

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
10 NOVEMBER 2020

Minutes of the remote meeting of the Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Tuesday, 10 November 2020

PRESENT: Councillor Rosetta Dolphin (Chair)

Councillors: Sean Bibby, David Evans, George Hardcastle, Patrick Heesom, Cindy Hinds, Kevin Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Joe Johnson, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton and Owen Thomas

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Ian Roberts, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Carolyn Thomas, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene & Countryside; Councillor Chris Bithell, Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection; Councillor Derek Butler, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy); Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation), Strategic Finance Manager, and Finance Manager

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

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

11. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2020 were submitted.

The minutes were moved for approval by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor George Hardcastle.

RESOLVED:

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

12. EMERGENCY SITUATION BRIEFING (VERBAL)

The Chief Executive gave an update on the current situation. He explained that following the end of the recent “firebreak” the small number of services which had been disrupted had been resumed and cited household recycling services as an example. He advised that the First Minister of Wales would review the position over the next two weeks and would give guidance on the need for any change, in the meantime it was essential that people continued to cooperate and comply with the rules to avoid the need for a further “firebreak” in the future.

The Chief Executive reported that Flintshire, North Wales, and Wales, had seen a drop in the number of Covid-19 cases reported which indicated a positive trend towards improvement, however, the medical advice was that the full impact of the “firebreak” would not become apparent until three weeks after the start date.

The Chief Executive advised there were no serious risks or concerns to raise regarding services and said that school services were operating well. Regional work was very good and he referred to the test, trace and protect service which was performing well in North Wales and had also worked collaboratively to support another authority in need in South Wales.

The Chief Executive advised that there had been a significant increase in Covid related hospital admissions in North Wales during the last week. He reported that Deeside Leisure Centre had opened on 9 November as a hospital (Rainbow Hospital) and up to 30 patients would initially be admitted on a “step down” arrangement to ease the pressure on local hospitals (Wrexham Maelor and Glan Clwyd Hospital being examples). The Chief Executive also explained that work was taking place with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to establish a local test centre in the Deeside area which would enable people to have a quicker test result.

RESOLVED:

Noted.

13. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Facilitator presented the current Forward Work Programme. She referred to the items listed for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 8 December 2020 and advised that an additional item would be included on the Corporate Joint Committee’s Welsh consultation document which required responses by 4 January 2021.

The Facilitator reported that a workshop on the Maintenance of Ditches and Watercourses was planned to be held in December and also a Digital Strategy workshop from the Economic Ambitions Board was being planned. A virtual meeting on Parc Adfer was to be held in the New Year. Members would be informed of the dates for these events when confirmed.

In response to a query from Councillor Patrick Heesom the Facilitator confirmed that items on the Integrated Transport Plan and Climate Change were included on the Forward Work Programme for future consideration by the Committee.

In response to the queries from Councillor Owen Thomas and George Hardcastle the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) explained that an update on Cycleways which would be brought to the meeting on 8 December, would include all proposals across the County for cyclepaths and full consultation would take place in the New Year. Councillor Carolyn Thomas and Councillor Chris Bithell

said they would provide an update to Councillor Thomas on the Mold to Rhydymwyn cycleway following the meeting.

Councillor Owen Thomas referred to work around ash dieback and asked that a record be kept of landowners to ensure they could be contacted in the future to ensure maintenance was undertaken to prevent infringement on public pathways and highways. The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) acknowledged the comments and said an update on the work around ash dieback would be provided to a future meeting of the Committee.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Patrick Heesom and seconded by Councillor George Hardcastle.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be approved;
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises; and
- (c) That the Committee notes the progress made in completing the outstanding actions.

14. NORTH WALES ECONOMIC AMBITION BOARD (NWEAB) – FINAL GROWTH DEAL

The Chief Executive introduced a report to present the key documents required for approval to reach Final Deal Agreement for the North Wales Growth Deal with the UK Government and Welsh Government. He provided background information and explained that a report and the relevant documents had been circulated to all partner organisations with the aim that by mid-December all ten partners had adopted the report in readiness to sign the final Growth Deal with both the UK Government and Welsh government before end of December 2020. The covering report would be presented to all six local authority Scrutiny, Cabinet and Council meetings.

The Chief Executive advised that the Growth Deal was the largest single collaborative project that North Wales had undertaken and commented on the political, economic, and financial significance. The Chief Executive and Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) gave a joint presentation on the North Wales Growth Deal which covered the following key points:

- partnership – North Wales Economic Ambition Board
- North Wales Growth Vision
- governance structure
- timeline
- Final Deal Agreement

- Final Deal Requirements – Business Cases
- overarching business plan
- the growth deal portfolio
- programmes
- income and expenditure
- financial implications
- Governance Agreement 2
- draft Final Deal Agreement
- key dates

Councillor Ian Roberts spoke of the successful regional work being undertaken by the NWEAB which was acknowledged by the Welsh Government. He urged Members to support the recommendations in the report and reiterated the need to progress towards signing the final Growth Deal with both the UK Government and Welsh government before end of December 2020 for the reasons already explained. Councillor Roberts paid tribute to the Chief Executive for his hard work and influence on the NWEAB and also paid tribute to Councillor Aaron Shotton for his work as former Leader of the Council.

