

CABINET
15 SEPTEMBER 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Tuesday, 15 September 2015

PRESENT: Councillor Aaron Shotton (Chair and Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance)

Councillors: Bernie Attridge (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment), Helen Brown (Cabinet Member for Housing), Derek Butler (Cabinet Member for Economic Development), Christine Jones (Cabinet Member for Social Services), Kevin Jones (Cabinet Member for Waste Strategy, Public Protection and Leisure) and Billy Mullin (Cabinet Member for Corporate Management)

APOLOGY:

Councillor Chris Bithell

ALSO PRESENT:

The following Councillors attended as observers:

Councillors: Ron Hampson, Dave Mackie, Mike Peers and Paul Shotton

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise), Chief Officer (Education and Youth), Chief Officer (Governance), Chief Officer (Organisational Change), Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation), Corporate Finance Manager and Committee Officer

Programme Co-ordinator – School Modernisation and Senior Learning Advisor Foundation Phase for minute number 65

Policy and Performance Manager for minute number 67

63. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Helen Brown, Derek Butler, Kevin Jones, Billy Mullin and Aaron Shotton declared personal interests (as they were School Governors) in agenda item number 4 – School Modernisation – School Standards and Organisation Act 2013 – John Summers High School.

Councillor Christine Jones declared a personal and prejudicial interest (as she was a School Governor and members of her family attended the school) in agenda item number 4 - School Modernisation – School Standards and Organisation Act 2013 – John Summers High School.

64. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 23rd June, 14th June and 6th August had been circulated with the agenda.

6th August 2015 – Accuracy

Councillor Helen Brown referred to page 20 and indicated that officers had responded to her question about intake for other schools by indicating that applications could be made to schools in Buckley, Mold and Flint if there were spaces available. She asked that the answer be included in the minutes.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the suggested amendment, the minutes be approved as a correct record.

65. SCHOOL MODERNISATION – SCHOOL STANDARDS AND ORGANISATION ACT 2013 – JOHN SUMMERS HIGH SCHOOL

Councillor Aaron Shotton introduced the report for reconsideration following the call-in by the Education and Youth Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Cabinet's previous decision on John Summers High School.

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) detailed the background to the report and spoke of the challenges due to low pupil numbers and budget reductions. He spoke of the increasing costs for schools for 2015/16 and 2016/17 and said that John Summers High School received funding per pupil of £5,180 which was £1,285 more than the £3,895 per pupil at Castell Alun High School. As funding reduced, the Council would not be able to sustain this level of funding for John Summers High School without lowering the funding for other schools. Using the existing funding formula the school could face a 16% reduction in funding over the next four years which would equate to the need to reduce teaching posts by at least 6.5 or 20% which was unsustainable. By 2019/20 this would result in a reduction of 8.7 full time equivalent posts, or 26% of staff, if a further loss of 10% of pupil numbers based on current allocation was applied, which again was unsustainable. The Chief Officer said that this would lead to higher pupil teacher ratios and teachers providing lessons in multiple subjects.

On 6 August 2015, Cabinet agreed to proceed to the next stage to close John Summers High School and refer the decision to the Welsh Government (WG) Minister. The call-in had been initiated over concerns about transition plans for pupils, transport to and from alternative schools and its cost, and the need for assurance about the future use of the site. The issues relating to transition and transport arrangements would be resolved through a detailed planning process. However, he added that many of the pupils from John Summers High School would be eligible for free transport under the Council's policy and a report on this would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee, possibly in November 2015. The Chief Officer explained that work was being undertaken on the transition plans to develop a future model for the high schools at John Summers, Saltney, Hawarden and Connaught Quay. Discussions had also been undertaken with GwE, the Regional School Improvement Service, and they were in agreement with the proposal to build on collaborative working and the provision of enhanced option choices. Transition plans had also been positively viewed by Estyn in their response to the consultation.

The Chief Officer drew Members' attention to paragraphs 1.17 to 1.22 which set out the key principles in relation to the Council's responsibility to support individual vulnerable learners through a period of change and transition. The principle of support needed to be extended to all learners at John Summers High School through the period of change and a commitment had been given to undertake this.

