

CABINET
19 MAY 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Tuesday, 19 May 2015

PRESENT: Councillor Bernie Attridge (Deputy Leader in the Chair)

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

APOLOGIES:

Councillors: Billy Mullin and Aaron Shotton

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise), Chief Officer (Governance), Chief Officer (Organisational Change), Chief Officer (Organisational Change), Chief Officer (Social Services) Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation), Corporate Finance Manager and Team Manager – Committee Services

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors: Clive Carver and Glenys Diskin

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment advised that, following recent consideration of two items at Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings, he had accepted them for consideration at the meeting today as urgent items. They were (1) Melrose Consultation and (2) Response from Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee to a Call In.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Helen Brown declared a personal and prejudicial interest in agenda item number 4, Medium Term Plan for Libraries – Proposal to Develop a New Hub Library at Deeside Leisure Centre and Re-locate Hawarden, Mancot and Queensferry Libraries.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2015 had been circulated with the agenda.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

3. MEDIUM TERM PLAN FOR LIBRARIES – PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP A NEW HUB LIBRARY AT DEESIDE LEISURE CENTRE AND RE-LOCATE HAWARDEN, MANCOT AND QUEENSFERRY LIBRARIES

The Cabinet Member for Education explained that a report had been considered at Cabinet in March 2015 which outlined a medium term plan for libraries. Following that report, a consultation exercise had been carried out and views of the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been sought. A copy of the draft minute of that meeting was appended to the report.

A summary of the discussion and recommendations from the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee was also appended to the report and focussed on the following four main areas:

- The location of Deeside Leisure Centre and whether this should be the preferred location;
- The robustness of the consultation exercise;
- The clarity of the options over community asset transfer; and
- Detailed work such as design of the library and the resources that would be available.

It had been claimed that the Council had not fully consulted; the Cabinet Member explained that the Council followed best practice on consultation and always avoided pre-determination. A full consultation exercise had taken place with users, community representatives, young people and the equality assurance group which provided the results detailed in the report. Additional correspondence had been received, such as petitions.

Ultimately it was the consultation, the future vision for the library services, and the budgetary constraints that were informing the development of a final set of options that were for consideration.

On Community Asset Transfer (CAT), the Council would consider for a locally run bookstock and IT provision either in the existing library buildings or other locations identified by the community as having the potential for CAT. The community of Mancot had expressed a strong preference for this.

After the original proposal had been re-assessed, consultation had been completed, the discussion at Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the final options appraisal, it was proposed to proceed with the development of a library at Deeside Leisure Centre and to re-locate services from Hawarden, Mancot and Queensferry. Specific work would then be undertaken with the three communities to:

1. Address the concerns raised about the Deeside location
2. Plan community library services for each of these areas
3. Identify if a CAT was feasible and could be supported
4. Work with communities to finalise the design and resources available for the new library at Deeside Leisure Centre

The Chief Executive added that a balance needed to be achieved between an affordable model and the national Public Library Standard which was for access to a library within 2.5 miles. If the second phase of library reviews was then approved, the Council would have a sustainable model. Welsh Government (WG) would need to be aware that the Council could not then revisit the model and carry out a third review to still balance affordability and meeting the Standards.

The Member Engagement Manager said Councillor Clive Carver had suggested an amendment to the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee minutes on his comments to read “Councillor Carver stated that although against the overall re-location of Hawarden library he would not be opposed to the provision of a mobile library service but that it would be difficult to find a suitable site from where the service could be provided from” which was accepted.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development said this was a hard decision for the Cabinet, however, widespread consultation had taken place to provide them with the information required to make the decision. He felt this was the best outcome for the three communities.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the results of the consultation, the views of the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the final options appraisal be received;
- (b) That the development of a library at Deeside Leisure Centre, re-locating services from Hawarden, Mancot and Queensferry, be approved; and
- (c) That it be agreed for the Council to work with the three communities specifically to:
 - Address concerns raised about the Deeside location
 - Plan community library services for each of these areas
 - Identify if a CAT is feasible and can be supported
 - Finalise the design and resources available at the new library at Deeside Leisure Centre

Note Councillor Helen Brown left the room for this item

4. THE COUNCIL’S BUS SUBSIDY, REVIEW OF THE DEMAND RESPONSIVE TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS AND THE INTRODUCTION OF AN INTEGRATED TRANSPORTATION UNIT

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Environment provided details of the review of the County’s subsidised bus service to enable discussions with local communities to deliver local community based transport arrangements.

