report and explained that Flintshire County Council was required to adhere to Welsh Language Standards, as set out in a Compliance Notice that was served on the Council in 2015.

The Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice for Flintshire County Council placed a statutory duty on the Council to publish an annual report that set out how it had met the Welsh Language Standards.

The purpose of the report was to present the Welsh Language Standards Annual Monitoring Report 2023/24, providing an overview of the Council's progress in complying with the Welsh Language Standards and identifying areas for further progress and improvement.

The Corporate Manager, Capital Programme and Assets provided information on increased initiatives; recruitment of Welsh speakers; areas for further improvement; and complaints.

During the next 12 months, the Council aimed to:

- Develop a Welsh Language Skills Strategy to increase the number of employees using Welsh to be able to deliver bilingual services.
- Reduce the number of employees who reported that they did not have any Welsh language skills.
- Continue completing self-assessments against the Welsh language standards to ensure services continue to comply.

There would be an area on the internal website for Members and officers to be signposted to what was available to support them, such as common phrases. In addition, a report would be presented to a future meeting of Cabinet on the cost for providing translation services at meetings.

RESOLVED:

That the Welsh Language Standards Annual Monitoring Report for 2023/24 be approved and published on the Council's website.

10. **AUDIT WALES: EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS: MORE THAN A TICK BOX EXERCISE**

Councillor Thomas introduced the report and explained that in September 2022, Audit Wales published a report on its findings of the use of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) in Wales.

The aim of the audit was to provide insight about the approach to EIAs undertaken across the public sector in Wales.

The report “Equality Impact Assessments: more than a tick box exercise?” set out four recommendations and seven key improvement areas for Welsh Government and public bodies. The report provided an update on actions being taken to meet the recommendation that applied to public bodies.

RESOLVED:

That the progress to meet the recommendations of Audit Wales “Equality Impact Assessments: more than a tick box exercise?” be noted.

11. **SOCIAL SERVICES CARE INSPECTORATE WALES, PERFORMANCE EVALUATION INSPECTION NOVEMBER 2023 – ACTION PLAN UPDATE**

Councillor Jones introduced the report and explained that in October, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) announced that they would be visiting Flintshire to undertake a full, routine PEI (Performance Evaluation Inspection) of both Adult’s and Children’s Services.

The purpose of the inspection was to review the local authority’s performance in exercising its social services duties and functions in line with legislation, on behalf of Welsh Ministers. It was to be the first full inspection the portfolio had received for over 8 years and was an opportunity to showcase the creative and innovative practice undertaken in Flintshire.

The full report was published on 22nd February 2024 and was largely positive in their findings across Social Services. An action plan had been produced based on the recommendations made by inspectors.

The Chief Officer (Social Services) thanked the team who had supported the work required through the challenging inspection. He added that the inspectors had commented on the positive support provided by Councillors. The report had been submitted to Social and Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee where the recommendations had been supported. Councillor Roberts also expressed his thanks to the Chief Officer and the team.

RESOLVED:

That the outcome of the report be noted and the resulting Action Plan be supported.

12. AGE FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

Councillor Jones introduced the report which provided an update on the development of age-friendly communities in Flintshire and sought commitment for ongoing support across portfolio areas.

The Welsh Government 'Strategy for an Ageing Society' set out the actions needed to enable people in Wales to age well and to live within age-friendly communities. To support the strategy, Welsh Government funding was provided to all local authorities to support them to apply for and maintain membership of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities.

In May 2023, Flintshire County Council received confirmation of its successful application to join the WHO Age-friendly Network having demonstrated the breadth of engagement with older people and range of age-friendly services and initiatives in the county.

As members of the WHO Network, Flintshire had developed an age-friendly plan to outline the actions needed for communities in Flintshire to become more age friendly. The plan was based on local and national policy and strategies, and on priorities and needs identified through community engagement. The plan was a working document and would evolve in line with changing priorities and new and emerging strategies.

Flintshire was meeting commitments to provide online information hubs and to share best practice examples across Wales and globally. This had included contributions to the Welsh Government's Age-friendly Wales newsletter. In addition, a presentation was made by citizens from Flintshire community groups, supported by the Social Services' team, at the Older People's Commissioner's Age-Friendly Wales Conference on 8th November 2023. The work was very well received and was detailed in the report.

The report had been submitted to Social and Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee where it was supported.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress made to develop age friendly communities in Flintshire including the successful application for membership of the World Health Organisation Global Network; and
- (b) That Cabinet commit to the continued support and collaboration of all portfolio service teams to help develop Flintshire as a great place to live for the ageing population.

13. DEFERRED CHARGES AUDIT REPORT

Councillor Jones introduced the report and explained that as part of the Internal Audit programme of work for 2022/23 an audit of deferred charges and the management of residential care liabilities in Social Services was undertaken.

A Deferred Payment was only available for individuals who were receiving care and support in a residential or nursing care home setting. It was an agreement between the individual in receipt of care and the Council which allowed for a deferment or a delay in paying for care costs until a later date. The costs deferred were repaid at a future date.

