

CABINET
19TH JANUARY 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of Flintshire County Council held virtually via Webex on Tuesday 19th January, 2021.

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chair)

Councillors: Glyn Banks, Chris Bithell, Derek Butler, Dave Hughes, Christine Jones, Billy Mullin and Carolyn Thomas.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Governance), Corporate Finance Manager, Chief Officer (Housing and Assets), Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy), Chief Officer (Education and Youth), Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation); Chief Officer (Social Services), and Strategic Performance Advisor

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor Hilary McGuill and Ms. Julia Hughes, Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee were in attendance as observers.

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Chairman led the Committee in a silent tribute to Councillor Kevin Hughes who had sadly passed away.

75. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Jones declared a personal interest in Agenda item 9 – Adult Community Learning Partnership.

76. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 3rd and 15th December were submitted and confirmed as a correct.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings were approved as a correct record.

77. COUNCIL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2021/22

Councillor Banks introduced the report which set out (1) a close to final budget estimate in readiness for Council to set the annual budget in February (2) the financial implications of the Welsh Provisional Local Government Settlement (3) the remaining issues to be resolved in reaching a balanced budget for recommendation to Council and (4) the budget-setting timetable.

The Chief Executive advised that the report summarised the Provisional Settlement and its implications to follow the verbal updates provided to Cabinet and all Members in December. The report was an interim step prior to the recommendation of a legal and balanced budget to Council in February, and set out the outstanding issues to be resolved. Any subsequent annual pay awards would

remain an open risk in-year with the Council's position on pay remaining clear that as there was no specific provision within the Provisional Settlement for annual pay awards for 2021/22, there could be none or the burden would fall on public sector employers.

The Corporate Finance Manager provided a detailed update on the remaining issues for budget closure, as set out within the report, with conclusive outcomes expected prior to Cabinet (in February) being able to recommend a legal and balanced budget to Council. The Chief Executive suggested that the recommended budget report be presented to the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee for their observations prior to being presented to Cabinet in February, with any comments/suggestions made being verbally to Cabinet.

Councillor Roberts supported the suggestion to present the report to Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee prior to Cabinet. He reported that the Chancellor of the Exchequer's UK Spending Review Announcement made no provision for public sector pay awards and whilst Members personally would no doubt support an annual pay award, funding to allow this had not been provided and therefore one could not be implemented. The Chief Executive said that the cost of pay awards must be funded by Government with other Council's taking the same position. The potential of later pay awards could not be accounted for when setting the budget and therefore this remained an open risk.

In response to a question from Councillor Bithell, the Chief Executive advised that the School Budget Forum had supported the Council's position on annual pay awards with Trade Unions making their views known at a national level.

Councillor Banks praised the WG hardship fund which had assisted the Council in being able to propose a Council Tax rise under 5%. He reiterated the comments made for annual pay awards to be fully funded at a national level and made the case for financial assistance to assist Out of County placements in the short term.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made in moving towards a set of recommendations for Council to be able to set a legal and balanced budget in February be noted.

78. COUNCIL PLAN 2021/22

Councillor Roberts introduced the Council Plan for 2021/22 which would continue to take into account recovery in addition to longer-term strategic objectives. The initial framework for Part One of the Plan was built around six themes, as outlined within the report, and each theme was accompanied by a strategic statement.

The Chief Executive outlined the positive approach to Council planning and innovation and reported that the Council continued to perform well against targets set. The Council Plan for 2021/22 clearly covered all priorities of the moment and said that it was important for officers to have positive milestones to achieve at the

end of the pandemic. Overview & Scrutiny Committees would have the opportunity to be engaged in the development of the Plan, with feedback initially received from the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee around the cross-cutting themes and a suggestion that the Committee may wish to lead on the Poverty theme. Following the cycle of consultation, the Plan would be presented to Cabinet in its second stage prior to adoption by the County Council in April/May.

The Strategic Performance Advisor reported on the strands of work to ensure the embedding of well-being objectives within the Plan. Work was also progressing on part two of the Plan which would be presented to Cabinet in March/April.

Councillor Thomas welcomed the priorities as set out in the Plan which were clear for all partner agencies to follow. On the cross-cutting themes, she commented on the positive joint working between service portfolios and suggested a clear pathway be developed to identify which priority area would be considered by which Overview & Scrutiny Committee going forward. The Chief Executive suggested that when reporting quarterly to Overview & Scrutiny Committees the Plan would be shared, with specific reference made to the priorities which sit within the terms of reference of each Committee within the respective covering report.

