

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
17 OCTOBER 2017

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Tuesday, 17 October 2017

PRESENT: Councillor Ray Hughes (Chairman)

Councillors: Mike Allport, Haydn Bateman, Sean Bibby, Chris Dolphin, Andy Dunbobbin, David Evans, Veronica Gay, Cindy Hinds, Dave Hughes, Joe Johnson, Colin Legg, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton and Owen Thomas

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Bernie Attridge and Patrick Heesom attended as observers

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection; Councillor Carolyn Thomas, Cabinet Member for Streetscene & Countryside; Chief Officer (Planning & Environment); and Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation), Finance Manager (minute no. 33), Highways Network Manager (minute no. 36), North Wales Residual Waste Treatment Project (NWRWTP) Contract Manager (minute no.38)

IN ATTENDANCE: Environment Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officer

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

32. VARIATION IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

Following a suggestion by the Chair, a change in the order of business was agreed to bring forward agenda item 4, Financial Forecast and Stage One of the Budget 2018/19.

33. FINANCIAL FORECAST AND STAGE ONE OF THE BUDGET 2018/19

The Finance Manager introduced a report to provide the current financial forecast position for 2018/19 and consult on the Stage 1 Council Fund Revenue budget proposals for 2018/19. He provided background information and referred to the financial forecast which had been reported to Cabinet in July 2017 and was detailed in the report. He advised that the reported “gap” was £11.7m due to national, local, and workforce pressures, and the latest projections for inflation.

The Finance Manager gave a brief update on the Provisional Local Government Settlement for Wales for 2018/19 which was announced last week.

He emphasised that the Settlement was provisional at this stage and that specific grant confirmations were due to be received on 24 October. He advised that the provisional Settlement indicated a 0.9% reduction in funding to the Authority which would increase the “gap” by £1.6 - £1.9m due to the new responsibility for homelessness and unresolved pressures. The Finance Manager explained that a statement on the provisional Settlement and Stage 2 of the budget process would be made at the meetings of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 19 October, and Cabinet on 24 October, and analysis of the Settlement would follow to all Members.

Councillor Aaron Shotton spoke of the negative impact of the provisional Settlement and the implications of a further reduction in funding. He advised that the Authority and the Welsh Local Government Association would continue to enforce its lobbying case robustly for “betterment” before the Final Settlement was announced in December. Councillor Shotton commented that much rested on the Chancellor’s UK budget statement in November and the possibility of some improvement in the austerity measures imposed to date.

The Finance Manager reported on the main considerations as detailed in the report concerning emerging pressures, specific portfolio pressures, inflation and risks.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) and the Chief Officer (Planning and Environment) reported on the specific portfolio pressures and operating model efficiencies for their respective portfolios. The Chief Officers also reported on the current resilience position for their portfolios which was appended to the report and which set out the context for the savings and efficiencies proposed for 2018/19. Further details on the portfolio options for savings and efficiencies were included in the Operating Models appended to the report.

During discussion the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) responded to the comments and questions raised around streetlighting and the introduction of a no side waste policy which would coincide with the introduction of a charge to discourage people from leaving garden waste as side waste.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) agreed to meet with Councillor Chris Dolphin to discuss the specific concerns expressed around repair and maintenance of roads and streetlighting in his Ward.

The Chief Officer (Planning and Environment) responded to the questions around planning fee income. He advised that many services within the Planning portfolio were mandatory and that collaboration may be considered as an option for some of the services, however, he explained that whilst this may provide resilience it would not necessarily save costs.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee’s comments on the portfolio budget options and the portfolio financial pressures be noted; and

- (b) That the Committee was satisfied with the approach being taken to Stage One of the Council Fund Revenue budget 2018/19 for the Streetscene and Transportation and Planning and Environment portfolios.

34. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2017 were submitted.

Matters arising

Revised Environmental Enforcement and Car parking arrangements

Page 9: Councillor Andy Dunbobbin explained that his point was about what learning the Authority could take from the way private enforcement operators worked with a view to providing an in-house service after 2 years.

Page 9: In response to a request from Councillor Veronica Gay concerning the location of Fixed Penalty Notices the Cabinet Member advised that she had requested that an extra column be added for future reports to include information on time and location.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

35. BURIAL STRATEGY AND BEREAVEMENT SERVICES

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) introduced the report to provide information on the activities of the Bereavement Services Team within Streetscene and Transportation and proposals to extend the service for residents. He provided background information and advised that there were a number of challenges and risks facing the service which needed to be addressed and the report detailed these and the proposals to deal with them.

The Chief Officer reported on the main considerations, as detailed in the report, around the memorial safety policy, grounds maintenance, public health burials, burial space, and child burial fees. The Chief Officer advised that grounds maintenance was one of the largest costs incurred by the service and, referring to ways in which the Council could reduce costs in the future, it was proposed that the Service look to develop a policy of working with Town and Community Councils and local communities by establishing local volunteer groups to undertake maintenance works within the cemeteries. Councillor Paul Shotton spoke in support of this suggestion as a way forward. Councillor Owen Thomas asked if consideration had been given to spraying grass to slow down growth within cemeteries. The Chief Officer agreed to make further enquiries into this.