The Chief Executive commented that two of the three issues that had been raised at the call-in had been addressed (transition plans and transport) by the Chief Officer (Education and Youth). On the third issue of the site, he gave assurance that the Council had no alternative plans for the future use of the John Summers site. The Capital programme for Queensferry Primary School was to continue and this would be developed further as part of the Council's 21st Century schools programme and the existing services on the site (the Youth Centre, Pupil Referral Unit and Community First office base) would be retained. Any future plans for the site would be brought back to Cabinet and public consultation would be guaranteed. The Chief Executive explained that at the call-in meeting, Councillor Shotton had commented that should the Minister take the decision to close the school, he would be in favour of the land being protected as 'open space' for community use in perpetuity, due to the density of development in the locality and open and playing space being at a premium.

On the transport issue, Councillor Bernie Attridge said that a detailed report would be submitted to a future meeting of Cabinet for consideration and he provided a personal assurance that this would take place before the end of the year.

Councillor Derek Butler felt that the three issues that had been raised at the call-in meeting had been addressed. Councillor Helen Brown spoke on the future of the site and said that she had voted against closure of the school. It had been suggested that the site could be retained as a 'field in trust' to prevent it being built on but Councillor Brown urged caution on this as she felt that this could rule out the site being used if a new school needed to be built when the Northern Gateway site progressed. Councillor Attridge acknowledged the comment. He clarified that there were no current plans for the future use of the site and expressed significant concern at the comments and personal attacks that had been made to him and his family over the issue. Councillor Shotton confirmed that he was in favour of the land being protected as 'open space' for community use in perpetuity and that protecting it as a 'field in trust' was an option.

Councillor Shotton said that the three issues raised at the call-in meeting had been addressed as follows:

- transport costs and the discretionary elements of the Council's school transport policy were being considered;
- transition planning was being undertaken and developed;
- the issue of the future use of the site had been discussed.

He spoke of the comments made by the Local Assembly Member and the ex-Head teacher of John Summers High School and said that he hoped that they recognised that the reducing funding, which was out of the Council's control, had been a

significant element in the Authority's decision. Councillor Shotton referred to the challenges faced by the Council and of the funding gap that could put services under threat. He spoke of the budget for schools which he said would have to increase by 4% for next year to maintain the current service and added that more funding cuts could be announced by the Government in the autumn. He indicated that urgent discussions were required with Welsh Government to request help with the remaining financial gap that the Council faced for 2016-17, and that if this was not forthcoming, further difficult decisions would need to be made.

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) said that if the student figures for John Summers High School remained static, it was expected that a reduction by 2019/20 of 8.7 full time equivalent teaching posts would be lost, which was not sustainable for the school to deliver a curriculum to the pupils. He reiterated his earlier comments that reduced teacher numbers would have a direct impact on the standards at the school and would make the school a less vibrant place to study which would lead to further reductions in pupil numbers.

The Chief Executive explained that policy indicated that for a school for 11-16 year olds to be sustainable, it required 600 pupils to attend. The current figure was 305 and based on the formula used, it was forecast that the Northern Gateway site, which could take a number of years to complete, would only generate 199 secondary school pupils which gave a total of 504 which was below the trigger point of 600. Local residents had suggested that an exception could be made to retain the school with lower pupil numbers but WG did not have the facility to make an exception and would not provide the additional funding required to retain the school with a low rate of pupils. He referred to the Medium Term Financial Strategy and said that it reflected that the Council did not have the financial capability to continue the current funding required for John Summers High School. The Chief Executive spoke of the meetings that had taken place with the Head Teachers and Governors of the school where he had raised concern that the budget for the school was not sustainable. The Council was not in a position to continue the current level of funding without having an impact on the funding provided to other schools. Some schools received additional specific grants but these were also reducing.

Councillor Shotton spoke of the importance of WG recognising the Council's need for help and support in closing the budget gap.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet is reassured by the plans for transition and the openness to consider home to school transport options explored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- (b) That Cabinet reaffirm their commitment to reviewing in detail options for home to school transport;
- (c) That Cabinet direct the officer and head teacher planning group to plan in detail for transition taking into account the feedback of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;

- (d) That a commitment is made to a full public consultation exercise on the future use of the site, should the school be closed, including the options for open space and fields in trust protection; and
- (e) That Cabinet reaffirms the previous decision to refer the proposal of closure of the Sixth Form at John Summers High School from 31st August 2016 and closure of the School from 31st August 2017 to the Welsh Government.

