

CABINET
20 JANUARY 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Tuesday, 20 January 2015

PRESENT: Councillor Aaron Shotton (Chair)

Councillors: Bernie Attridge, Chris Bithell, Helen Brown, Derek Butler, Christine Jones and Kevin Jones

APOLOGY:

Councillor: Billy Mullin

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise), Chief Officer (Education and Youth), Chief Officer (Governance), Chief Officer (People and Resources), Chief Officer (Organisational Change), Chief Officer (Organisational Change), Chief Officer (Planning and Environment), Chief Officer (Social Services), Corporate Finance Manager and Team Manager – Committee Services

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors: Ron Hampson, Carolyn Thomas and Arnold Woolley

102. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Helen Brown, Derek Butler, Christine Jones, Kevin Jones and Aaron Shotton declared a personal interest in agenda item number 5 – School Modernisation Strategy.

103. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2014 had been circulated with the agenda.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

104. 2015/16 COUNCIL FUND BUDGET SETTING PROCESS UPDATE

The Chief Executive delivered a presentation on the 2015/16 Council Fund Budget Setting Process which covered the following areas:

- Content
- National Position
- Revised Local Position
- Impacts of 14-15 on 15-16
- Strategy to Close the Extended Gap
- Up to Date Strategy Position
- Remaining Strategy Actions

- Big Budget Conversation
- Member Involvement
- Overview and Scrutiny
- Final Steps in the Budget
- Medium Term Financial Plan Review

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance expanded upon the forthcoming consultation process which would be taking place with Overview and Scrutiny Committees over the following two weeks before consideration by County Council on 17 February 2015. He added that the authority maintained its position to protect local services and facilities wherever possible. However, if similar cuts were experienced in future years, services could become unsustainable. He stressed the importance of Community Asset Transfer options coming to fruition, full details of which were in a report for consideration at this meeting. On consequential funding, he expressed his disappointment that no further funding had been made available to local authorities in Wales.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be received and the update position be noted.

105. SCHOOL MODERNISATION STRATEGY

The Cabinet Member for Education introduced the updated ‘Strategy for the Modernisation of Flintshire Schools’.

Details of a number of school organisation projects which had been undertaken since the original Strategy was introduced, which increased efficiency and effectiveness within the school system, were outlined in the report.

Work had also progressed well on the 21st Century Schools Band A projects at Holywell and Connah’s Quay. The John Summers project was subject to current pause and review.

He explained that it was the responsibility of local authorities to manage the supply of school places and whilst the level of surplus places in Flintshire was similar to the Welsh average, it was significantly higher than the advice from the Wales Audit Office (WAO) and the Welsh Government (WG) target, both of which were 10%. A target of 10% meant that resources could be focused on teaching and learning instead of the upkeep of buildings and leadership and administrative costs that were inefficient.

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) added that the key drivers for school modernisation and reorganisation included the need to address:

- Educational improvement
- Resilient school leadership
- Securing suitable learning and working environments
- Addressing unfilled places
- Addressing diminishing revenue resources

The Cabinet Member for Education explained that strategies would continue to be developed to ensure that the authority was providing school places that were fit for purpose in the 21st century.

RESOLVED:

That the updated School Modernisation Strategy be approved.

106. COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment provided an update on the development and implementation of the Council's approach to Community Asset Transfer (CAT).

Public assets owned by Flintshire County Council were one of its major strengths. However, the Council must balance the requirement to dispose of surplus or underutilised assets to provide funding for its capital programme with the need to regenerate local communities and encourage social enterprise through the alternative use of its buildings and land assets. Community ownership could play a part in enhancing the local environment and providing opportunities for all sectors of the community.

Assets that were considered suitable for transfers included playing fields, play areas, community centres, youth centres, allotments, sports grounds, pavilions and libraries.

Interest expressed to date included a total of 20 proposals for over 40 assets which had been agreed to proceed to stage 2. The next stage would be to produce a business case which was expected to take six months. In addition, a total of 47 informal enquiries had also been received from Town and Community Councils, community organisations and individuals relating to 195 assets which covered 21 Town and Community Council areas.

The stage 2 decision would be a formal decision that committed the Council to an Asset Transfer subject to completion of legal agreements. Therefore the decision making needed to be formal and in line with Council policy. It was proposed that the initial mechanism be a recommendation panel with one representative Member from the Council and Flintshire Local Voluntary Council (FLVC), supported by council officers. Recommendations from the panel would then be brought back for formal ratification by the Council and authority given at that stage to enter into legal agreements. It was proposed that the Cabinet Member for Environment be the Council representative on the panel which should meet every three months.

The Chief Officer (Organisational Change) explained the approach and methodology of the CAT strategy as follows:

- Stage 1 – Expression of Interest: This could be made by an individual or community group
- Stage 2 – Business Model Application: This could only be made by a community group and was the formal application stage of the process

- Stage 3 – Completion and Transfer of Asset: The final stage in the process which would be between the Council and an appropriate organisation

In response to a question from the Cabinet Member for Education, the Chief Officer (Organisational Change) explained that Town and Community Councils were being encouraged to act as facilitators in their areas with a view to other organisations and groups getting involved.