During the Internal Audit of the existing Deferred Payment process eight actions were identified as needing action, five of which were red and three amber. Since the completion of the audit report the Financial Assessment and Charging Team had established a Task and Finish Group to address the agreed actions, this work was taking place alongside the implementation of a new finance software system which would support the additional monitoring and control measures identified in the audit report.

The report had been submitted to Governance and Audit Committee and Social and Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the information on the actions taken since the completion of the Internal Audit report be noted; and
- (b) That Members be assured that the remaining actions are being undertaken within the timescales laid out in the audit report and that progress is being monitored effectively.

14. CRACKS IN THE FOUNDATIONS BUILDING SAFETY IN WALES – AUDIT WALES REPORT

Councillor Bithell introduced the report and explained that in August 2023, Audit Wales published a report on Building Control in Wales entitled 'Cracks in the Foundations' to understand how well the Welsh Government, local authorities and their partners were strengthening and improving Building Control and building safety services following the introduction of the Building Safety Act 2022.

The Audit Wales report looked at all Building Control Authorities in Wales and how each was prepared to take on the enhanced responsibilities and requirements of the 2022 Act. It focused on the resilience of existing services and the robustness of building safety assurance systems.

The findings from the report give a critical oversight and raised concerns that not enough priority was being given to Building Control services. It suggested that there was an absence of robust planning and clear decision making and inadequate resources raising fears that the new responsibilities and requirements of the 2022 Act would not be delivered as intended in Wales.

Eight recommendations were made by Audit Wales, four directed at Welsh Government and four directed at Local Authorities. The purpose of the report was to give an overview of the Audit Wales review, their recommendations and the response to those recommendations and actions required.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) explained that the report had been submitted to the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee the previous week and questions were asked on the Council's response to the recommendations, particularly around fee setting and progress on timescales which were outlined in appendix 1.

RESOLVED:

That the outcome of the Audit Wales report be noted and the actions to be taken to address the four recommendations made for Local Authorities be supported.

15. DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

Councillor Roberts introduced the report on behalf of Councillor Healey and read out a prepared statement.

The report highlighted that tourism generated an estimated annual contribution to the Flintshire economy of £325m, supporting around 3,300 jobs.

The draft Destination Management Plan had been co-produced with a wide partnership of businesses and partner agencies to take a co-ordinated approach to supporting the development of the visitor economy sector and responding to the challenges and opportunities that would be faced over the next few years.

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) explained that the report had been submitted to Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee where the workstreams had been scrutinised, focussing on the Council being reliant on shared prosperity funding, tourism tax, tax on second homes and the toilet strategy.

RESOLVED:

That the draft Destination Management Plan be endorsed.

16. COMMUNAL HEATING CHARGES 2023/25

Councillor Bibby introduced the report and explained that the Council operated eight communal heating schemes within Flintshire, with 417 properties on communal heating systems.

The Council had recently renegotiated the fuel tariff to be charged for 2024/25 as the previous contract ended in March 2024. The rate chargeable for gas was expected to decrease by approximately 51% over the next 12 months. Communal contract holders were billed based on the Council's Industrial and Commercial Contract rate and although electricity and gas market prices remained two times higher than historic average market prices, the Council contracted gas rates were now reducing from their high point in 2022/23.

New communal heating charges were based on the prior year's energy use which ensured an accurate assessment of costs and impacted on the heating reserve account. To recover the projected heating charges in full the Council

needed to align the communal heating charges to ensure full cost recovery. The proposed recharges for 2024/25 were set out in the report.

The Chief Officer (Housing and Communities) added that the Council would be implementing a phased approach in 2024/25 to individual billing for all communal contracts based on actual usage rather than a proportional charge due to triggering the requirements of The Heat Network (Metering and Billing) Regulations.

The Council had commenced with the installation of individual meters to all Council owned dwellings within the HRA, which were served by a communal heating system. This included linking the new meters to a portal so the Council could accurately provide contract holders with a statement of their energy usage and bill them accordingly. The Council were also in the process of installing additional heating controls to contract holders' homes where feasible, so that their heating could be individually controlled and regulated. Those works would be completed within the 2024/25 financial year.

The report had been submitted to the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee where the proposed changes to the heating charges were supported.

RESOLVED:

That the changes to the current heating charges at Council properties with communal heating schemes, as outlined in the report, be approved. All changes to take effect from 31st July 2024.

17. PURCHASE OF 'BUY BACKS' USING THE WELSH GOVERNMENT (WG) TRANSITIONAL ACCOMODATION CAPITAL PROGRAMME (TACP)

Councillor Bibby introduced the report and explained that the properties at 93 and 95 Hawarden Road in Hope were previously commercially let as a takeaway / restaurant. The properties had been vacant for many years and had become derelict.

The legal process of ending that type of commercial lease was very protracted. Last year the properties were removed from the lease and returned to the Council and had been secured and made safe.

As former Housing Revenue Account (HRA) homes they were ideally suited to meet the criterion set by Welsh Government (WG) under the Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP). This was 'top sliced' funding from the Social Housing Programme (SHG) to bring back into use derelict or 'moth balled' properties quickly to tackle the burgeoning homeless crisis across the UK.

