

CABINET
21st NOVEMBER 2017

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of Flintshire County Council held in the Clwyd Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Tuesday, 21st November 2017.

PRESENT: Councillor Aaron Shotton (Chair)

Councillors: Chris Bithell, Derek Butler, Christine Jones, Billy Mullin, Ian Roberts and Carolyn Thomas.

APOLOGY:

Councillor Bernie Attridge.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Governance), Chief Officer (Social Services), Corporate Finance Manager, Corporate Business and Communications Executive Officer, Revenues Manager, Benefits Manager and Team Leader – Democratic Services.

OTHER MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors Patrick Heesom and Mike Peers.

82. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were declared.

83. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th October 2017 had been circulated with the agenda and approved as a correct record.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

84. COUNCIL FUND BUDGET 2018/19 – STAGE 2

The Chief Executive introduced the verbal item on the Council Fund Budget 2018/19 Stage 2.

Stage 1 of the Council Fund Budget had been presented to County Council the previous week where efficiencies of £3.1m and a consultation response for Welsh Government (WG) had been agreed.

An all Member workshop had been arranged later that day where Stage 2 budget options would be discussed. Following that, a meeting of Group Leaders was scheduled to take place on 28th November prior to a report being submitted to County Council on 12th December. The Chancellor of the Exchequer's final Statement would be delivered the following day.

Councillor Shotton said political meetings had been arranged with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government.

A petition had been started which called on the Chancellor to end austerity and had been signed by hundreds across the county. That petition would be presented to Parliament by Flintshire's MP's, Mark Tami and David Hanson.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal report be received.

85. COUNCIL PLAN 2017/18 – MID YEAR MONITORING

Councillor Mullin introduced the Council Plan 2017/18 – Mid Year Monitoring report which presented the monitoring of progress for the mid-year position of 2017/18.

Flintshire was a high performing Council which was evidenced in previous Council (Improvement) Plan monitoring reports as well as in the Council's Annual Performance Report.

The Chief Executive explained that the first mid-year monitoring report for the 2017/18 Council Plan was a positive report, with 88% of activities being assessed as making good progress, and 67% likely to achieve the desired outcome. In addition, 67% of the performance indicators (PIs) met or exceeded target. Risks were also being successfully managed with the majority being assessed as moderate (67%) or minor (8%).

The Corporate Business and Communications Executive Officer added that the report was an exception based report and therefore focused on the areas of under-performance. She commented in particular on the PI 'average number of calendar days taken to deliver a Disabled Facility Grant (DFG)' which had increased. This was due to a small number of DFGs for children's adaptations completing in the quarter which had very lengthy completion dates due to their complexity. On the red RAG risks, she explained that a large number of them related to funding which was beyond the control of the authority.

Councillor Bithell welcomed the report which was encouraging to see the authority as a high performing Council despite the austerity faced. However, he raised concerns on the DFG PI and said he would welcome any improvements in that area. Councillor Shotton explained that improvements had been made in that area the previous year so the target had been raised which was ambitious. Councillor Butler commented that this was a complex area and if one or two additional cases were presented, this could have a significant impact on the delivery of DFGs.

Councillor Shotton commented on the reference to the exploration to further the extension of bed provision for residential and nursing home care at Marleyfield in Buckley which he welcomed.

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 Council Plan
 - The performance against improvement plan performance indicators
 - The current risk levels for the risks identified in the Council Plan
- (b) That Cabinet Members be assured by plans and actions to manage the delivery of the 2017/18 Council Plan priority impacts.

86. NORTH EAST WALES HOMES LIMITED

The Chief Officer (Governance) introduced the North East Wales (NEW) Homes Limited report.

Following Councillor Attridge stepping down as Chair and Board Member of NEW Homes, and an outstanding vacancy for the Board, Councillors Janet Axworthy and Sean Bibby had been nominated to fill both vacancies.

There were two amendments required to NEW Homes Articles of Association, the first of which would allow the company to appoint a Vice Chair which would provide more flexibility in meetings in the event of the Chair not being present. The second would allow for termination of directorship in the event that directors of the company failed to attend a certain number of board meetings in any given year or financial year.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the appointment of Councillor Janet Axworthy and Councillor Sean Bibby be approved as Directors of NEW Homes subject to NEW Homes Board approval;
- (b) That an amendment of the NEW Homes Articles of Association to permit the appointment of a Vice Chair of NEW Homes be approved; and
- (c) That an amendment to the NEW Homes Articles of Association be approved to provide for the termination of directorships due to board meeting non-attendance in any year or financial year with specific terms approved by the NEW Homes Board.

87. WELFARE REFORM UPDATE – INCLUDING UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Councillor Mullin introduced the Welfare Reform Update – Including Universal Credit report.

He explained that the UK Government had been implementing its programme of Welfare Reforms over the last 5 years and by 2020 those reforms would have reduced expenditure on social security benefits available to low income households in the UK by around £31 billion per year.

