

ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
8 JUNE 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Organisational Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Monday, 8 June 2015

PRESENT: Councillor David Roney (Chairman)

Councillors: Clive Carver, Glenys Diskin, Ian Dunbar, Andy Dunbobbin, Brian Dunn, Ron Hampson, Dave Mackie, Mike Reece, Paul Shotton, Nigel Steele-Mortimer, and Carolyn Thomas

ALSO PRESENT: (Initiators of the Call-In who were not Members of the Committee): Councillors: Adele Davies-Cooke, and Alison Halford.
Councillor Nancy Matthews

CONTRIBUTORS:

Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment, Chief Officer (Organisational Change (1)), Chief Officer (Organisational Change (2)), and Principal Libraries and Arts Officer.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Member Engagement Manager and Committee Officer

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

The Member Engagement Manager advised the Committee that Councillor David Roney had been appointed to this role.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the appointment of Chair.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

The Chair sought nominations for the appointment of Vice-Chair for the municipal year. Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer nominated Councillor Brian Dunn and the proposal was duly seconded.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Brian Dunn be appointed Vice-Chair for the Municipal year 2015/16.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. CONSIDERATION OF A MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE PURSUANT TO THE CALL IN ARRANGEMENTS

The Member Engagement Manager explained the procedure for the Call-in of a Cabinet decision.

5. 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 Member Engagement Manager referred to the Call-in to the decision of the Cabinet from its meeting held on 19 May 2015 relating to 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 Call-In notice had been signed by five Members of the Council. To assist Members, the following documents had been circulated with the agenda:-

- (a) A copy of the procedure for dealing with a called-in item.
- (b) A copy of the report considered by Cabinet on 19 May 2015
- (c) A copy of the Cabinet Record of Decision No. 3173
- (d) A copy of the Call-in notice signed by Councillors Clive Carver, Alison Halford, Adele Davies-Cooke, Dave Mackie, and Glenys Diskin.

The Member Engagement Manager explained the procedure for a Call-in meeting and detailed the four options available to the Committee.

The Chair invited the Call-in signatories to address the Committee. Councillor Clive Carver, as the first of the signatories, detailed the reasons for the Call-in. He explained that the decision had been called-in as the signatories felt that the Medium Term Plan for libraries did not take into account the impact of the Hawarden and Mancot library closures on the existing and prospective users. The signatories also felt that it did not show the future plans for the Flintshire Record Office which is co-located with Hawarden Library, and did not take into account the closeness of the existing Connah's Quay Hub with the proposed new Hub within the Deeside Leisure Centre.

Councillor Carver outlined his concerns, citing a number of legal precedents and interpretations and expressed the view that the consultation which had taken place regarding the closure of Hawarden, Mancot and Queensferry libraries could not be described as "fair" or as required by law. He said that the face-to-face consultation exercise had only involved a limited number of users at Hawarden library and there had not been a fact finding exercise as required. The same process had been applied to the Mancot and

existing Queensferry library. He said that consultation must take place when the proposal was still at a formative stage.

Councillor Carver referred to the decision taken by Cabinet at the meeting on 19 May 2015 which stated that the Council should work with the three communities to address the concerns raised about the Deeside location, plan community library services for each of these areas and identify if a community asset transfer was feasible and could be supported. He commented that the decision was not helpful as it appeared to request consultation after agreement had been made to the development of a library at Deeside Leisure Centre and re-location of services from Hawarden, Mancot and Queensferry libraries.

Councillor Carver reported that many residents at Hawarden and Mancot had stated that they would experience difficulty travelling to Deeside Leisure Centre. He also referred to the suggestion that a mobile library service be provided for Hawarden as a replacement for the library and said it could not provide a like for like replacement for the existing services and it would be difficult to find a suitable site from where the service could be provided,

Councillor Glenys Diskin raised concerns regarding the difficulty some residents in her Ward had said they would experience in gaining access to Deeside Leisure Centre. She explained that there was a bus service from Mancot to ASDA in Queensferry, however, library users would have to walk to Deeside Leisure Centre which involved crossing a busy main road with a high volume of traffic. She said many of the residents in her Ward were elderly and mothers with young children and they said they would not use the Deeside Leisure Centre as a library. Councillor Diskin said that Mancot community had been offered a mobile library service, however, this would not provide a service for young people who would be at school during the allocated time.

Councillor Adele Davies-Cooke referred to the Welsh Government (WG) requirement concerning library provision in an area. She commented on the services provided by libraries and cited the promotion of literacy, education, Welsh language, information and digital technology, and well-being of the people of Wales, as some examples. She expressed the view that the needs and opinions of the residents of Queensferry, Hawarden and Mancot communities were being ignored.