In response to a question from Councillor Thomas, the Chief Executive advised that the Council Plan 2021/22 would be publicised once final with stakeholders having been consulted during its development.

Members spoke in support of the Council Plan and the themes and supporting priorities and thanked all officers for the involvement in preparing the Council Plan.

RESOLVED:

That the draft Part One of the Council Plan 2021-22 be shared with Overview and Scrutiny Committees for consultation.

79. FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL RESPONSE TO WELSH GOVERNMENT'S TRANSPORT STRATEGY CONSULTATION

Councillor Thomas introduced an overview of the content of Welsh Government's (WG) revised Transport Strategy and the Council's proposed response to the formal consultation process which ended on 25 January, 2021.

WG's overarching Transport Strategy set out the future direction for transport in Wales and the implementation of the revised Strategy would require all Welsh authorities to revise their Joint Local Transport Plans in order to reflect WG's desired direction for transport over the next 5 years. This in turn would instigate the revision of the Council's own Integrated Transport Plan (ITP), which would define the Council's own aspirations for transport over the same period.

Having reviewed the Wales Transport Strategy, it was evident that WG's approach to transport had evolved to the prioritisation of greener, more sustainable modes of transport with an emphasis on Active Travel and Public Transport. This approach was strongly endorsed by the Council's own ITP which aimed to provide

long term sustainable transport solutions though the successful integration of all modes of transport.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Welsh Government's revised draft Wales Transport Strategy – 'Llwybr Newydd – A New Wales Transport Strategy' be noted; and
- (b) That Cabinet approve the Council's response to the formal consultation process, with the inclusion of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny comments from their meeting in January.

80. THE WELSH GOVERNMENT BUS EMERGENCY SCHEME

Councillor Thomas introduced the report which sought approval to sign by to the Bus Emergency Scheme 2 (BES2) which would support operators through the next phase of the pandemic.

Bus travel had been severely affected by the Covid-19 situation with passenger numbers falling, whilst social distancing and additional cleansing requirements had placed added burdens and costs on operators. BES2 was the latest scheme which followed two previous ones – BES1 in July and BES1.5 in August, 2020. By signing this latest agreement, councils could secure Welsh Government (WG) financial support for the bus sector and allow WG to establish a relationship with local authorities that ensured the ongoing emergency funding meet those authorities' priorities and was delivered on their behalf.

The Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) reported that WG, working with Transport for Wales (TfW), was now proposing to enter into this longer-term BES2 agreement with operators and Local Authorities to protect services. He advised that if reassurance could be provided that core bus routes could continue to operate moving forward, then councils would be in a position to provide local services to feed into the core services and provide a regular, affordable and reliable service for all residents in Flintshire.

Councillor Bithell welcomed the report and commented on public transport being essential to ensure residents across the County stayed connected. He raised concern around bus timetables and the need to ensure that they were regularly updated. In response, Councillor Thomas supported the need for all residents to have access to clear up to date information and advised that the BES2 agreement would ensure services remained the same for a longer period, therefore reducing the need to regularly change bus timetables.

Councillor Jones outlined the importance of keeping communities connected to address loneliness and isolation and the impact this has on mental health and wellbeing. Councillor Thomas agreed, saying that bus transport should also be seen as a service which supported wellbeing.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet approves that the Council should sign up to the BES 2 agreement (Appendix 1) as regional lead authority, in order to secure (conditional) WG financial support for the bus sector and to allow WG to establish a relationship with their constituent local authorities that ensures the ongoing emergency funding meets those authorities' priorities and is delivered on their behalf; and
- (b) That Cabinet request a further report on bus reform proposals relating to the future management of bus services in Wales.

81. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2020/21 (MONTH 8)

Councillor Banks introduced the report which provided the latest detailed revenue budget monitoring position for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account for the financial year, and presented the position based on actual income and expenditure, as at Month 8. The report projected how the budget would stand at the close of the financial year if all things remained largely unchanged. It also took into account the latest position on Welsh Government (WG) Emergency Grant Funding announcements.