Authority was sought to complete the internal transfer of 93 and 95 Hawarden Road Hope from the Council fund to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) including a transfer cost of £0.150m from the HRA to the Council Fund (£0.075m per dwelling). Also, to note the refurbishment and project costs for the

properties which were approved using delegated powers subject to the grant of TACP from WG as detailed in the report.

RESOLVED:

That the internal transfer of the properties from the Council fund to the Housing Revenue Account for a transfer cost of £0.150m be approved.

18. EXERCISE OF DELEGATED POWERS

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

Streetscene and Transportation

- **Proposal to Construct a Puffin Pedestrian Crossing on the A548 Chester Road, Flint**
To note that formal objections have been received as part of the statutory consultation procedure which have been reviewed and considered impartially. This delegated report confirms the progression of the proposals to construct a Puffin Crossing on the A548 Chester Road, Flint, incorporating minor amendments to the advertised design.
- **Proposal to Construct a Puffin Crossing Facility on the B5444 Wrexham Road, Mold**
To note that formal objections have been received as part of the statutory consultation procedure which have been reviewed and considered impartially. This delegated report confirms the progression of the proposals to construct a Puffin Crossing on the B5444 Wrexham Road, Mold.
- **Proposal to Construct a Zebra Crossing on Ffordd Llewelyn, Flint**
To note that formal objections have been received as part of the statutory consultation procedure which have been reviewed and considered impartially. This delegated report confirms the progression of the proposals to construct a Zebra Pedestrian on Ffordd Llewelyn, Flint, incorporating minor amendments to the advertised design.
- **Proposal to Construct a Puffin Pedestrian Crossing on the A5119 Main Road, Sychdyn**
To note that formal objections have been received as part of the statutory consultation procedure which have been reviewed and considered impartially. This delegated report confirms the progression of the proposals to construct a Puffin Crossing on the A5119 Main Road, Sychdyn.
- **Proposal to Construct a Puffin Pedestrian Crossing on the A5119 Ruthin Road, Mold**
To note that formal objections have been received as part of the statutory consultation procedure which have been reviewed and considered impartially. This delegated report confirms the progression of the proposals to construct a Puffin Crossing on the A5119 Ruthin Road, Mold.

- Proposal to Implement Waiting Restrictions (double yellow lines), on the B5444 Wrexham Road, Mold**

To note that formal objections have been received as part of the statutory consultation procedure which have been reviewed and considered impartially. This delegated report confirms the progression of the proposals to implement waiting restrictions (double yellow lines), on the B5444 Wrexham Road, Mold.
- Proposal to Reduce the Existing Speed Limit of 40mph on the A5026 Holway Road, Holywell and Introduce a Restricted Road (20mph) on a Section of the A5026 Holway Road, Holywell and the A5026 Whitford Street**

To note that a formal objection has been received as part of the statutory consultation procedure which has been reviewed and considered impartially. This delegated report confirms the progression of the proposals to reduce the existing speed limit of 40mph on the A5026 Holway Road, Holywell and introduce a Restricted Road (20mph) on a section of the A5026 Holway Road and the A5026 Whitford Street, Holywell.

Housing and Communities

- Housing Benefit Overpayment**

Financial Procedure Rules (section 9.6) – Income and Expenditure) stipulate that any individual debt between the values of £10,000 and £25,000 shall be reported to the Head of Finance for consideration to write off, in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Finance. The schedule attached to the delegated powers report details a Housing Benefit Overpayment where the overall debt is greater than £10,000.

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 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

19. INSURANCE SERVICES CONTRACT EXTENSION

Councillor Johnson introduced the report which provided details of the current Insurance Services contract and the proposed extension.

RESOLVED:

That the extension to the current Long Term Agreements with Zurich Municipal and Risk Management Partners by a further two years to 31st March 2027 be approved.

20. RECOMMISSIONING OF LEARNING DISABILITY DAY AND WORK OPPORTUNITIES SERVICES

Councillor Jones introduced the report and provided an update on the recommissioning of Learning Disability Day and Work Opportunities Services.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the current contract to the present service provider for the learning disabilities day and work services currently delivered by Hft be approved. It is proposed that the extension is for a further five-year and two month period commencing from 1st February 2025 with the option of a further two year extension, therefore the end date would be 31st March 2032. The anticipated spend for the proposed contract award necessitates that a decision for long-term direct awards require a Cabinet decision according to the thresholds for the authority to approve substantial variations as set out in the local authority Contract Procedure Rules; and
- (b) That the direct award of a contract to the present service provider for the learning disabilities day and work services currently delivered by Clocktower CIC as detailed in the report be approved. It is proposed that the Direct Award is for a five-year period commencing from 1st April 2025 with the option of a further two year extension, therefore the end date would be 31st March 2032. The anticipated spend for the proposed contract award necessitates that a decision for a long-term direct aware requires a Cabinet decision or delegated decision according to the thresholds for the authority to approve exceptions as set out in the Contract Procedure Rules.

21. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the public in attendance.

(The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and ended at 11.47 a.m.)

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Chair