Councillor David Evans asked if consideration had been given to establishing a new cemetery as opposed to extending the existing sites. The

Chief Officer advised that all options were being considered and the Council's Asset Team were looking at potential sites.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee recommends that the Cabinet approves the changes to the current inspection and management arrangement for memorials within Council owned cemeteries;
- (b) That the Committee recommends that the Cabinet approves plans to investigate partnership agreements with local communities to deliver grounds maintenance for cemeteries and closed churchyards;
- (c) That the Committee recommends that the Cabinet approves the new arrangements for house searches, in respect of Public Health burials;
- (d) That the current capacity within the Council owned cemeteries be noted; and
- (e) That the committee recommends that the Cabinet approves the adoption of the Memorandum of Understanding being developed by Welsh Government to standardise Child Burial Fees across Wales.

36. POTHoles AND RESURFACING PROGRAMMES

The Highways Network Manager introduced a report to provide an update on the processes used to identify resurfacing programmes and the preferred methods of repairing and maintaining the highway network. He advised that the report outlined the approach to detect identification, including the inspection regime and the intervention levels operated by the Council. The report also provided details on capital expenditure and investment levels on the various highway assets, the preferred treatment option for carriageways such as patching, surface dressing or resurfacing and the cost benefit of temporary pothole repairs.

In response to the concerns raised by Councillor Chris Dolphin around the condition of some roads, the Highways Network Manager advised that regular safety inspections took place and any defects were noted and the necessary repair work arranged. Defects which required urgent attention were corrected or made safe at the time of the inspection. Defects which did not represent an immediate hazard or risk were programmed for repair within the times defined within the policy as set out in the report. The Highways Network Manager acknowledged the concerns raised by Councillor Dolphin and agreed to meet him following the meeting to discuss the specific problems within his Ward concerning road maintenance and street lighting. The Highways Network Manager advised that the Council reviewed its inspection policy every 2 years and a revised 'Policy for Highway and Car Park Safety Inspections, Intervention Criteria and Response Times' would be submitted to Cabinet for approval by July 2018.

In response to the comments and suggestions by Members regarding the need to explore the use of alternative types of materials for road surface dressings, the Chief Officer said a number of alternative products had been used in the past and he would continue to make enquiries on the suggestions put forward and report back his findings to a future meeting of the Committee.

During discussion it was agreed that Members would be provided with information on when highway safety inspections were undertaken in their Wards and feedback on the condition scores would be provided.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

37. NORTH WALES RESIDUAL WASTE TREATMENT PROJECT (NWRWTP)

The North Wales Residual Waste Treatment Project (NWRWTP) Contract Manager introduced a report to provide an update on the North Wales Regional Waste Partnership. He provided background information and advised that following the successful award of the North Wales Residual Waste Treatment Project contract to Wheelabrator Technologies Inc (WTI) the Parc Adfer waste treatment facility on Deeside Industrial Park was now under construction. The contract term with Wheelabrator Technologies Inc was 25 years. The five partner authorities had also signed an Inter Authority Agreement which formalised their partnership for the duration of the contract. Members were informed that Parc Adfer would be fully operational by 2020. Wheelabrator Technologies Inc had engaged with the local community and would continue to do so throughout the construction process and into the future.

Members spoke in support of the Community Benefit Fund which would become available when Parc Adfer was operational and would have a value of £230k per annum for community projects in the Deeside area. The NWRWTP Contract Manager advised that in addition to the Community Benefit Fund WTI had launched their own construction phase community fund of £50k over the construction period.

Councillor Aaron Shotton also spoke in support of the Community Benefit Fund and said this would be welcomed by community groups and would benefit residents in the Deeside area. He explained that the Council would decide how the Community Benefit Fund was allocated and further details concerning this would be provided to the Committee. Councillor Shotton also spoke of the positive outcome that the gate fees payable would be lower than the guideline or 'bid' price which had been set at the outset.

In response to a question from Councillor Owen Thomas the NWRWTP Contract Manager advised that a railway link was not part of the current plan, however, there was potential to attach a railway link in the future.

Following a suggestion by the NWRWTP Contract Manager, it was agreed that the Facilitator would arrange for Members to have a site visit to the Parc Adfer waste treatment facility on Deeside Industrial Park.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the progress of the construction of Parc Adfer be noted; and
- (b) That the scheduled operational date for Parc Adfer be noted.

38. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme for consideration.

The facilitator advised that a workshop had been arranged in November to include School Transport. Cllr David Evans agreed that whilst a workshop may be a suitable way to take this matter forward, the item should remain as an item for the Committee for the present time, pending the outcome of the workshop.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted; and
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

39. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.18pm)

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Chairman