The Chief Officer (Governance) responded to a further question and explained that there was sufficient capacity within the Legal Services team to undertake the work on the legal agreements as each one would be similar and not bespoke.

The Chief Executive explained that services were protected for 2015/16 which provided time for Town and Community Councils, community organisations and individuals to express an interest for 2016/17. The Leader concurred and said by allowing more time for expressions of interest to be shown, communities would understand the implications of what would be at risk if CATs were not considered. He added that the level of interest shown in a short time period, since November, was encouraging and demonstrated that discussions were taking place in communities.

RESOLVED:

That the appointment of the Cabinet Member for Environment be approved to sit on the Panel which will make recommendations in relation to all stage two business models.

107. INTERMEDIATE CARE FUND (ICF)

The Cabinet Member for Social Services provided an overview of the projects delivered by the Intermediate Care Fund (ICF) and the opportunities to scrutinise the outcomes that had been delivered.

Full details of the projects which had been delivered following the funding received were detailed in the report, which included: provision of step up/step down beds in residential care homes; purchase of a dementia assessment bed; increasing staff resource; extending specialist dementia care in the community; end of life care; equipment; aids and adaptations; enhanced pharmacy support within the community; falls prevention; dementia community support service; intermediate care support service; healthy homes for discharge project; hoarding tendencies support project; neurotherapy centre; support at night; conversion of a property for short term intermediate care accommodation and development of extra care.

Also detailed in the report were case studies which provided real life examples of how ICF funding had made a difference to people's lives.

The ICF was designed to be one year funding for 2014/15 and Welsh Government (WG) had confirmed that the Fund would cease on 31 March 2015. There was a degree of flexibility in funding projects until the end of April to ensure

that projects were appropriately closed and support finalised for people who had already started a short term service. Regional work was underway to identify critical ICF projects where it was considered that the end of the project would have a significant adverse impact on the delivery of effective intermediate care. In Flintshire, these had been identified as:

- Step up/Step down provision and the associated investment in in-reach support staff to enable people to return back to the community
- The falls prevention project
- The palliative support project and associated nursing support
- A regional project for minor adaptation and equipment

Those projects had been communicated to BCUHB so there was an opportunity for dialogue aligned to the development of their three year plan. In addition, potential funding opportunities could continue to be explored from WG.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted including the progress made with the effective use of the Intermediate Care Fund; and
- (b) That given the importance of early success of the priority services which have been recognised by BCUHB, other partners and Flintshire County Council, the case should be made to Welsh Government for continuing financial support when new funding possibilities arise.

108. FLINTSHIRE COAST PARK PROPOSALS

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment presented a prospectus for a Flintshire Coast Park which detailed the strategic direction of recreation and access along the Dee Estuary following completion of the Wales Coast Path.

The prospectus featured six hubs whereby people could access and enjoy the coast. The Wales Coast Path and cycle path provided a common thread between hubs, providing walkers and visitors with a flavour of the Flintshire coast. The distinctive character of each hub would give a rich and memorable experience but would be set in a common theme of branding to give continuity along the county's coast.

The Chief Officer (Planning and Environment) explained that engagement work would be required as projects were promoted within communities. The vision would enable positive environmental benefits through managed access to the Dee Estuary and coast.

RESOLVED:

That the concept of the Flintshire Coast Park be endorsed and it be recommended that Council seeks to take forward potential key projects within the area to support its priorities and objectives.

109. TRANSPORT PRIORITIES AND THE REGIONAL TRANSPORT PLAN

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment provided an update on the progress made to refresh the Regional Transport Plan (RTP) and sought approval for the document to be approved by the Taith Board.

In line with Welsh Government (WG) Guidelines, the Plan demonstrated how transport would deliver the Programme for Government, with a focus on maximising the benefits from WG investment. Once approved, the RTP would become a statutory document that would sit alongside the Local Development Plan (LDP) and other strategic document policies and plans for each of the local authorities.

The document had been subjected to a period of consultation with the final version taking account, where possible, of the comments received during the consultation period.

The finalised RTP would be presented to the Taith Board for approval before submission to WG at the end of January 2015.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress made to refresh the Regional Transport Plan (RTP) be noted and the document be submitted to the Taith Board for approval; and
- (b) That the local transport priorities within the RTP be approved, noting the comments received during the consultation period.

110. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2014/15 (MONTH 7)

The Corporate Finance Manager provided Members with the latest revenue budget monitoring information for 2014/15 for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account based on actual income and expenditure as at Month 7 and projected forward to year-end based on the most up to date information available.

The projected year-end position, as estimated at Month 7 was:

Council Fund

- Net in year expenditure forecast to be £0.821M lower than budget. This included variances on pay
- Projected contingency reserve balance at 31 March 2015 of £3.762

Housing Revenue Account

- Net in year expenditure forecast to be £0.083M less than budget
- Projected closing balance as at 31 March 2015 of £1.249M

The report provided details on corporate and functional efficiencies, workforce efficiencies, inflation and monitoring budget assumptions and risks.

