

CABINET
16th FEBRUARY 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of Flintshire County Council held in the Clwyd Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Tuesday, 16th February 2016

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 (Streetscene & Transportation), Chief Officer (Organisational Change), Corporate Finance Manager and Team Manager - Committee Services

OTHER MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors: Glyn Banks, Dave Mackie, Mike Peers and Arnold Woolley

128. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

On agenda item number 10, School Organisation – Ysgol Mornant Gwespyr Picton, the Chief Officer (Governance) explained that any Members who were a School Governor had a personal interest. The interest was not prejudicial for most of those Members as they were not School Governors of the school being discussed except for Councillor Shotton whose interest was personal and prejudicial as he was a School Governor at Ysgol Maes Garmon which would form part of the discussion. Councillors Bithell, Brown, Butler, Christine Jones and Kevin Jones declared personal interests in agenda item numbers 10. Councillor Shotton declared a personal and prejudicial interest in agenda item number 10 accordingly.

On agenda item number 17, Introduction of Council Tax Premium for Empty and Second Homes, Councillor Butler declared a personal interest.

On agenda item number 18 Councillor Butler declared a personal interest. Councillors Bithell and Brown declared personal and prejudicial interest.

129. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th January 2016 had been circulated with the agenda.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

The Chair advised that agenda item number 10, School Organisation – Ysgol Mornant Gwespyr Picton would be brought forward and considered as the first agenda item.

130. YSGOL MORNANT GWESPYR PICTON

Councillor Bithell introduced the report which provided details of the responses from the statutory consultation period for Ysgol Mornant, Gwespyr Picton. The proposal to enter into formal consultation on closure was approved in June 2015 on the basis of criteria laid down in the Council's School Modernisation Strategy which were: Unfilled places across the primary school portfolio; diminishing resources criteria; small school; and it was in Welsh Government's (WG) categorisation 4 (out of 1-4), with 4 being the lowest, for standards.

Responses had focussed on:

- The impact on Welsh Culture (language, community and education provision);
- Transport, with concerns on distance and time to alternative schools;
- Impact on the wider community;
- Concern that the Council was not following the Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP);
- Impact on childcare, parents and carers;
- Impact on pupils
- Concern about the consultation documents and procedure

On concerns raised about not following the WESP, Councillor Bithell said the authority was committed to the Plan and had been commended for the Welsh school in Shotton, Ysgol Ty Fynnon. Similarly, on the concern about the procedure that had been raised, he explained that Estyn had considered the documents and believed the review was appropriately and fairly presented.

The Council worked in partnership with WESP to increase the number of fluent Welsh speakers however take up in individual schools depended on parental preferences. Following Welsh Language surveys in 2009 and 2013, the Council responded to the demand by extending the provision of Ysgol Croes Atti in Flint onto the additional site in Shotton, Ysgol Ty Fynnon, which opened in September 2014 and the number of pupils attending that school were rising. Conversely, the pupil numbers at Ysgol Mornant had been in steady decline with the current number of 44 not providing a sufficient income to sustain high quality provision at the school.

The Governors at Ysgol Croes Atti had considered an official request to federate with Ysgol Mornant however it was decided, unanimously, that they were not in favour of forming a federation at this time. However, representatives of Ysgol Maes Garmon had stated that they would wish to engage further with the Governors at Ysgol Mornant and the Council to explore ways in which Welsh Medium provision could be sustained in the area and what support they could offer to achieve this.

In considering the consultation responses, Councillor Bithell said it was acknowledged that parents would be less likely to choose an alternative Welsh medium school if Ysgol Mornant was to close because the next nearest Welsh schools were between 4 and 9 miles away which would result in some children needing to get on a

bus at 7.30am which was clearly a disincentive. In addition, if the school were to close the biggest impact on community activity would be on the Cylch Meithrin. The Governing Body was currently trying to provide transport to the Cychh Meithrin in an aim to boost numbers at Ysgol Mornant.