Approval was sought for the removal of the Council’s subsidy for the bookable Demand Responsive Travel (DRT) service, known locally as the Deeside Shuttle, and to develop options for the introduction of a non-subsidised commercial bus service to replace it. Approval was also sought for the introduction of an Integrated Transport Unit within the Streetscene and Transportation portfolio.

The Council subsidised thirty bus routes through either standalone contracts or agreements with public transport operators to provide subsidies for services that would not be commercially viable. A summary of all of the subsidised services and other types of bus services was appended to the report.

A number of bus services in Flintshire were profitable and were operated on a commercial basis by private bus companies. Those services provided strategic links between key towns and settlements and were well used and unlikely to change in the future.

The Council intended to engage with commercial operators to further encourage growth on those core routes which in turn would benefit service users and provide increased travel choices. Those routes would predominantly operate on a commercial basis, however some support may be provided to ensure a regular and high quality service linked the key end destinations with various collections points along the route.

Once the core routes had been identified the Council would engage with the community to develop links with community transport arrangements and the local hub, which would include bus and railway stations, large shopping centres or simply well maintained shelters.

The current level of subsidy for the Deeside Shuttle Service was high and not sustainable in the long term. Passenger journeys had increased significantly over the last three years to 78,000+ which meant the service could be formalised into a scheduled service operating commercially. The first stage of the subsidised service review would see the withdrawal of the Shuttle Booking Service, formalising the times of the buses and changing the Deeside Shuttle to a fixed scheduled bus service. Engagement would take place with commercial bus operators with a view to introducing and developing new commercial bus services into the Deeside Industrial Park before the cessation of the current demand responsive service.

Following a diagnostic review carried out by Northgate Public Services consultants, the Council had identified the benefits from the creation of an Integrated Transport Unit (ITU) that brought together all fleet and transport provision into one centre of excellence.

The ITU would be established as a “one-stop shop” and deliver all of the Council’s transport needs including reviewing policy and service delivery standards at regular intervals. In order to deliver the savings, it was proposed that a suitably experienced business partner be engaged on a risk and reward basis to assist staff from the new service.

Subject to Cabinet approval, it was proposed that the responsive element of the Deeside Shuttle Service would cease on 31 August 2015. An all Member Workshop would assist in identifying the core routes across the County and the required frequency and standard of service each route should provide. This would allow the Bus Subsidy policy to be reviewed and presented to Overview and Scrutiny for comment before Cabinet approval in July 2015.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the proposed review of the Subsidised Bus Service be approved and the proposed development of community transport services be supported;
- (b) That proposals for the Deeside Shuttle Service be approved;
- (c) That the realignment of all operational service delivery areas be supported in order to establish the Integrated Transport Unit (ITU) within the Streetscene and Transportation portfolio; and
- (d) That the engagement of a suitably qualified business partner on a gain share basis be approved to assist with the assessment and delivery of the financial benefit that will be derived from the new ITU.

5. CHILDREN'S EQUIPPED PLAY AREAS MATCH FUNDING SCHEME

The Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection and Leisure provided details of the approach to the Children's Equipped Play Areas Match Funding Scheme for this year and from 2016/17 onwards.

Since 2010 the Council, in partnership with local Town and Community Councils, had successfully delivered a match funding programme to upgrade children's playgrounds.

Initially in 2015/16, Fixed Play Match Funding of £105k would be made available on the same basis as previous years, details of which were outlined in the report. Proposals would be required from Town and Community Councils by Friday 10 July with any unallocated funds then being available to support organisations who were taking on Community Asset Transfers (CATs).

Where a CAT of a play area was agreed the Council proposed to make a 'one off' payment of up to £5,000 per play area transferred with a maximum of £10,000 per community per year. From 2016/17 onwards any unallocated funds from 'Play Area Community Grant Scheme' would then be made available on a match funding basis for the enhancement of children's fixed play areas as outlined in the report.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Play Area Match Funding scheme in 2015/16, as outlined in the report, be agreed, with any balance to be allocated to play areas subject to Community Asset Transfer; and
- (b) That from 2016/17 the Play Area Community Grant Scheme be established with its primary focus on supporting play areas that are transferred to, or managed by, communities.

6. WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON COUNCIL TAX PREMIUMS FOR SECOND HOMES AND LONG TERM EMPTY PROPERTY

The Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) provided information on Welsh Government (WG) consultations which sought views on the policy of giving Local Authorities discretionary powers regarding a council tax premium that they could apply to second homes and long term empty homes.

The consultation paper sought views on the circumstances in which some long term empty or second homes might be exempt from the premium for time limited periods or indefinitely in some cases. For long term empty homes, the ability to charge a premium rate of council tax could therefore apply in circumstances where a property was unoccupied after time limits, as indicated in the report.