The projected year end position, without new actions to reduce cost pressures and/or improve the financial return on efficiency planning and cost control was:

Council Fund

- An operating deficit of £0.270m (excluding the impact of the pay award which would be met by reserves), which was a favourable movement of £0.466m from the deficit figure of £0.196m reported at Month 7.
- A projected contingency reserve balance as at 31st March 2021 of £1.685m

Housing Revenue Account

- Net in-year expenditure forecast to be £1.590m lower than budget
- A projected closing balance as at 31st March of £3.763m.

The Corporate Finance Manager provided details on the projected position, the projected position by portfolio, significant movements from Month 7, open risks, new emerging risks, achievement of planned in-year efficiencies and reserves and balances.

The Chief Executive reported on the positive projected year end position which would be achieved through management discipline and creative work within services such as homelessness to avoid cost burdens.

In response to comments on Out of County Children's Services placements, the Chief Executive advised that the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee had resolved to support seeking additional funding from WG. It was suggested that the Corporate Finance Manager assess trends in overspends in this area across Wales.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the overall report and the projected Council Fund contingency sum as at 31st March 2021 be noted; and
- (b) That the projected final level of balances on the Housing Revenue Account be noted.

82. ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

Councillor Roberts introduced the report to provide an overview of how Adult Community Learning (ACL) funding was changing in Flintshire and how the Council was looking to ensure best value for adult learners from the increase in allocation of the Community Learning Grant (CLG) for 2020 onwards. The report also sought approval to proceed with the formation of a joint Flintshire and Wrexham Adult Community Learning Partnership which would provide oversight and management of ACL across both Council areas.

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) reported that each year, the Welsh Government (WG) provided Councils with funding for ACL for people over the age of 19. With the new funding allocations, it was anticipated that full year funding for 2021/2022 would be in the region of £216,152.

The Council was working with the Deeside Community Trust on the construction of a new Community Hub in Queensferry and the new facility would provide much needed community, adult learning and sports facilities. The Trust would assist the partnership in delivering some of its key educational objectives. Part of the funding would be used to commission the Trust to develop and deliver learning opportunities in the local community and help meet the action plan agreed with WG.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Adult Community Learning funding within Flintshire and the increased funding allocation through the Community Learning Grant (CLG) by Welsh Government be acknowledged; and
- (b) That the development work with Wrexham Adult Learning Partnership be noted and approval given for Flintshire to proceed with forming a joint Flintshire and Wrexham Adult Community Learning Partnership.

83. 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

- **Football Pitch Booking Fees Seasons 2019/20 and 2020/21**

The fees and charges levied for the use of Football pitches on public accessible sites across Flintshire will need to be reviewed in light of the restriction placed on Football Clubs due to the response to the Covid-19 global pandemic. These restrictions have prohibited Clubs from training or playing since March 2020, which will mean that their ability to make use of facilities and generate income to pay such fees would be significantly limited.

Fees are usually collected in August each year before the start of each season, but due to the restrictions in place at that time, and enquiries from the clubs about the lack of use during restrictions, bookings were accepted but invoices have not been issued until more information was available about how Welsh Football Association (WFA) were going to advise on moving grass roots football forward. Junior Cup matches restarted on 28th November 2020. There are two considerations for Flintshire:

- 1 To provide a rebate to clubs for the period of non-use at the end of the 2019/20 season
- 2 To reduce the charge for the 2020/21 season to take into account the reduced period of availability.

- **Street Works Fees and Charges for 2021/22**

The fees and charges levied for various licenses and applications issues within Street Works have been received and the proposed charges for 2021/22 are set out in the table below:-

All the new charges are to take effect from the 1st April 2021.

Description	Current Charge	Revised Charge from 01.04.2021
Section 50 licence	£551	£562
Emergency road closure	£809	£825
Temporary traffic order	£1967	£2006
Switching off of traffic lights	£132 (working day) and £197 (out of hours)	£134 (working day) and £200 (out of hours)
Bus stop closure	£132 (working day) and £197 (out of hours)	£134 (working day) and £200 (out of hours)

Governance

- **Introduction of Weekly Direct Debit Payments for Business Rates and Four Weekly Direct Debit Option for Council Tax Payers**

The Council currently provides flexible options for households to pay their Council Tax bill via weekly, monthly, half yearly or as a one off payment. That will be extended to also permit payment 4 weekly by direct debit.