A recent Education and Youth Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved “That the Committee recommend to Cabinet that they do not issue the Statutory Notice to Ysgol Mornant but work towards a federation of schools using Welsh Medium education”. In responding to that an in light of recent discussions with the Governors at Ysgol Maes Garmon, Councillor Bithell moved the following recommendations, which were seconded:

- (a) That Cabinet support the commitment from the Governing Bodies of Ysgol Maes Garmon and Ysgol Mornant to develop and consult on a federation proposal;
- (b) That Cabinet authorises support for the schools in planning consultation, decision making and implementation of a federation proposal (with existing officers advising); and
- (c) That Cabinet authorises officers to work with other local schools and community partners on how they can support the sustainability and resilience of Ysgol Mornant.

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) added that the authority wanted the best possible education for all pupils in the County. Clear guidance had been provided to the Governing Bodies of Ysgol Mornant and Ysgol Maes Garmon on what a federation entailed. He stressed the importance of community support for a possible federation for the future of education at Ysgol Mornant with more pupils resulting in additional funding and sustainability of the school. This included supporting early years education and encouraging families to access the school. If the community could find a practical transport solution for those in nursery at the Cychh Meithrin, he felt a federation could be successful.

A written outline proposal for a federation had been submitted and all of the appropriate support would be offered to both Governing Bodies in preparation of them consulting on the federation which was the next stage of the process.

The Chief Executive commented on two other school review reports considered by Cabinet the previous month. A similar approach had been taken to allowing schools the opportunity to explore federations as an option. Each case had to be considered on its own merits. The Chief Executive and Chief Officer (Education and Youth) explained the difference to the two previous review reports being the presence of a firm proposal for a federation and information from parents that they would be unlikely to access alternative Welsh Medium education if Ysgol Mornant closed.

On the timeline, the Chief Officer explained that over the next two months consultation would take place with parents, staff, pupils and the community. Following that consultation a report would be submitted to each Governing Body in April 2016 detailing the responses subsequent to which both Governing Bodies would take a

formal decision to form a federation with a start date of September 2016. A copy of the report submitted to both Governing Bodies in April 2016 would be presented to Cabinet to provide assurance on the process.

Councillor Attridge commended the officers, Cabinet Member, the local Member, Councillor Glyn Banks, and the community for the dignified way in which this had been dealt with, adding thanks to staff, parents and carers.

Councillor Butler concurred and said this was an example of a robust process where an alternative solution had been found which was a good outcome to a difficult situation.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the commitment from the Governing Bodies of Ysgol Maes Garmon and Ysgol Mornant to develop and consult on a federation proposal be supported;
- (b) That support be authorised for the schools in planning consultation, decision making and implementation of a federation proposal (with existing officers advising); and
- (c) That officers be authorised to work with other local schools and community partners on how they can support the sustainability and resilience of Ysgol Morant.

Councillor Shotton left the room during discussion of the item and Councillor Attridge chaired.

131. COUNCIL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2016/17

Councillor Shotton introduced the budget options for the closing Stage Two of the annual budget process, adding them to the budget proposals adopted at Stage One in January, for recommendation of a balanced budget to County Council that afternoon.

He expressed his thanks to all Chief Officers, Cabinet Members and employees for their help in achieving a balanced budget in what had been the most difficult year faced by the authority to date. He was pleased that a balanced budget had been achieved without devastation to public services and commented on the protection of the three local authority care homes, leisure centres and additional funding for schools budgets during the difficult budget process.

The Chief Executive explained that Stage Two was before Members for consideration, with the previous Stage One being appended for information. The remaining Stage Two budget options were detailed in fully the report and reflected how the amount of £3.517M would be met, which were:

- Review of New and Emergent Pressures;
- Workforce;
- Council Tax;

- Use of Reserves and Balances; and
- Other Adjustments.

There were eight significant risks outlined in full in the report, which were:

- Impact of reductions in Specific Grant funds;
- Inflationary impacts;
- Failure to achieve income targets in full;
- Failure to achieve efficiency targets in full;
- Insufficient capacity to implement change programmes and projects to time and to financial target;
- Impact of new and emergent pressures;
- Over use of reserves and balances; and
- Sufficiency of remaining reserves and balances to meet unforeseen pressures.

The Chief Executive said the Council would have to have a greater 'appetite' for risk which was the same for all public bodies in the fiscal climate. He explained that provided the risks were understood, the likelihood of their occurring and the impact they would make if they did so occur was assessed, and there were sufficient plans to mitigate those impacts in that eventuality, then the approach to risk could be supported. An underlying organisational risk was that there was less financial flexibility to adjust to new cost pressures in year as budgets were more precisely based on forecast need with smaller margins for flexibility and error, with the total quantum of funding available to the Council as a corporate body being smaller than in recent years.