Following a short adjournment, the meeting resumed at 10.30am.

66. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Councillor Aaron Shotton introduced the report which introduced Part 2 of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the three year period 2015-2018 for the Council Fund.

He explained that Part 1 of the MTFS outlined the financial pressures faced by the Council over the three year period to 2018 because of reductions in funding and increases in pressures such as teacher pension costs. Workshops had been held to help Members understand the areas of pressure. The Council was facing a significant challenge on what to do to meet the gap to allow compliance with its statutory duty to provide a balanced budget.

The Chief Executive provided a detailed presentation which highlighted the following key areas:

- Our journey thus far
- What do the next three years look like?
- An efficient and innovative Council
- Council Annual Efficiency Targets 2008/09 to 2015/16
- A low funded Council
- Our three part strategy
- Business Plan Efficiency Targets 2015/16-2017/18
- Corporate Finance Efficiency Proposals 2015/16
- Funding Pressures for Support and Relief
- Balancing ambition and risk
- What next?

He spoke of the risks and explained that two of the three parts of the strategy could be undertaken locally but the third part required an open discussion with WG.

Councillor Shotton thanked the Chief Executive, Chief Officer team, Corporate Finance Team and Cabinet Members for their work on the strategy. Page 22 of the strategy document reported a list of services that were under threat if support from WG was not forthcoming and a considerable amount of work had been undertaken on putting a case forward for consideration by WG. Flintshire was a low funded Council and this had been acknowledged by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and because of the funding formula Flintshire was ranked at 19th out of 22 authorities for the amount of funding received. Despite the low funding, Flintshire was a high performing Council and even though Flintshire had

areas of deprivation, other authorities in Wales had larger deprivation areas and the funding formula did not recognise that the Council did all it could with low funding to provide services to residents and perform well in the services it provided. He suggested that an additional recommendation be included that the MTFs be referred to the County Council meeting on 24th September 2015 to allow a debate with all Members to take place. Councillor Shotton also spoke of the need to seek support from local Assembly Members and Members of Parliament to support Flintshire County Council in defending services from austerity cuts. He spoke of 'co-operative Councils' and 'enabling Councils' and of the proactive work being undertaken on alternative delivery models and with community groups on Community Asset Transfers. He reiterated earlier comments on the need for early discussions with WG to seek financial support to close the current budget gap.

In speaking of the importance of the MTFs, Councillor Attridge said that without help from WG, facilities such as care homes, leisure centres and Theatr Clwyd could be under threat because of lack of funding. He felt that the budget cuts were a 'tipping point' for the Council and that difficult decisions would need to be made without help from WG. Councillor Kevin Jones agreed and highlighted the cost of pressures in Social Care and Education. He commented on predicted cuts in the Revenue Support Grant which could result in the significant reduction or termination of public services provided by the Council. He accepted that WG did not have any new money but did have a choice of how it spent the budgets that it received.

Councillor Billy Mullin said that the severity of the situation had been highlighted to Members at the recent workshops. He agreed that the issue should be considered at the County Council meeting but added that it was important that the public were also made aware of the significant issues faced by the Council. Councillor Derek Butler commented that the Council did perform well despite being low funded and that Flintshire was a vital and vibrant region. He suggested that discussions needed to take place with WG about collaboration and sharing of services with neighbouring authorities in England and also about policy changes to allow more of the business rates collected by the Council to be retained by the Council instead of being paid to WG.

In welcoming the suggestion by Councillor Butler about retention of business rates, Councillor Shotton referred to a recent meeting he had attended where the issue had been raised. A scheme in England allowed 100% of business rates from new businesses to be retained locally and Councillor Shotton felt that this option could be explored with WG. He spoke of information from CIPFA which indicated that the unique situation of the porous border of Flintshire and the high level of traffic movements on the A548 and A55 were not recognised. Councillor Shotton commented on the historical elements to the large number of individual towns in Flintshire and on the replication of services currently provided in each of these towns. Many other authorities in Wales had one main town where the services for the whole of the County were provided but this was not the case in Flintshire and the funding formula did not recognise this.