On unearmarked reserves and the current projected outturn at Month 7, the projected balance on the contingency reserve at 31 March 2015 was £3.762M, full details of which were contained in Appendix 4 to the report.

The position at Month 7 on the HRA was an overall projected underspend of £0.083M and a projected closing balance at Month 7 of £1.249M, which at 4.15% of total expenditure satisfied the prudent approach of ensuring a minimum level of 3%. Appendix 5 to the report provided details of the reasons for significant variances.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment asked for consistency with the headings used for the Revenue Budget reports which were submitted to both Cabinet and Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee which was agreed.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That the projected Council Fund contingency sum as at 31 March 2015 be noted (note the projected final level of balances on the Housing Revenue Account).

111. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

The Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) introduced the report which explained the requirement to adopt the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) for 2015/16 by 31 January 2015.

Within the Regulations made under Schedule 1B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, there was limited discretion given to the Council to apply additional elements that were more generous than the national scheme, details of which were outlined in the report. The Council's recommended approach to the available discretions were to continue to apply them as follows:

1. Not to increase the "extended payment period" to more than four weeks when an applicant starts work. This rule acted as a good incentive measure under CTRS and it made sense to maintain it in line with the Housing Benefits (HB) Extended Payment Rules, which were also set at four weeks. The projected cost of this measure for 2014/15 was £20,098 and the approximate cost for 2015/16 would be £20,700.
2. To continue to disregard all War Disablement and War Widows Pensions as income. The projected cost of this measure for 2014/15 was £42,870 and the approximate cost for 2015/16 would be £44,156.
3. To maintain the standard three month backdating provisions for working age customers when a good reason for failing to claim earlier was shown. This reflected the current position with regard to CTRS and HB. The projected cost of this measure for 2014/15 was £62,502 and the approximate cost for 2015/16 would be £64,377.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the laying of The Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Prescribed Requirements and Default Scheme) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 be noted; and
- (b) That the Scheme as set out in 3.02 of the report be adopted and the recommendations agreed to maintain the current discretionary elements.

112. TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR REPORT 2014/15

The Corporate Finance Manager presented the draft Treasury Management Mid-Year Report for 2014/15 for recommendation to Council.

Treasury Management updates had been provided to the Audit Committee at each quarterly meeting during 2014/15 and a Mid Year update was also submitted to the Audit Committee on 10 December 2014.

RESOLVED:

That the Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2014/15 be approved and recommended to Council.

113. ENERGY SWITCHING SCHEME

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment advised on the opportunities relating to energy switching and energy advice. Information was provided on the resulting Welsh Government's sponsored collective switching scheme called Cyd Cymru and a nomination was sought for somebody to sign the related charter to support the scheme in Flintshire.

The Chief Officer (Planning and Environment) explained that Cyd Cymru had concluded two fuel switches and the processes and procedures worked well and without incident. The current scheme was open for registrations and would close on 1 March 2015. Those who had registered would have until 16 March 2015 to confirm whether or not they wanted to switch.

Residents on prepayment meters could participate in the switch with tariffs offered based on what the resident entered as their preferred billing method.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance suggested that the Cabinet Member for Environment be nominated to sign the charter and provide a statement of support which was agreed.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the initiative be supported and the Cabinet Member for Environment be nominated to sign the charter and provide a statement of support; and

- (b) That the engagement packs be utilised by Members (when available) to promote the Cyd Cymru fuel switching scheme and promote energy efficiency when doing so.

114. CHILDREN'S SERVICES FORUM

The Cabinet Member for Education sought approval to amend the membership of the Children's Services Forum.

The membership of the Forum had been extended to include a secondary school headteacher and had benefitted from the knowledge, experience and input from that representative. It was the view of the Forum that extending the membership to include headteacher representation from the primary sector would further inform the Forum, and afford direct links to the primary sector.

The addition of a representative from an independent professional advocacy service had also been considered by the Forum and it had been agreed that the extension of the membership to include this would positively support the Forum in its remit.

Both of the representatives would have full voting rights and would be formally co-opted by the Children's Services Forum. Terms of office would be four years with representatives being able to serve for an unlimited number of terms of office, subject to reselection.

RESOLVED:

That the changes to the membership of the Children's Services Forum be authorised to include a Primary Headteacher representative and an independent advocate.

115. EXERCISE OF DELEGATED POWERS

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

Streetscene and Transportation

- **Brushwood Avenue, Flint – Traffic Calming**
To advise Members of two unresolved objections following the advertisement of the proposal to replace the existing traffic calming on Brushwood Avenue with a new scheme, and to recommend that Members overrule the objections.
- **Bagillt High Street – Traffic Calming**
To advise Members of two unresolved objections received following the advertisement of the proposal to introduce physical calming on Bagillt High Street, and to recommend that Members overrule the objection.

RESOLVED:

That the actions taken under delegated powers be noted.

116. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were two members of the press in attendance and one member of the public.

(The meeting commenced at 9.30am and ended at 11.20am)

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Chairman