In order to respond to the reforms, Flintshire County Council had been working with partners in an attempt to mitigate the full impacts on the most vulnerable residents in the County. The Council's response to the implementation of Universal Credit was being seen as a model of good practice by other Welsh Local Authorities and the Welsh Government (WG). He paid credit to officers and in particular to the Flintshire Connects staff who had provided front line digital support to over 1000 customers, helping them to make new claims and also to manage their claims online.

The Benefits Manager explained that the three most significant areas which were having an impact on Flintshire residents were Spare Room Subsidy (bedroom tax), Benefit Cap and Universal Credit.

There were a number of challenges faced which were mainly due to the major change and fundamental differences between Universal Credit and the legacy benefits. This was due to it being a fully digitised service, paid to the claimant in arrears, managing the whole of the household finances and responsibility for paying rent direct to landlords.

Councillor Shotton welcomed the personal statements produced by the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) that were appended to the report which detailed the challenges faced by people. There were a number of Councils who were urging UK Government to have compassion and halt the roll-out of the scheme as it was not working. The impact was evident in other areas and throughout the community and he asked if there was a willingness for the UK Government to learn from their experiences. The Benefits Manager explained that the UK Government adopted a 'test and learn' approach to the implementation and detailed the issues that had arisen, including confusion as to which benefits to claim, delays in payments and payment advances.

Councillor Thomas provided an example of a situation in her ward where a resident did not have access to digital services which resulted in the Government closing her case as they could not get access to the service.

The Benefits Manager explained that the Council had taken the initiative in working on providing support and solutions to help the most vulnerable residents. Approximately 90% of the people that had been supported had identified that they had debt issues and there was also an increase in customers accessing pay day loans and doorstep lenders to help to make ends meet until their first payment of Universal Credit was received.

The Council was putting together an action plan to target support to those households in order to alleviate the impacts and work would also be undertaken with CAB on providing a response to UK Government. Work was also being undertaken with helping families access the free childcare offer which would help with returning to the workplace.

On the 'Spare Bedroom Subsidy', Councillor Roberts commented on the positive shift that should be seen in Flintshire with the introduction of the council house building scheme whereby two bedroom properties were being built, which would allow larger families to move into the bigger houses which would help to eliminate the need for some families to pay 'bedroom tax'.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and that the ongoing work to manage the impacts that Welfare Reform has and will have upon Flintshire's most vulnerable households continue to be supported.

88. 3-4 YEAR OLD FUNDED CHILD CARE OFFER

Councillor Jones introduced the 3-4 Year Old Funded Child Care Offer report which provided an update on the free Childcare offer and sought approval to extend the offer to other areas in Flintshire.

The first children took up the offer on 4th September 2017 with 215 applications having been received. Flintshire had been successful in automating the application process enabling parents to register on line and self-select registered childcare providers from the registered 134 providers. The original figure of 441 children would increase to 748 children if approved by Cabinet.

The Chief Officer (Social Services) explained that the first year of the Offer was a pilot and would seek to test and learn from:

- How accessible and easy it was for parents to access the Offer;
- How accessible and easy it was for providers to provide the Offer; and
- How the Offer fitted alongside Flying Start and the Early Years Foundation Phase (Early Entitlement)

Testing the Offer more widely would allow Welsh Government (WG) to learn what worked and what did not in the delivery of the Offer, in readiness for the rollout across the whole of Wales.

The Offer was designed to be inclusive so children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) / Additional Learning Needs (ALN) would be supported to access their place. Workshops would be held to update providers on the development of the Offer.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made with the implementation of the Childcare offer be noted and that proposed extension of the pilot to all areas within Flintshire be approved.

89. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2017/18 (MONTH 6)

The Corporate Finance Manager introduced the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2017/18 (Month 6) report which provided the current revenue budget monitoring position for 2017/18 for the Council Fund and the Housing Revenue Account. The report presented the position, based on actual income and expenditure, and projected how the budget would stand at the close of the financial year if all things remained equal.

The projected year end position, without mitigation to reduce cost pressures and improve the yield on efficiency planning, was:

Council Fund

- Net in year expenditure forecast to be £1.147m more than budget; and
- Projected contingency reserve balance as at 31st March 2018 of £3.935m.

Housing Revenue Account

- Net in year expenditure forecast to be £0.035m higher than budget; and
- Projected closing balance as at 31st March 2018 of £1.081m.

The report covered the latest in year forecast by portfolio; tracking of in year risks and emerging issues; inflation; and reserves and balances.

At the meeting of Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee the previous week, comments had been made on (1) the need for clarify of the language used in the report on overspends and underspends; and (2) on the underspend on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, an investigation take place and the budget allocation be remodelled if necessary.

Councillor Thomas commented on the unexpected increase in Street Lighting which had an effect on the budget, as did the reduction in the Single Environment Grant (SEG). Councillor Shotton referred to the comments made at the recent Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the overspend position which demonstrated the challenges faced by the authority that needed to be understood by all members of the Council.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the overall report and the projected Council Fund contingency sum as at 31st March 2018 be noted; and
- (b) That the projected final level of balances on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) be noted.

90. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2017/18 (MONTH 6)

The Corporate Finance Manager introduced the Capital Programme Monitoring 2017/18 (Month 6) report which summarised changes made to the Capital Programme since Month 4 to the end of Month 6 (September 2017), along with expenditure to date and projected outturn.

Table 1 in the report showed how the programme had changed during 2017/18 with more detailed information relating to each Portfolio being appended to the report.

The report covered carry forward sums from 2016/17; changes during the period; capital expenditure compared to budget; carry forward into 2018/19; additional allocations; savings; and funding of 2017/18 approved schemes.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the overall report be approved; and
- (b) That the carry forward adjustments set out in the report be approved.

91. COUNCIL TAX BASE FOR 2018-19

Councillor Mullin introduced the Council Tax Base for 2018-19 report which was integral to the revenue budget and Council Tax setting process for 2018-19. It also allowed the Council, Police & Crime Commissioner's Office for North Wales and Town and Community Councils to calculate next year's Council Tax precept.

The Revenues Manager explained that the Base for 2017-18 had been calculated as 63,835 band D equivalent properties, after taking into account the total number of properties that would be subject to Council Tax, less those which were exempt from Council Tax or where household discounts applied.

Setting the Tax Base at 63,835 also represented growth in the Tax Base of 0.46% compared to the previous year, equivalent to an increase of 292 band D equivalent properties.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Tax Base of 63,835 band D equivalent properties be approved for the financial year 2018-19;
- (b) That a 'nil' discount for properties falling within any of the Prescribed Classes (A, B or C) continues to be set and for this to apply to the whole of the County area; and
- (c) That a 50% Premium continue to be set for long term empty property and second homes falling into the Premium scheme.

92. EXERCISE OF DELEGATED POWERS

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

Streetscene and Transportation

- **Proposed Prohibition and Restriction of Waiting and Loading and Parking Places. Civil Enforcement and Consolidation Order. Amendment No. 9.**
To advise Members of an objection received following the advertisement of the proposed Prohibition and Waiting and Loading and Parking Places Amendment No. 9 Order, which introduces No Waiting At Any Time and Limited Waiting on Phoenix Street, Wood Street, Fairway, Watkin Street, North Street, Harrison Grove, Evansleigh Drive and Lawrence Street, Sandycroft.

- **Proposed Prohibition and Restriction of Waiting and Loading and Parking Places. Civil Enforcement and Consolidation Order. Amendment No. 4.**
To advise Members of the objections received following the advertisement of the proposed Prohibition and Restriction of Waiting and Loading and Parking Places Amendment No. 4 Order, which introduces No Waiting At Any Time, Limited Waiting and Limited Parking on Cymau Road and Wyndham Drive, Abermorddu.
- **Street Works Fees and Charges for 2018/19**
The fees and charges levied for various licenses and applications issued within Street Works have been reviewed and the proposed charges for 2018/19 are set out in the table in the delegated powers form.

Planning and Environment (Community and Business Protection)

- **Buckley Precinct Public Space Protection Order**
Following an investigation into vehicle nuisance at the Buckley Precinct Car Park, Buckley, and a subsequent consultation, there has been positive support for Flintshire County Council to make a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO), prohibiting drivers of motor vehicles from engaging in a number of anti-social acts on the site. Proposed implementation date is 24th November 2017 for a period of three years.
- **Annual Increase in Fees and Charges 2017/18**
Revised fees and charges document for Community and Business Protection for 2017/18.

Organisational Change

- **Community Asset Transfer of Northop Allotment Gardens at St Peters Park, Northop**
The Community Asset Transfer (CAT) of Northop Allotment Gardens as detailed on the plan in the delegated powers report shown in red.
- **Former Garaging Site, Wirral View, Rhewl, Mostyn**
This garaging site is now disused and is being sold to an occupier of two remaining garage plots on the site.

RESOLVED:

That the actions taken under delegated powers be noted.

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 14 Of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

93. PROCUREMENT OF A NEW AGENCY CONTRACT

Councillor Mullin introduced the Procurement of a New Agency Contract report which outlined detailed the current framework contract used to procure agency staff.

The Chief Officer (Governance) explained that there were some difficulties with the contract which included the inability to secure workers at the rates of pay offered; difficulty in securing technical/professional specialists; and sometimes difficulty in securing workers in sufficient numbers. The specification therefore needed to be revised as part of the re-procurement process to ensure that the contract continued to serve the needs of the Council.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the procurement be commenced using the ESPO MSTAR2 Framework Number 653F; and
- (b) That Flintshire County Council work collaboratively with Denbighshire County Council in managing the procurement process.

99. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the public and one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting commenced at 9.30 a.m. and ended at 11.00 a.m.)

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Chair