He provided details of a service issue which had been raised late in the budget process, which was the provision of a weekly allowance to the clients of the Learning Disability Workforce Schemes. Cabinet, since the publication of the January budget report, had directed that this allowance be continued for 2016/17 and the budget reinstated. This required a budget provision of £0.070M which had the impact of increasing the remaining gap to £3.517M.

An additional area for consideration was the discussions and negotiations that were ongoing between the independent care providers and the Council for commissioned services in residential, nursing, specialist care, domiciliary care, and direct payments, over the rate of annual uplift for to inflationary costs in the sector.

The Final Settlement was due to be announced on 9th March 2016 and this late date presented challenges for all councils in setting a balanced budget within the statutory timescales, whilst ensuring there was sufficient time to deal with the practicalities of Council Tax billing in advance of the new financial year. Advice provided by Welsh Government (WG) was that there was unlikely to be any significant change from the allocation provided at the Provisional Settlement stage. Therefore setting a budget now based on the Provisional Settlement was considered low risk.

The Corporate Finance Manager and Section 151 Officer provided further information on each of the work-stream areas on how the budget gap would be met, primarily focussing on setting the Council Tax at 4.5%, reduction in the annual

contribution to GWE and the adjustment to the levy payable to North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority.

On Council Tax and the use of Reserves and Balances, several factors required careful consideration which were the extent of the remaining gap to be funded, the comparison of planned Council spend with the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) as the national spending guideline, and the impact of using too high a level of reserves now on the 2017/18 budget.

Although higher than in previous years the proposed increase in Council Tax of 4.5% was still 0.5% lower than the maximum allowable level of 5%, and the utilisation of £1.429M of reserves and balances was consistent with examples of recent local practice and was not at a level where sustainability of budget planning was unachievable against the latest Medium Term Financial Planning forecast.

The formal advisory opinions of the Corporate Finance Manager and Section 151 Officer and the Chief Executive were detailed in full in the report.

Councillor Attridge said Cabinet was pleased to be in a position to present a balanced budget to County Council that afternoon, explaining the difficult year the Chief Executive, Chief Officers and Cabinet Members had faced in achieving that. He thanked the Chief Executive and all officers who had been involved in the process and commented on the investments being made in education and social care.

In response to a question from Councillor Kevin Jones, the Corporate Finance Manager explained that the rise of 1.5% in Council Tax roughly equated to the additional funding for schools. The Chief Executive added that if that funding was not found through the rise in Council Tax then there would inevitably be an impact on services.

Councillor Shotton commented on the recent public consultation events that had taken place on budget consultation where overwhelming support was given at each event for a rise in Council Tax for the protection of services.

Councillor Shotton read out two amended recommendations which were supported unanimously.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Council be recommended to approve a balanced budget for 2016/17 based on a combination of the previously adopted Stage One proposals, and the new Stage Two of £3.517M as set out within Table 1 of the Council report; and
- (b) That the Council calls on Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to allocate a proportion of the additional Intermediate Care Fund monies granted by Welsh Government to assist the Council, in its capacity as a commissioner of care, in meeting the increasing provider costs within the local residential and nursing and specialist provider independent care sector to both sustain the provider market and protect the secondary and acute health sector from increased demand.

132. COUNCIL FUND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2016/17 AND INDICATIVE PROGRAMME TO 2019/20

The Corporate Finance Manager introduced the Council Fund Capital Programme and indicative programme for 2017/18 – 2019/20. The report was linked with the draft Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan 2016-2020 where it was proposed to split the Council Fund Capital Programme into 3 sections; Statutory / Regulatory; Retained Assets and Investment sections. The report provided details of the proposed allocations for the period 2016/17 – 2019/20 for those sections of the Programme.

Table 3 in the report showed the proposed schemes for the period 2016/17 – 2019/20 for the Investment section of the Capital Programme which would grow through 2016/17 as business plans were developed. Table 4 summarised the proposals for the 2016/17 – 2019/20 Council Fund Capital Programme financed from general funding.