Councillor Helen Brown reiterated the comments about the importance of engaging with the public to highlight that Flintshire County Council was one of the lowest funded but highest performing authorities and of the discussions that needed

to be undertaken with WG. The Chief Executive confirmed that some ideas were being developed and referred to the last paragraph in the strategy about calling on local communities to stand up for their local services by working with the Council on new local service models. Councillor Christine Jones felt that Social Services, which included Adult Social Care, Mental Health and Children's Services, was struggling with the budget available and suggested that an element of the money given to the National Health Service (NHS) was needed and that this should be discussed with WG Ministers. She also spoke of the financial implications on local authorities of the Social Services Wellbeing Act which she felt should also be raised with Ministers.

In response, Councillor Shotton commented on a review of capacity in the Council's three care homes and said that if austerity cuts forced the Council to shut the facilities, then this could result in 'bed blocking' in hospitals if capacity was not available in the private sector. He felt that there was a need to develop and understand what the review would say and added that it was important to put together a coherent case for public sector spending. The Chief Executive spoke of the high occupancy rate of 95% in the Council's residential care facilities and commented on discussions with the Minister on the review of care home provision in Flintshire.

Councillor Shotton proposed an additional recommendation that the MTFs be referred for debate to the County Council meeting on 24th September 2015; this was duly seconded.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the second and concluding part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) titled *Meeting the Financial Challenge* is adopted for consultation and development as the first step towards setting balanced budgets for 2016-17 and 2017-18;
- (b) That the specific proposals set out for service reform, corporate financing options, and national support and relief, be approved in principle for more detailed consultation and development;
- (c) That early engagement be undertaken with Welsh Government, with the support and involvement of the Welsh Local Government Association as our representative body, on the case for national support and relief as set out in *Meeting the Financial Challenge*;
- (d) That the Medium Term Financial Strategy be referred for debate to the County Council meeting on 24th September 2015.

67. QUARTER 1 IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORT

Councillor Billy Mullin introduced the report to present the monitoring of progress for the first quarter of 2015/16 on the Improvement Plan. He commented on the significant amount of work that had been undertaken on monitoring the plan.

The Chief Executive spoke of the positive report and the progress that had been made with nearly 84% of activities likely to achieve the desired outcome and 69.5% of the performance indicators having met or exceeded target for the quarter. The report identified the areas of concern and the risks faced by the Council and the Chief Executive confirmed that risks would be monitored by the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The Policy and Performance Manager explained that the report highlighted areas of underperformance or higher risk which could be because of complex cases such as the number of days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant for children. She felt that it was important to acknowledge that performance indicators did not tell the whole story but added that other examples provided reassurance of the work that was being undertaken.

The Chief Executive advised that the 'how to guide' for the Improvement Plan was to be shared with Overview & Scrutiny Committees and could also be circulated to Members and the press if required.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the following be agreed:
- The levels of progress and confidence in the achievement of high level activities which seek to deliver the impacts of the Improvement Plan;
 - The performance against improvement plan performance indicators; and
 - The current risk levels for the risks identified in the Improvement Plan
- (b) That Cabinet Members be assured by plans and actions to manage the delivery of the 2015/16 Improvement Priority impacts.

68. STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15 AND WELSH LANGUAGE SCHEME ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2014/15

Councillor Billy Mullin introduced the report to present the Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2014/15 and Welsh Language Scheme Annual Monitoring Report 2014/15 for adoption. He expressed concerns about some aspects of the scheme, particularly the funding element.