Councillor Davies-Cooke commented on the WG initiative that every child should be a member of a local library and said that children in school had been issued with a library card so they could gain further access to books from their local library service. She made a comparison between the location of the existing library in Hawarden and its close proximity to a primary school and the location of Deeside Leisure Centre which was not within walking distance for children or elderly people.

Councillor Alison Halford commented that Hawarden and Mancot areas were required by law to have a library service to keep communities together. She said that if the Authority went ahead with the closure of the existing three libraries in Hawarden, Mancot and Queensferry then it was taking no account of community cohesion or provision as a whole. Councillor Halford concurred with the views expressed by Councillor Diskin that many residents, particularly the elderly, vulnerable, and young children, would experience significant difficulty and expense travelling to Deeside Leisure Centre. She also referred to the information reported by Councillor Davies-Cooke that the WG were encouraging children to be a member of their local library. She stated that libraries were intended to give free and equal access to books for everyone. Councillor Halford commented on the finance, management and administration required for a community to set up its own library service and cited the need for an adequate range of stock, booking request systems, and provision and the ongoing maintenance of IT equipment as examples.

Councillor Halford also raised concerns around the future of Flintshire Record Office which was co-located with Hawarden Library and referred to Flintshire's reputation as a centre of excellence in archiving. She expressed concerns around the proposal to develop a new hub library at Deeside Leisure Centre and referred to reduced computer provision, lack of a reading room or study area, a noisy and busy environment, poor parking provision, and self-service facilities. In summing up Councillor Halford acknowledged the current and future financial restraints on the Authority but asked that the decision to develop a library at Deeside Leisure Centre be reconsidered for the reasons she had stated.

Councillor Dave Mackie expressed the view that insufficient thought had been given to the implications for the proposal and that there was a need to consider all the alternative options for the areas concerned. He referred to the cost of providing a new hub library at Deeside Leisure Centre and the need to be certain that the expense was justified. He asked the Committee to consider the areas maps he had provided relating to the provision of library services in the Deeside area. He explained that Hawarden was the third largest community in the County and said it was unacceptable that there was not a hub library in at least the three largest communities.

Councillor Mackie also commented on the application for grant funding from CyMAL which had to be submitted by 9 February 2015 and asked why this matter had not been reported to the meeting of the Lifelong Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee which had been held on 15 January 2015. In summary Councillor Mackie said that the proposal to develop a new hub library at Deeside Leisure Centre did not add a great deal to the existing provision for library users in Deeside and said that other options should be considered to ensure that funds were spent in the most effective way. He said that there were other buildings in Flintshire, some in the Community Asset Transfer programme, that could be considered under the proposal. He continued that a significant number of library users who had been consulted on the proposal were not in favour of the Deeside Leisure Centre location and emphasised the need for other options to be considered.

The Chair invited the decision makers to respond.

Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader of the Council, commented that the change was primarily driven by the Authority's current and future financial situation. He referred to the current £50m of savings to be achieved in the next three years and the overall £0.600m savings that were anticipated would be needed in library services. The Leader said that the proposed re-location of the three libraries into a new facility at Deeside Leisure Centre would make a significant saving in terms of building costs and future repairs and maintenance of existing buildings.

The Leader of the Council acknowledged the concerns raised. He commented on the difficult decisions to be made now and in the future and referred to the decisions of the previous Administration which had closed Bagillt, Garden City, and Halkyn libraries during financial pressures without a clear plan as to how residents in those areas would continue to have access to library services. He stated that the proposal to consolidate and re-locate the library services at Hawarden, Mancot and Queensferry was intended to best protect a public library network for Flintshire residents. He advised that Deeside Leisure Centre was also subjected to financial cuts as part of leisure services, however, the Authority still endeavoured to maintain leisure service provision whilst other authorities had chosen to close leisure centres. The Leader also commented on the terms of the CyMAL grant funding which required the need to demonstrate co-location of services.

The Leader of the Council said the Authority would do all it could to support and assist communities coming together to provide services in a sustainable way for the future and cited the possibility of capital one-off funding to provide alternative provision, and community asset transfer as examples of such support. He also commented on the opportunity for all local Community and Town Councils and community groups to express interest in working co-operatively with the Authority to provide a joint solution for community service provision going forward.

In response to the concerns raised by Councillor Clive Carver regarding the consultation exercise, the Chief Officer (Organisational Change) gave an overview of the consultation process. He explained that a full consultation exercise had been undertaken with users, community representatives, young people and the equality assurance group. The outcome of the exercise had been taken to scrutiny for consideration and debate including any petitions and correspondence that had been received. The final proposals had then been submitted to Cabinet and County Council.