Details of schemes funded by specific grants and borrowing were outlined in Table 6 in the report with Table 7 showing the summary of total proposals for the 2016/17 – 2019/20 Capital Programme.

Councillors Shotton and Kevin Jones commented on the importance of the headroom that had been built in to enable the programme to be more flexible, either to allocate funding to small schemes as they presented in year as a result of opportunities or to fund urgent unforeseen activity.

RESOLVED:

That the following be recommended to County Council on 16 February 2016:

- Approval of the allocations in Table 2 for Statutory/Regulatory and Retained Assets sections of the Council Fund Capital Programme 2016/17 – 2019/20
- Approval of the schemes included in Table 3 for the Investment section of the Council Fund Capital Programme 2016/17 – 2019/20
- Continued support for the existing process of allocating capital receipts to fund capital schemes generally only when the receipts have been actually received

133. CAPITAL STRATEGY AND ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN 2016-2020

The Chief Officer (Organisational Change) introduced the Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan 2016-2020, which was a new Strategy for Flintshire County Council combining medium term plans for managing the Council's assets and its Capital Programme.

There was a need for a comprehensive and structured strategy which merged together capital resource planning and development, with asset management planning. Even more so in the current period of austerity where prudent use of capital resources in programmes of work could be used for strategic investment projects contributing positively to reduce the revenue budget gap that the Council faced.

The key aims of the strategy were outlined fully in the report including the strategy's principles. Also provided was a summary of what was included in the Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan. Plans for other assets included within the strategy had been drawn from the Improvement Plan, Portfolio Business Plans and other strategies.

Future capital programmes would be set on a four year rolling basis reflecting the fact that schemes spanned more than one year and did not necessarily correspond financial year boundaries. Schemes starting in year one would be approved along with costs and funding in the subsequent years. Schemes starting in years two onwards would be given indicative approval to enable services to plan more efficiently, but would ultimately be approved in the subsequent year's Capital Programme.

Headroom would be built into the Capital Programme to enable it to be more flexible so as to be able to allocate funding to small schemes as they presented in year either as a result of opportunities or unforeseen circumstances.

The timetable for creating and approving the Capital Programme was outlined in the report.

Councillor Kevin Jones asked for information on what was the intention for phases 3 and 4 of County Hall. Colin Everett explained that both phases were being moved to phases 1 and 2 to make best use of accommodation and reduce running costs; a decision had not yet been taken on phases 3 and 4.

RESOLVED:

That the Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan 2016-2020 be approved so that it can be adopted as the principal document for managing the Council's Capital Property and Land resource assets.

134. DRAFT HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2016/17 AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2016/17

Councillor Brown presented the draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget for 2016/17 and HRA Business Plan which included details on the rent increase of 1.4%, a garage rent increase of 1.4% and the proposed HRA Capital Programme for 2016/17.

The HRA had a ring fenced budget which demonstrated that the Council could achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) by 2020, could meet service improvement plans and commitments and with prudential borrowing could commence a council house building programme in 2016.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report, particularly the ability to meet WHQS by 2020 and the building of new council homes in 2016. Councillor Shotton commented on the low increase in rent which he said was the lowest since he had been a Member of the Council.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2016/17 as set out in the Business Plan be approved and recommended to Council;
- (b) That a rent increase of 1.4% (plus up to or minus £2) as set out in the business plan with target rents applied for new tenancies, and with the introduction of service charges for communal area cleaning, digital services and aerial maintenance for existing tenancies be approved;
- (c) That a garage rent increase of 1.4% be approved; and
- (d) That the proposed Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme for 2016/17 be approved.

135. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2016/17 AND MID-YEAR REPORT 2015/16

The Corporate Finance Manager presented the draft Treasury Management Strategy 2016/17 for approval and recommendation to Council, in conjunction with the Draft Treasury Management Policy Statement 2016-2019 and the Draft Treasury Management Practices 2016-2019. In addition the draft Treasury Management Mid-Year review 2015/16 was presented for approval and recommendation to Council.