The Chief Executive advised that the report identified areas of good practice undertaken by the Council and the areas for improvement. He commented on the draft Welsh Language Standards that had been consulted on by Welsh Government and said that a risk had been identified by the Council about the uniformity required across all Welsh Local Authorities. This and other element of the standards had been challenged as it was not felt that uniformity should be applied; the outcome was awaited. It was felt that there could be implications because the standards included the proposal that all committee papers be bilingual which would become a new budget pressure for the Council and have implications on time because the report deadlines would need to be earlier to allow for translation. The comment had been submitted to WG that this should not be a requirement for the Council for all committee papers but it was intended that documents such as the Medium Term

Financial Strategy would be available bilingually. Councillor Kevin Jones felt that the cost implications if this was required by WG could result in the loss of other services due to funding cuts.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet is assured that adequate progress has been made during the year to meet our statutory duties;
- (b) That Cabinet recommend that Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee monitor progress of the revised SEP and the implementation of the new Welsh Language Standards as part of their forward work programme; and
- (c) That the publication of the reports on the Council's website and the submission of the Welsh Language Scheme annual report to the Welsh Language Commissioner be agreed.

69. THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMUNITY BENEFIT TRAINING ACADEMY

Councillor Aaron Shotton introduced the report to seek approval for the creation of a Community Benefit Training Academy (CBTA) as a vehicle to deliver jobs and training opportunities. The project illustrated that capital funding could provide hope and investment in the County. He welcomed the report and the project.

Councillor Helen Brown said that the project was unique to Flintshire and would allow the apprentices to complete their course with the same employer and receive a qualification at the end of the scheme. Councillor Derek Butler commented on the national commitment for apprenticeships, some of which were poorly paid, and spoke of the importance of ensuring that the project was positively publicised.

The Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) commented on the positive and exciting opportunity that would provide high quality apprenticeships. The project would be flexible and would allow placements to be changed if they were not suitable for the apprentice. She commented on the work to be undertaken to ensure that schools were aware of the options of training in work and close working with Coleg Cambria would also be undertaken. She reassured Members and the press that the scheme was totally self-financed and in addition to the job creation, community initiatives would also be developed; these were detailed in the report.

Councillor Kevin Jones welcomed the proposals and the flexible aspect to the scheme. He queried whether a pre-apprenticeship scheme would form part of the project which could allow apprentices to sample a variety of subjects available to them before they chose the field that they wanted to work in. The Chief Officer indicated that she would discuss this option with Coleg Cambria.

Councillor Billy Mullin welcomed the report and the career opportunities that the project would allow for the apprentices. Councillor Shotton commented on the importance of raising the profile of the positive scheme locally. He also spoke of the good working relationship that the Council had with Coleg Cambria and queried whether it was felt that the scheme could be widened to other local employers in the

future. The Chief Officer said that options to expand the scheme could be considered and discussions could take place with businesses in the area. Councillor Kevin Jones indicated that he would pursue the suggestions with the Consortium of Local Authorities in Wales (CLAW) framework group.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the creation of the Community Benefit and Training Academy (CBTA) to manage the implementation of the community benefit commitments be approved; and
- (b) That a new post to manage and administer the function and services of the academy be approved.

70. VEHICLE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM POLICY

Councillor Bernie Attridge introduced the report to seek approval for the Vehicle Management System (VMS) Policy for use on all fleet vehicles operated by the Authority. The system would allow real-time monitoring of resources and provide historical data of specific times, dates and start/finishing points of each journey. This would ensure that all of the vehicle assets were being utilised to maximum benefit for the Council. There would be a three month 'settling in' period where individuals would be counselled on operational and traffic infringements arising from the VMS reports. The policy would allow compliance with the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007 which came into effect on 6 April 2008.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) explained that the Council recognised that the introduction of vehicle monitoring could raise privacy concerns and that was why the Council was committed to carrying out privacy impact assessment before any new monitoring techniques were implemented. The Council would ensure that the monitoring was proportionate to the business need and staff privacy was not intruded upon. The Council would be open with staff and Union colleagues regarding the monitoring undertaken and the monitoring data would only be used for the specified purposes.

In response to a query from Councillor Aaron Shotton, the Chief Officer confirmed that savings that had been achieved by the Fleet Review totalled £1.3m over the last three years. He also advised that the policy had been considered by the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Vehicle Management System Policy and its adoption by the Authorities operations be approved.

71. SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

Councillor Aaron Shotton indicated that it had been requested that an urgent item in the form of a verbal update be provided on the Syrian Refugee Crisis and he advised that he had made a statement on behalf of Flintshire County Council on the

international humanitarian crisis. It had been recognised that local authorities in Wales had a duty to help where possible and the Council had been preparing to receive refugees and those in crisis. However, full funding from Welsh Government/UK Government would be required.

The Chief Executive advised that a verbal update would also be provided to the County Council meeting on 24th September 2015. A national scheme had not yet been adopted and therefore the Council could not put a plan in place but a project group had been established in readiness for an annual number of families moving into the area. He spoke of the language difficulties and the need for support and explained that the project would not impact on the social housing supply as the required housing would be in the private rented sector.

Councillor Bernie Attridge gave thanks to the Chief Executive, Council employees and the generosity of the people of Flintshire for their donations in response to the crisis. He commented on local businesses that had become donation points for the large amount of goods that had been donated. He said that the people of Flintshire should be proud of themselves for their generosity.

In echoing the comments, Councillor Shotton said that it was appropriate that the generosity of the residents of Flintshire be acknowledged but spoke of the criticism that he had received from a minority of people. Councillor Kevin Jones said that it had been suggested that refugees would be able to stay in Britain for five years but that funding would only be provided for one year. He felt that it was important to discuss with Welsh Government about the provision of funding beyond the first year of the project.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal update be received.

72. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2015/16 (MONTH 3)

The Corporate Finance Manager provided Members with the latest revenue budget monitoring information for 2015/16 for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) based on actual income and expenditure as at month 3. The projected year end position, as estimated at month 3, was:

Council Fund

- Net in year expenditure forecast to be £0.212m lower than budget
- Projected contingency reserve balance at 31 March 2016 of £4.958m

Housing Revenue Account

- Net in year expenditure forecast to be £0.070m higher than budget
- Projected closing balance as at 31 March 2016 of £1.168m

The reasons for the variances were reported in appendix 1 for the Council Fund and appendix 4 for the HRA. A projected underspend within Social Care of £0.573m was mainly due to the additional allocation included in the budget for Independent Living Fund of £0.338m now met by grant from Welsh Government (WG). As a result, it was proposed that

£0.300m of this allocation be held centrally as a one off in year efficiency with the potential for any permanent efficiency to be assessed once confirmation had been received from WG.

The Corporate Finance Manager explained that it was currently projected that £10.876m (84%) of efficiencies would be achieved resulting in a net underachievement of £1.998m. Details of the latest position where there was a variation to the level of efficiency achievable compared to the budget were summarised in Appendix 2. He added that the position would continue to be monitored and reported throughout the monthly monitoring process.

Taking into account the current underspend at Month 3, the balance on the Contingency Reserves at 31 March 2015 was projected to be £4.958m. In June 2015, Cabinet approved expenditure of £0.210m for the costs of the Speed Limit Review and it was recommended that these costs be met from the Contingency Reserve.

The position at Month 3 for the HRA was projecting in year expenditure to be £0.070m higher than budget and a projected closing balance as at 31 March 2016 of £1.168m which at 3.8% of spend satisfied the prudent approach of ensuring a minimum level of 3%.

In response to a comment from Councillor Aaron Shotton, the Chief Executive confirmed that the report had generally been well received when it had been considered by the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee the previous week but a concern on the overspend in Streetscene was to be referred to the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the outcome reported to a future meeting of Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the overall report and the projected Council Fund contingency sum as at 31st March 2016 be noted;
- (b) That the transfer from Social Services of £0.300m of budget for Independent Living Fund (ILF) to be held within Central and Corporate Finance as a one off in year efficiency be approved;
- (c) That the projected final level of balances on the Housing Revenue Account be noted; and
- (d) That an allocation of £0.210m from the Contingency Reserve for the costs of the speed limit review which is an improvement plan priority be approved.

73. BUSINESS RATES – WRITE OFF

Councillor Billy Mullin introduced the report to seek approval for the write-off for business rates debts for two organisations.

The Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) explained that report described the events that had taken place and the processes that had been undertaken to recover the business rate debts for two organisations that were no longer trading. One of the debts was significant and referred to charges for 16 empty properties located in Saltney. There was no direct financial implications for the Council or local

taxpayers as business rates collected by the Council were borne by the National Collection Pool for Wales. However, as the Collection Pool was supported by Welsh Government (WG) and non-payment of rates and rates avoidance would result in less money for WG, this would have a wider impact on the Welsh taxpayer. She reassured Members that the relevant processes had been undertaken and that write-off was being recommended as a last resort.

In response to a query from Councillor Aaron Shotton, the Corporate Finance Manager confirmed that the decision complied with the Council's Financial Procedure Rules and that he was comfortable that write-off was the only option remaining for the Council.

The Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) confirmed that the Authority performed well in collecting business rates and details of the amount collected during the period that the debts had accrued was reported.

Councillor Kevin Jones expressed his disappointment that the organisation had taken on so many properties, had not paid the rates and had then disappeared. He felt that it was important to raise awareness that business rates were collected by the Council but were paid to Welsh Government. Councillor Derek Butler felt that the units could have been let to other businesses for employment opportunities.

RESOLVED:

That the write off of these business rate debts amounting to £486,063 for Milvus Ltd and £52,800 for Midcomb Ltd be approved.

74. TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15

Councillor Billy Mullin introduced the report to present the Annual Treasury Management Report for 2014/15.

The Corporate Finance Manager explained that the report had been reviewed by Audit on 15th July 2015 and would be submitted to County Council on 24th September 2015 following consideration by Cabinet at this meeting. Audit Committee had not raised any specific issues. The key points included details on low interest rates and it was explained that no new borrowing had been undertaken during the year with the Council continuing to use cash reserves to fund capital expenditure in place of new borrowing. It was reported that the treasury function had operated within the limits detailed in the Treasury Management Strategy 2014/15.

RESOLVED:

That the Annual Treasury Management Report for 2014/15 be approved and recommended to the Council.

75. EXERCISE OF DELEGATED POWERS

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

Organisational Change - Leisure Services

- **Provision of High Ropes and Conversion to Trampoline Park**
To advise on the proposed changes to the activities on offer in the Evolution Extreme Zone at Deeside Leisure Centre.
- **Deeside Dragons and Manchester Phoenix Ice Hockey Teams**
Flintshire Leisure Services have been exploring opportunities to generate additional income by delivering products, services and activities in an alternative way. This report is to advise on the proposal to handover all ownership rights of the Deeside Dragons ice hockey team to Red Hockey Ltd and to permit Manchester Phoenix ice hockey team to play all of their home matches at Deeside Ice Rink for the two sessions commencing in the autumn of 2015.

Organisational Change – Valuation and Estates

- **Land to the Rear of Withen Cottage, Alltami Road, Buckley, Flintshire**
For development purposes the land is only available from the purchaser's land which has detailed consent for residential development. The purchaser is a well-established developer who intends to build quality houses upon the subject site to which approval has been given.

People and Resources – Finance

- **Business Rates Write Offs**
Financial Procedure Rules (section 9.6 – Income and Expenditure) stipulate that any individual debt between the values of £5,000 and £25,000 shall be reported to the Chief Finance Officer (Corporate Finance Manager / Section 151 Officer) for consideration to write off, in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Finance. There are 9 business accounts where the overall debt for each company is greater than £5,000 and the write off of these debts is recommended. The total of these debts from 2011 to 2014 is £82,131.21.

People and Resources – Finance

- **Council Tax Write Offs**
Financial Procedure Rules (section 9.6 – Income and Expenditure) stipulate that any individual debt between the values of £5,000 and £25,000 shall be reported to the Chief Finance Officer (Corporate Finance Manager / Section 151 Officer) for consideration to write off, in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Finance. There are 2 Council Tax accounts where the overall debt is greater than £5,000. The debts relate to unpaid Council Tax which has been secured by way of a charging order. At a point in the future when the property is sold the arrears will be paid from the equity from the sale. The total of these debts from 2007 to 2014 is £24,055.69.

RESOLVED:

That actions taken under delegated powers be noted.

76. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were 33 members of the public and four members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting commenced at 9.30am and ended at 12.18pm)

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Chair