Councillor Paul Shotton raised a question on overspend. In response the Chief Executive explained that there was tight governance arrangements on programmes which devolved to project level and gave assurance that there were no concerns relating to overspend. The Chief Executive also responded to the comments raised around BREXIT and said that there would be local benefit for Flintshire arising through the Growth Deal in the dispersal of European funding. He also spoke of the significance of Holyhead in terms of trade, investment and tourism.

In response to the concerns raised by Councillor Owen Thomas relating to local employment and investment in local industry, the Chief Executive explained that jobs and benefits from the Growth Deal would be dispersed across the region and that funding for investment in local industry had also been obtained ahead of and separate to the Growth Deal. In response to the further concerns expressed by Councillor Thomas the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) commented on the Regional Skills Partnership and the work between colleges and the Ambition Board to ensure schools, colleges, and universities provided the relevant skills required for the jobs created by new capital projects.

The recommendations in the report were moved by Councillor Kevin Hughes and seconded by Councillor Paul Shotton.

Councillor Patrick Heesom abstained from the vote on the recommendations

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee formally endorses and recommends that Cabinet and Council approve the Overarching Business Plan as the document that sets out the arrangements to deliver the North Wales Growth Deal as the basis

for entering into the Final Deal Agreement and acceptance of the Grant Funding Letter with the UK and Welsh Governments;

- (b) That the Committee formally endorses and recommends that Cabinet approves the provisions in Governance Agreement 2 relating to executive functions, recommends that Council approves the provisions relating to non-executive functions, and that Cabinet specifically adopts the delegations and Terms of Reference in “Governance Agreement 2: Appendix 1” thereof as the basis for completing the Final Deal Agreement and acceptance of the Grant Funding Letter with the UK and Welsh Governments;
- (c) That the Cabinet formally endorse and recommend that the Council authorise the accountable body, Gwynedd Council, to sign the Grant Funding Offer letter on behalf of the Partners;
- (d) That the Cabinet formally endorses and recommends that Council approves the method used to calculate the cost of borrowing notionally required to facilitate the negative cash flow for the Growth Deal, and to include a provision within the Council’s budget to pay this contribution and the established core and supplementary contributions; and
- (e) That the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader, Monitoring Officer, and Section 151 Officer, be granted delegated authority to agree minor changes to the documents with the Partners as necessary to complete the agreement.

15. BUDGET 2021/22 – STAGE 1

The Chief Executive introduced a report on the Streetscene and Transportation, and Planning, Environment and Economy cost pressures and overall budget strategy. The Committee was invited to review the costs pressures and risks and advise on any potential efficiency options to explore. The Chief Executive advised that the report was to be submitted to all five Overview & Scrutiny Committees for consideration and feedback would be provided to the meeting of Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 12 November and following to Cabinet and County Council.

The Chief Executive, Strategic Finance Manager, and Finance Manager, gave a joint presentation on the Medium Term financial Strategy (MTFS) and Council Budget 2021/22 which covered the following main points:

- financial forecast for 2021/22
- the future – what we advised back in February
- summary totals of cost pressures
- Streetscene and Transportation portfolio specific cost pressures
- Planning Environment & Economy Portfolio specific cost pressures
- solutions – three part solutions and risk-taking

- national position and funding
- potential funding scenarios
- budget timetable
- support and challenge today

Councillor Paul Shotton asked if any potential savings could be achieved on the use of recycled plastics for road resurfacing, share/hire of council owned garden equipment and tools etc. Responding to the use of recycled plastics for road resurfacing the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) explained that a pilot scheme had been undertaken and work was progressing with the Welsh Government and a local supplier. Regarding the suggestion around hiring out garden equipment etc. the Chief Officer advised that the Authority was submitting a bid to the Welsh Government Economy Fund for use, repair, or subsequent resale/hire of such equipment which would provide a social benefit for people in financial hardship.

Officers responded to the further questions raised by Members around storage of recycled materials, SuDs. and Council tax.

The recommendations in the report were moved by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor Patrick Heesom.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the Streetscene and Transportation, and Planning, Environment and Economy cost pressures, as outlined within the report, be noted;
- (b) That no further cost efficiency areas be proposed by the Committee to be explored further;
- (c) That the Committee support the overall budget strategy;
- (d) That the Committee re-affirm the Council's position on local taxation policy; and
- (e) That the Committee support the Council's expectations of Governments, as outlined within the presentation provided

16. RECOVERY STRATEGY (PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY PORTFOLIO)

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) introduced a report to provide an oversight on the recovery planning for the Committee's respective portfolio areas. The Chief Officer provided background information and explained that the latest version of the risk register and set of risk mitigation actions for the Planning, Environment and Economy portfolio were attached to the report. In addition an update was detailed in the report on progress against each of the portfolio's 14 recovery objectives.