RESOLVED:

That the following be approved and recommended to Council:

- Draft Treasury Management Strategy 2016/17
- Draft Treasury Management Policy Statement 2016-2019
- Draft Treasury Management Practices and Schedules 2016-2019
- Draft Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2015/16

136. LOCAL SERVICE BOARD AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS – MID YEAR MONITORING

The Chief Executive presented an overview of arrangements for the transition of the Flintshire Local Service Boards (LSB) to a Public Services Board (PSB) in accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. An update on the Flintshire LSB Single Integrated Plan (SIP) priorities were provided which were based on the following themes:

- People enjoy good health, well-being and independence; and
- People are safe.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the arrangements for the transition of the Flintshire LSB to the Flintshire PSB be noted; and

- (b) That the progress made as detailed in the two SIP priority update reports be noted and the commitments made be endorsed.

137. THE SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELL-BEING (WALES) ACT 2014

Councillor Christine Jones provided details of the Act which provided a legal framework for improving the well-being of people who needed care and support, and their carers, and would play a critical role in transforming how services were delivered over the next two years.

The process of implementation would take a phased approach which would be built on a foundation of training and cultural development. Flintshire was working collaboratively to support the development and implementation of regional training plans which were aligned to the national learning and development strategy. Sound progress was being made in transforming and modernising services in preparation for the delivery of the Act, building key mechanisms into practices and processes which centered on the key principles of the Act.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Council's preparation and response to the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 be approved; and
- (b) That a further report be submitted to Cabinet in 6 months to report on the progress to implement actions in response to the Act.

138. REPORT BACK FROM THE ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S CONSIDERATION OF THE HOPE HOUSEHOLD RECYCLING CENTRE CALL-IN

The Chief Officer (Governance) outlined the decision of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the decision relating to the Hope Household Recycling Centre which was that the explanations given by the decision makers were accepted.

The decision of the Cabinet taken in December could now be implemented.

RESOLVED:

That the resolution of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee that it was satisfied with the explanations given (option one) be noted and that the decision regarding Hope Household Recycling Centre be implemented immediately.

139. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2015/16 (MONTH 8)

The Corporate Finance Manager provided the latest revenue budget monitoring position for 2015/16 for the Council Fund and the Housing Revenue Account and reported that no specific issues had been raised when considered at the recent Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. The position was

based on actual income and expenditure as at Month 8 and projected to the year-end. The projected year-end position, as estimated at Month 8 was as follows:

Council Fund

- Net in year expenditure forecast to be £0.743M lower than budget
- Projected contingency reserve balance at 31 March 2016 of £4.379M

Housing Revenue Account

- Net in year expenditure forecast to be £0.149M lower than budget
- Projected closing balance as at 31 March 2016 of £1.386M

The report provided details on the programme of efficiencies, inflation, unearmarked reserves and earmarked reserves.

The report also outlined details on a number of risk areas as follows:

- Municipal Mutual Insurance (MMI)
- Recycling
- Car Parking
- Out of County Placements
- Former Euticals Site

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the overall report and the projected Council Fund contingency sum as at 31 March 2016 be noted; and
- (b) That the projected final level of balances on the Housing Revenue Account be noted.

140. PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2016/17 TO 2018/19

The Corporate Finance Manager provided details of the Council's Prudential Indicators for 2016/17 – 2018/19 on:

- Prudential Indicators for Capital Expenditure
- Prudential Indicators for Affordability
- Prudential Indicators for Prudence
- Prudential Indicators for External Debt and Treasury Management

RESOLVED:

That the following be approved and recommended to County Council:

- The Prudential Indicators for 2016/17 – 2018/19 as detailed in Section 1 of the report
- Delegated authority for the Corporate Finance Manager to effect movements between the separately agreed limits within the authorised limit for external debt and the operational boundary for external debt

141. MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION - 2016/17 POLICY

The Corporate Finance Manager presented the annual statement which the authority was required to prepare on their policy on making Minimum Revenue Provision.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the following be approved and recommended to County Council on 16 February for Council Fund (CF):-
- Option 1 (Regulatory Method) be used for the calculation of the MRP in 2016/17 for all capital expenditure funded from supported borrowing; this represents a continuation of the approved and adopted policy for 2015/16.
 - Option 3 (Asset Life Method) be used for the calculation of the MRP in 2016/17 for all capital expenditure funded from unsupported (prudential) borrowing or credit arrangements; this represents a continuation of the approved and adopted policy for 2015/16.
- (b) That the following be approved and recommended to County Council on 16 February 2016 for Housing Revenue Account (HRA):-
- Option 2 (Capital Financing Requirement Method) be used for the calculation of the HRA's MRP in 2016/17 for all capital expenditure funded by debt; this represents a continuation of the approved and adopted policy for 2015/16

142. FLINTSHIRE APPRENTICESHIP ACADEMY

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development provided a progress update on the creation of an apprentice academy and sought approval to enter into a service level agreement with Future Works, who would employ the apprentices and manage the scheme in partnership with the Council. This was a flagship for Flintshire which he was proud to present to Members.

