

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CABINET**

DATE: **TUESDAY, 21 MAY 2013**

REPORT BY: **CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

SUBJECT: **NORTH WALES PRISON**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To update Members on the campaign for a prison in North Wales and on the proposals for a preferred site.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 The Justice Secretary, Chris Grayling, made a ministerial statement on 10th January 2013 on Prison Management.

2.02 The Minister stated that modern prisons could deliver better custody and rehabilitation services more efficiently than older prison accommodation, citing savings from HMP Oakwood a new prison that provides places and better services at less than half the average cost of existing prison places.

2.03 The Minister announced plans to close 6 prisons, including Shrewsbury and the partial closure of a further 3 prisons. This planned capacity reduction of 2,600 is equivalent to the capacity of HMP Oakwood.

2.04 The significant reduction in costs that the new developments will achieve has led to the Minister making a commitment to examine the feasibility of building a new prison with a capacity of 2000 places or more in the North West, London or North Wales.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 The North Wales Regional Board (NWRLB) has campaigned for a prison in North Wales since 2007.

3.02 The grounds for the campaign are: -

- parity of treatment: North Wales is the only area in the United Kingdom not to have a prison in the region. To secure a prison subject to the provision of the Welsh Language Act, where prisoners from North Wales are held in facilities where they can use their first language with the benefit of reducing re-offending

- economic benefits: new and stable employment and a supply chain covering a range of services from education, health, catering and building maintenance
 - efficiency for the public services: prisoner transport and transport costs and travelling time to court/prison for legal/offender management services
 - improving rehabilitation and reduction of re-offending rates: through enabling closer contact between families and support professions by improving access to the prison. Keeping families together also avoids cost to public services and is correlated with prisons that are accessible to families.
- 3.03 A prison in the region will support the Criminal Justice system in the area including the probation service and the courts, supporting jobs in the legal and court system.
- 3.04 The economic benefits are considerable. In work to assess the impact of a 1500 bed prison it was estimated that 1,165 jobs could be created through direct employment in the prison and indirectly through the supply chain. The expenditure going through a 1,500 bed prison into the wider community would be in the region of £47m. Over half of new jobs would be in the immediate area of location.
- 3.05 The NWRLB has developing a campaign around: -
- demonstrating political commitment to pursue a prison for North Wales
 - reporting the opportunity for a prison in North Wales to each local authority
 - demonstrating support for the policy objectives of the Ministry of Justice for cost reduction and modernisation of facilities
 - conducting a feasibility study and assess potential sites for a prison
 - identifying potential sites for a prison.
- 3.06 A regional officer group has been set up to take forward proposal and support the development of a business case for a prison in North Wales. Early work undertaken was to identify any potential sites that Local Authorities may have available and which were not constrained. The Head of Assets and Transportation sits on this group and as part of the site search confirmed that no suitable sites were available in Flintshire that were able to meet the criteria. The only sites in the region which have come forward to meet the criteria and with local support are in Wrexham.
- 3.07 The First Minister, Carwyn Jones AM, speaking during First Minister's Questions on 16 April, has subsequently announced that the former Firestone Site in Wrexham is the preferred location for a prison in North Wales.
- 3.08 The NWRLB has now commissioned to the preparation of a business case in support of a prison in the region.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 That the campaign for a prison in North Wales is supported; and
- 4.02 That Wrexham County Borough Council are supported as the lead authority in the development of the full business case for a prison for North Wales.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.01 None as a direct result of this report. Although indirectly the prison is likely to have wider economic benefit.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

- 6.01 Would provide excellent linkages with local business which can help the development of work opportunities and skills development for prisoners in custody and those due for release.
- 6.02 Improved prisoner rehabilitation and reduced re-offending rates -from enabling closer contact between families/prisoners/support professions by reducing travel distance to the prison.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 7.01 Should be positive in that it would provide excellent transport/accessibility within the region and to other regions of the UK and provide a strong commitment to sustainable development.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.01 Positive in that Culture and Welsh language would be secured through a prison that would be subject to the provision of the Welsh Language Act, where prisoners can use their first language.
- 8.02 Improved prisoner rehabilitation and reduced re-offending rates -from enabling closer contact between families/prisoners/support professions by reducing travel distance to the prison.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.01 None as a direct result of this report but may create local employment opportunities for Flintshire citizens.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

- 10.01 None as a direct result of this report.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 None as a direct result of this report.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 Appendix 1: - North Wales Regional Leadership Board May 2013
Prison Bulletin.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None.

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