The Council also provides businesses with the option to pay their Business Rates bill either monthly, half yearly or as a one off payment. That will be

extended to allow businesses to pay weekly or direct debit. These changes are a response to customer feedback.

Housing and Assets

- **Mynydd Isa Scout Hut, Snowdon Avenue, Bryn Y Ball, Near Mold**

The transfer of Mynydd Isa Scout Hut and land, Snowdon Avenue, Bryn Y Baal, Near Mold.

Education and Youth

- **Local Authority appointed school governors**

Appointment of Local Authority Governor (s) representatives on school governing bodies in accordance with The Government of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2005

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

84. EMPTY HOMES PURCHASE

Councillor Hughes introduced the report which sought approval to progress the purchase and refurbishment of empty properties to support the Phase 2 Homelessness Plan by bringing empty dwelling back into use and increase the supply of housing for the 'homeless covid cohort'.

Welsh Government grant had been secured for both revenue and capital activity to support the delivery of Flintshire's Phase 2 Homelessness Plan and the grant was for increasing the capacity and improving the standards of Flintshire's temporary accommodation portfolio.

In response to questions raised, the Chief Executive outlined the cost savings from the use of temporary accommodation and therefore the purchase of the properties was good value as part of the invest to save project.

RESOLVED:

- (a) Cabinet approve the purchase of the property as identified in the report; and
- (b) Cabinet provide delegated authority to the Chief Officer (Housing & Assets) in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing to purchase further empty

properties through the Phase 2 Homelessness funding awarded to the Council by Welsh Government when identified.

85. AURA – RENEWAL OF SERVICE CONTRACT

Councillor Roberts introduced the report which sought to extend the service contract between the Council and Aura for a further two years by mutual agreement. Cabinet was also recommended to grant the Chief Executive authority to make variations to the terms of the current agreement and the level of the service contract payment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education, within the areas set out within the report. It was noted that any variations would have to be affordable and within the tolerances of the Council Fund Revenue Budget 2020/21.

The Chief Executive reported that Aura had largely been successful in achieving the aims and objectives of the service contract and that its business plan and had matured as an organisation under an independent management model. The Council enjoyed a close and mutually supportive relationship with Aura under an established partnership agreement with protocols for joint working and decision-making. It was essential that the Council played its part in ensuring that Aura was suitably funded for it to continue to be a sustainable and competitive organisation as it emerged from the pandemic situation.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet agrees to a further and final extension of the service agreement with Aura to 31 March 2024; and
- (b) That the Chief Executive be granted authority to make variations to the terms of the current agreement and the level of the service payment as set out in the report, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education & Youth.

86. CHILDCARE OFFER PROGRAMME

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) introduced the report which sought approval to enter into a contract for the construction phase of the Childcare Offer Programme.

A commercial offer for the programme had been provided which offered cost certainty. Revenue implications had been tested through submission of school business case and only the projects that had demonstrated that they were viable and sustainable had been chosen to proceed.

The funding allocation to the proposed project at Ysgol Brynford had increased. It was not possible to utilise balances from other funding streams nor was it feasible to reduce the project scope and Cabinet were requested to authorise the £50k shortfall from the Council's capital headroom.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet approves entering into a contract for the construction phase of the Childcare Offer Programme; and
- (2) That Cabinet approves that the £50k shortfall on the proposed project at Ysgol Brynford be funded from the Council’s capital headroom.

87. ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF IN HOUSE RESIDENTIAL CARE PROVISION FOR CHILDREN

Councillor Jones introduced the report which sought support for the purchase of three properties which would enable the development of a local residential Care home for Children. An integrated health and social care steering group between Flintshire, the local health board and Wrexham had developed proposals for a transformational approach to establishing a local residential children’s provision.

The site identified could provide a range of support services and benefit from being close to local amenities and services. All the properties have a homely aspect and would be seen as a home environment for the Council’s most vulnerable children and young people. It was intended to establish a short term residential assessment and support provision to carry out intensive assessments and therapeutic intervention work to support families or commission longer term local fostering/residential placements.

Members spoke in support of the report and commented on the innovative proposals.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet support the purchase of three properties, as outlined within the report, to enable the development of a Residential Care Homes for Children.

88. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and ended at 11.16 a.m.)

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Chair