The Council planned to spend circa £150m on housing construction over the following five years which created the opportunity for 50 completed apprenticeships to level 2, with a number achieving level 3 and beyond. The type of job roles needed included plumbing, joinery, plastering, gas and electrical, bricklayers. Also required were Tenant Liaison Officers, Clerk of Works and Quantity Surveyor.

Work had been underway to set up a scheme to take forward the establishment of "an academy" and a summary of four options was outlined to take the scheme forward with the recommended route being to work with Future Works.

Future works would employ the apprentices and would charge the construction companies for the apprentices placed with them. They would ensure the apprentices were provided in the numbers needed at any one time and would work jointly with Flintshire staff to recruit. They would also work closely with Coleg Cambria and any

other Further Education providers to ensure that students were working successfully through their training qualifications.

Recruitment had taken place for the first cohort of apprentices with the first scheme to be on site by the end of February. An Apprentice Fayre was taking place on 16th March to which Flintshire secondary schools had committed to send young people to. The Council was also exploring opportunities to establish a “skills centre” as part of the significant construction contracts being delivered across the Council.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report, commenting on the link between capital investment, local jobs and apprentices and the opportunity to complete the courses in full. It was also hoped the scheme would be adopted regionally.

Councillor Bithell said he was pleased to represent the Council at a presentation ceremony at the Dorchester Hotel in London on 4 February in recognition of the work undertaken by Flintshire on apprenticeships who were the only public body to be nominated for an award.

RESOLVED:

That it be approved that the Council enters into a service level agreement with Future Works, a community interest company, who will employ and provide apprentices in Flintshire, branded as Future Works Flintshire, for an initial period of five years commencing in March 2016.

143. INTRODUCTION OF COUNCIL TAX PREMIUM FOR EMPTY AND SECOND HOMES

The Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) provided details of the introduction of a premium which was designed to address local housing need and encourage owners of empty and second home properties to bring those properties back into full use.

The introduction of a premium was designed to address local housing need and to encourage owners of empty and second home properties to bring those properties back into full use. The determination to charge a premium must be made by County Council at least one year before the beginning of the financial year to which the premium related. This meant that the earliest a premium could be changed from was 1st April 2017.

There was evidence that demonstrated that some owners sat on empty properties for long periods of time without having plans in place to bring the properties into use. This was often despite best efforts of the Council to work with owners to encourage them to bring their asset back into use, either by accessing loans or grants.

Using the taxation system to encourage owners to bring long term empty property and second homes back into use would provide a sensible financial incentive to do so and potentially help to increase the supply of housing in the County. Current

Council Tax records indicated that 888 properties as being long term empty or second homes which could be potentially liable for the premium from April 2017.

Councillor Bithell welcomed the report and asked if going through probate could be an exemption to the taxation. The Chief Officer said she would obtain that information and respond to Councillor Bithell outside of the meeting.

In response to a question, the Chief Officer explained that for Council Tax purposes the following year, the Council Tax table could show two different amounts for Band D for example, one as was currently shown and one column showing the amount for empty properties.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Council Tax premium scheme be introduced from 2017/18;
- (b) That a 50% premium be adopted for the first year of implementation in 2017/18 which will be consistent with other local authorities across the region; and
- (c) That the premium level be reviewed during the first year of implementation in 2017/18 with a view to increasing the rate from 2018/19 after taking into consideration the effectiveness of the new policy of incentivising owners to bring long term empty properties and second homes back into full use.

144. COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATE STATUTORY POLICIES 2016/17

The Chief Officer (Community and Enterprise) provided details on policies for the administration of Council Tax and Business rates which were:

- Council Tax Discounts on second and long term empty homes
- Council Tax Discretionary Discounts
- Business Rates Discretionary Rate Relief
- Business Rates 'top-up' Discretionary Rate Reliefs to small businesses

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the current policy of not awarding Council Tax discounts on second and long term empty homes be continued in 2016/17;
- (b) That the current policy to consider Discretionary Council Tax discounts only in cases of civil emergencies and natural disasters be continued;
- (c) That the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy for 2016/17 be approved; and
- (d) That the current policy of not awarding 'top-up' Discretionary Discounts to businesses already qualifying for Small Business Rate Relief be continued in 2016/17.

Councillors Bithell and Brown left the room during the discussion of this item.

145. FLINTSHIRE SUPPORTING PEOPLE COMMISSIONING PLAN

Councillor Brown presented the Supporting People Local Commissioning Plan 2016/18 which had been subject to significant reductions over the past three years. She was pleased to announce that the grant had been protected for 2016/17 which would provide the team time to work with providers to identify different ways of working which could deliver savings whilst protecting service delivery.

She commented on the released funding that would be used to ensure Flintshire had suitable and safe arrangements for males fleeing domestic abuse which was welcomed.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Local Commissioning Plan 2016/18 for the Supporting People Programme Grant be approved; and
- (b) That the spend plan for 2016/17 be approved.

146. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S SUBSIDISED BUS SERVICES

Councillor Attridge explained that it was intended that only a core network of bus routes would be maintained in the County, largely made up of commercial bus services, with minimal support provided to ensure that essential regular connections were retained at key hubs along the routes. Other commercially operated routes could also operate in the County, but they would not be within the control of the Council and may not receive any subsidy.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the proposed core network of bus routes be approved; and
- (b) That the withdrawal of the existing subsidised journeys and routes that are poorly used and no longer sustainable or affordable and the mitigating actions that are intended to reduce the impact of the proposals in the community currently services by each route be withdrawn.

147. EXERCISE OF DELEGATED POWERS

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

Organisational Change

- **IT Staffing Structure**

Approval of the following minor amendments to the structure agreed by Cabinet at its June meeting:

1. Movement of 1 post from the Workplace Technologies Team to Business Partnership and Service Desk Team to increase the number of people on the IT help desk. The overall number of posts will remain the same and the change is cost neutral
2. Transfer the despatch office from the Corporate Admin Team to Digital Print Team, in order to pave the way for an electronic post room. This is cost neutral

Organisational Change

- **Clwyd Theatr Cymru Theatre Tax Relief**

To approve the establishment of an independent trading company of the Council to act for the specific purpose of ensuring effective management of theatre production costs. This is to include dealing efficiently with Theatre Tax Relief and Value Added Tax (VAT). It is initially estimated that up to £0.100m could be claimed in tax relief.

Revenues

- **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. For the financial years 2010, 2014 and 2015 the grand total of write offs in £29,182.15.

Community and Enterprise

- **Installation of Solar Panels on Council homes**

Cabinet has previously approved the installation of Solar PV (Solar Panels) on 400 Council homes. This approval was given following the submission of a delegated powers form, given the need to complete the Scheme prior to the cut in the Government's Feed in Tariff, which we now know will be on 15 January 2016. This additional delegated powers form seeks authority to extend the current Solar PV medium term contract with Warmer Energy Services from £2,000,000 to £2,500,000.

RESOLVED:

That the actions taken under delegated powers be noted.

148. 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 items by virtue of exempt information under paragraph 15 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

149. ADMINISTRATION REVIEW

The Chief Officer (Governance) provided an update on the savings achieved by the administrative review, and sought approval to combine administration teams as part of the long term vision.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the reduction in administrative costs achieved during Phase 1 of the administration review be welcomed and the vision for Phase 2 be agreed;
- (b) That delegated authority be given to the Chief Officer (Governance) in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Management to merge the Corporate Administration and Social Services teams as an interim step; and
- (c) That a further report be brought to Cabinet proposing a permanent structure for the administration teams and setting out an initial business case for Phase 2.

150. CHILDREN'S SERVICES RESTRUCTURE

Councillor Christine Jones outlined the principles that had informed the structure proposals as well as the core functions of the proposed service areas.

RESOLVED:

That the new Children's Services operating structure be endorsed.

151. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were 2 members of the press and 8 members of the public in attendance.

(The meeting commenced at 9.30am and ended at 11.47am)

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Chair