On second homes, local authorities already had discretion to vary council tax discounts or not to apply a discount. The current policy of this Council was not to award a discount on second homes. Local authorities would however also have new local powers to charge a council tax premium on second homes though WG also proposed a number of exemptions, some of which were time limited, for owners of second homes so they were not immediately affected by the council tax premium.

The deadline for comments on the consultation document was 13 June and the report was scheduled to be reported to Community and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 May. It was agreed that as there was insufficient time to report back any comments from Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the next meeting of Cabinet on 16 June, as this was after the deadline, delegated authority would be given to the Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise), in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Management, to amend the consultation response in light of any comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

In response to questions from the Cabinet Member for Education, the Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) explained that checks were carried out on occupancy of mobile homes. On empty homes, work had been robust on reducing the number of them significantly and time limits for properties being refurbished were in place. On homes to let, checks were carried out to ensure that properties were being marketed at a realistic rate and the Council had the flexibility to impose additional charges if appropriate.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the proposals to exempt certain properties from the Council Tax premium for periods as laid out in the consultation be supported; and
- (b) That delegated authority be given to the Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Management, to amend the consultation response in light of comments from the Community and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

7. MELROSE CONSULTATION

The Cabinet Member for Social Services provided an overview of the outcome of the consultation in order for Cabinet to make a final decision on the future provision of day care services previously provided at the Melrose Centre.

The agreed budget for the Council for 2015/16 included the need to rationalise day care for older people reducing to a smaller number of sites and to target specialist provision.

Day services for older people were currently provided five days a week in four main centres: The Melrose Centre, Marleyfield House Day Centre, Croes Atti Day Centre and The Old Brewery. Over the past 12 months occupancy levels for in house day care had dropped and given that the Melrose Centre supported mostly generic day care and that the building was in need of significant capital funding, it was timely to review service provision including the location.

Formal consultation began with two consultation events on 3 and 4 February, both of which were well attended. In addition to the group consultations, face to face consultations also took place and a number of letters and emails had been received from service users and families. The four options considered were outlined in the report.

The strong conclusion from the consultation was that Option 2 was the only feasible option to take forward. Although Option 1 was clearly popular, it was not possible to take that forward due to capital and revenue funding constraints.

The Chief Officer (Social Services) expressed his thanks to the staff and residents at The Melrose Centre over the last 25 years adding that the new model provision would provide a new direction for an excellent service. The proposals had been considered in depth at the recent Social and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee where Option 2 was fully supported.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the recommended Option 2, the transfer of the service to a new organisation, for the future provision of day care services previously provided by The Melrose Centre, be approved; and
- (b) That it be approved that where it is the people's choice, that Option 3, the transfer of day care to another Local Authority day centre, be made available to day care service users.

8. FLINTSHIRE PARKING STRATEGIES

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment reported the result of the call in of decision 3157 on Flintshire Parking Strategies.

The call in was heard by the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14 May with the Committee being satisfied with the explanation it had received, which included the Cabinet Member stating that if the Flintshire Parking Strategy was found to be in need of revision before the anticipated 12 months review, he would not hesitate to do so.

RESOLVED:

That the decision of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee be welcomed and that the Flintshire Parking Strategy be implemented.

9. EXERCISE OF DELEGATED POWERS

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

Organisational Change

- **Welsh Government Free Swimming Initiative (FS)**

To approve the proposed reductions to the free swimming programme in Flintshire as a result of a reduction in Welsh Government Free Swimming Initiative funding

10. 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 item by virtue of exempt information under paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

11. FLINTSHIRE'S STRATEGIC HOUSING AND REGENERATION PROGRAMME (SHARP)

The Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the report which sought approval to appoint a development partner for the Council's Strategic Housing and Regeneration Programme (SHARP).

All Cabinet Members welcomed the report and congratulated all staff involved in the process. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment suggested that a letter of thanks be sent by himself and the Chief Executive which was agreed.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That authorisation for the Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Housing be approved to enter into the contract for the SHARP with the preferred bidder, subject to the Chief Officer receiving from the preferred bidder satisfactory confirmation of tender commitments; and

- (b) That in the event the Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) (in her opinion) has not received satisfactory confirmation of tender commitments from the preferred bidder, the Chief Officer in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Housing be approved to enter into the contract for the SHARP with the reserve bidder, subject to the Chief Officer receiving from the reserve bidder satisfactory confirmation of tender commitments.

12. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting commenced at 9.30am and ended at 10.50am)

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Chairman