The Chief Officer referred to the final option analysis which had identified the preferred option as Option 4, a new library at Deeside Leisure Centre with additional community based services and consideration of the feasibility of a community asset transfer(s).

Councillor Paul Shotton emphasised the need to address the 30% reduction in budget funding for library services which may increase in future years due to further reductions in Government funding. He also commented on the opportunity to make good use of grant funding from CyMAL for Flintshire residents.

Councillor Ian Dunbar spoke in support of the proposal and said he anticipated that the library service would be greatly appreciated and used by visitors using the leisure facilities at Deeside Leisure Centre. He reiterated the views expressed by Councillor Paul Shotton concerning the need to address a 30% reduction in service provision. He also commented on the need to safeguard the leisure service provision in Deeside Leisure Centre.

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin commented on the Gladstone Residential Library in Hawarden which he said was a social enterprise provision.

Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer raised concerns around the future of the Flintshire Record Office which co-shared the building with Hawarden Library. He asked what were the plans for the Record Office if Hawarden Library was relocated to Deeside Leisure Centre. Councillor Steele-Mortimer also referred to the area maps provided by Councillor Mackie and said that the existing library provision in Connah's Quay Connects Centre covered almost the same area as Deeside Leisure Centre. He said the facilities in Connah's Quay library were excellent and he saw no reason to establish new and expensive provision in Deeside Leisure Centre.

In response to the concerns raised by Councillor Steele-Mortimer regarding Hawarden Record Office the Leader of the Council explained that the decision making about Hawarden Library was not related to Hawarden Record Office. The Chief Officer (Organisational Change) also responded to the concerns around the Record Office and commented on the issue of sustainable storage facilities which would need to be addressed in the future.

Councillor Carolyn Thomas referred to the closure of the Schools Library Service and commented that there was a reliance on other library services as a result. She expressed a number of concerns around the proposal and reiterated the issues around travel, the elderly, young and vulnerable people. She also commented on the mobile library service and asked how many communities it served. The Chief Officer explained why the Authority had withdrawn from the Schools Library Service. He responded to the further questions and concerns raised by Councillor Thomas and advised that the vision for a sustainable library service in the future was one that provided access to reading, learning, and information. The key elements to achieving this were the buildings, community based services such as mobile services, and where there was interest from local communities locally provided bookstock and IT supported through the Community Asset transfer programme.

Councillor Diskin reiterated her previous comments that the majority of library users in Mancot had informed her they would not wish to use Deeside Leisure Centre to gain access to library services.

Councillor Nancy Matthews expressed her concerns around the proposal to develop a new hub library at Deeside Leisure Centre as she felt it was not the right location. She said the decision to locate the hub at Deeside Leisure Centre should not be influenced by the footfall at the Centre as it attracted visitors from across the country to use its leisure facilities.

The Chair invited Members to sum up.

Councillor Glenys Diskin said she did not agree with the decision that Deeside Leisure Centre was the right location for a new hub library. She welcomed the opportunity for local Town and Community Councils and community groups to work collaboratively with the Authority to explore community based provision and said that this would be given due consideration in the Mancot area.

Councillor Alison Halford also expressed the view that Deeside Leisure Centre was not a suitable location for all users and asked that a further opportunity be given to all stakeholders to find an alternative location.

Councillor Dave Mackie said he had outlined the reasons why he did not agree that Deeside Leisure Centre was the most appropriate location and said that other options should be sought and examined before proceeding with the development of a hub at the Leisure Centre.

Councillor Clive Carver referred to the WLGA legislation concerning consultation.

The Chair invited the decision makers to sum up.

The Leader of the Council asked the Committee to acknowledge the decision which had been made at the meeting of the Cabinet on 19 May 2015. He said there was still the opportunity for further discussions with communities but emphasised that the Authority had to keep within the budget it had set as a Council.

The Member Engagement Manger outlined the Committee's four options for decision.

Councillor Clive Carver proposed Option 4 which was seconded by Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer. On being put to the vote the proposal was lost.

Councillor Paul Shotton proposed Option 1 which was seconded by Councillor Ian Dunbar. On being put to the vote the proposal was carried; the decision could be implemented. Councillor Brian Dunn abstained from the vote.

RESOLVED:

That having considered the decision, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee was satisfied with the explanation that it had received and therefore the decision could be implemented.

6. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were 11 members of the public and one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 1.30pm and ended at 3.25 pm)

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Chairman