Presenting the report the Chief Officer drew attention to the progress achieved on the recovery objectives regarding the re-opening of destination sites – Wepre Park, Greenfield Valley, Waun y Llyn; compliance with the new Local Development Plan timeline; support for local markets and town centres; undertaking of ash dieback surveys; and restoration of the Development Management function. The Chief Officer reported on the risk register (v7) which was appended to the report.

In response to the questions and comments from Councillor Patrick Heesom around the recovery objectives, the Chief Executive said that service continuity and performance had been high in comparison to other authorities during the Covid emergency situation

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Cindy Hinds and seconded by Councillor Owen Thomas.

Councillor George Hardcastle abstained from the vote on the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee notes the progress made with respect to recovery planning for the Planning, Environment and Economy portfolio; and
- (b) That the content of the updated portfolio risk register and mitigation actions be noted.

17. RECOVERY STRATEGY (STREETSCENE AND TRANSPORTATION PORTFOLIO)

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) introduced a report to provide an oversight on the recovery planning for the Committee's respective portfolio area. He provided background information and explained that the latest version of the risk register and set of risk mitigation actions for the Streetscene and Transportation portfolio were attached to the report. In addition an update was detailed in the report on progress against each of the portfolio's 9 recovery objectives.

The Chief Officer reported on the 6 red risks, which were Covid related, as detailed in the appendix to the report. He also reported on the progress achieved on the 9 recovery objectives in the report and drew attention to the objectives to consolidate Streetscene working standards at pre-COVID levels; return frontline workforce to standardised hours to ensure effective use of available resources; progress on the development of waste infrastructure to support increased recycling potential; and maintain the highway network during the winter period.

The Chief Officer responded to the questions raised by Councillor George Hardcastle regarding charges for the 'brown bin' waste service in view of the

recent temporary suspension of collection. Councillor Hardcastle also asked what action was being taken to prevent the problem of blocked drains on streets and public highways due to falling leaves during Autumn. The Chief Officer explained that residents who paid a full charge for the 'brown bin' service would be offered a reduction on next year's charge to compensate for the temporary loss of service due to the Covid-19 emergency situation. In response to the concerns around blocked drains the Chief Officer advised that four vehicles were working six days a week to address the issue and streetscene coordinators were being asked to monitor and identify problem areas.

Councillor Patrick Heesom congratulated the Chief Officer and his team for their progress and improvements achieved through the repair to pot-holes programme.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Kevin Hughes and seconded by Councillor Patrick Heesom.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the progress made to support the Recovery Strategy by the Streetscene and Transportation portfolio.

18. MID-YEAR PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR RECOVERY, PORTFOLIO AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) introduced a report to enable the Committee to review progress in the achievement of activities, performance levels, and current risk levels as identified in the Council Plan.

The Chief Officer reported that the mid-year performance monitoring report for the 2020/21 Reporting Measures showed that 69% of the performance indicators had met or exceeded their targets. Where performance could be measured against last year there had been a 64% downturn in trend, with 31% of measures improving on last year's performance and 5% maintaining stable performance.

The Chief Officer reported on the three performance indicators which showed a red RAG status for current performance against target, relevant to the Committee, for the Planning, Environment and Economy portfolio, as detailed in paragraph 1.05 of the report.

The Chair referred to page 294 of the report and the reporting measure for the average time taken to pursue positive enforcement action where a breach had been identified (days). In response to a request from the Chair for further information the Chief Officer provided clarification on the data provided and agreed to include additional detail in the next report to be submitted to the Committee. In response to the comments expressed by Members around performance on enforcement actions the Chief Executive advised that the Authority was regarded in North Wales as being the most pro economic

development planning authority and received positive feedback from businesses. The Chief Officer explained that the Authority was procuring a new system which would improve the availability of information to the general public on enforcement cases and planning applications. Councillor Chris Bithell referred to the policy document on enforcement and commented on the powers and timescales involved.

The Chief Executive paid tribute to the work of the public protection service during the pandemic and cited the contribution made around enforcement, business support advice, public health, and trace, track and protect. He said the dedication of employees and quality of work to meet need had been exceptional.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) reported on the two performance indicators which showed a red RAG status for current performance against target relevant to the Committee for the Streetscene and Transportation portfolio, as detailed in paragraph 1.05 of the report.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Paul Shotton and seconded by Councillor Kevin Hughes.

Councillor George Hardcastle abstained from the vote on the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

That the mid-year performance indicators for Recovery, Portfolio, and Public Accountability Measures, to monitor areas of underperformance be noted.

19. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the public or press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.35 pm)

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Chairman