

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
11 FEBRUARY 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a remote attendance meeting on Thursday, 11 February 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Clive Carver (Chairman)

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Sean Bibby, Geoff Collett, Andy Dunbobbin, Mared Eastwood, Patrick Heesom, Richard Jones, Paul Shotton, Andy Williams and Arnold Woolley

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor: Paul Johnson (for Kevin Rush)

ALSO PRESENT: Mark Morgan (Independent member of the Standards Committee) attended as an observer

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Ian Roberts (Leader and Cabinet Member for Education), Councillor Carolyn Thomas (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Countryside), Councillor Billy Mullin (Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets), Councillor Glyn Banks (Cabinet Member for Finance), Councillor Chris Bithell (Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection), Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Governance), Chief Officer (Housing and Assets), Corporate Finance Manager and Senior Manager for Human Resources & Organisational Development and Accountant

Strategic Performance Advisor - for minute 60

Strategic Finance Manager - for minute 61

Finance Manager - for minute 62

For minute number 57

Community and Business Protection Manager (Siân Jones), Community Safety Team Leader (Richard Powell), Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Co-ordinator (Rhiannon Edwards), Community Safety Officer (Peter Shakespeare), Regional Substance Misuse Commissioning & Development Officer (Paul Firth) and Chief Inspector Siobhan Edwards of North Wales Police

IN ATTENDANCE: Head of Democratic Services and Democratic Services Officers

54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Members declared a personal interest on the Community Safety Partnership Annual Report (agenda item 5):

- Councillor Dunbobbin - member of the North Wales Police & Crime Panel and White Ribbon Ambassador.
- Councillor Woolley - member of the North Wales Police & Crime Panel

- Councillor Shotton - member of the North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority
- Councillor Bithell - Trustee of the Domestic Abuse Safety Unit

55. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2021 were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillors Shotton and Collett.

On minute 51, representations for a national funding solution on Out of County Placements had been incorporated into the Council's response to the Provisional Local Government Settlement.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

56. ACTION TRACKING

The Head of Democratic Services presented the report on progress with actions arising from previous meetings.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Dunbobbin and Eastwood.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the progress which has been made.

57. COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT

The Chief Executive introduced the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) annual report which provided an overview of activities over the past 12 months. Following changes to governance arrangements, the CSP was now under the auspices of the Public Service Board and discharged its duties through the 'People are Safe' Board. The work of the Board was underpinned through the implementation of a local delivery plan.

The Community and Business Protection Manager gave a presentation covering:

- Context
- Community Safety Delivery Groups
- Local Priorities for 2020/21
- Crime & Disorder - current position (compared with previous year)
- Regional Partnerships

In welcoming the report and presentation, Councillor Heesom moved the recommendation.

Councillor Jones said that including numbers alongside percentages on changes in trends would help to provide context. The officers agreed to circulate this information following the meeting.

In response to comments from Councillor Dunbobbin, the Chief Executive said that the CSP remained a priority and that the Public Service Board in Flintshire was recognised as a strong performer. He provided clarification on accountability and reporting arrangements.

In representing the Area Planning Board, Paul Firth gave assurance of actions being taken to support the CSP on priority areas such as domestic violence and alcohol/drug related offences.

In answer to a question from Councillor Johnson, Chief Inspector Siobhan Edwards provided information on the Community Cohesion Group which had been established to understand community issues at the start of the emergency situation across Wrexham, Flintshire and Denbighshire.

Councillor Bibby thanked officers for their work and community engagement, in particular the 'Visible and Vulnerable' multi-agency group. He also thanked the newly-appointed Community Safety Officer for his assistance on ward issues.

As Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection, Councillor Bithell spoke about the importance of a multi-agency approach to tackle priority areas and promote safety in communities.

Having previously been moved, the recommendation was seconded by Councillor Bibby.

The Chairman thanked the contributors for their attendance.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee supports the contents of the report.

58. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In presenting the report, the Head of Democratic Services highlighted the items due at the next meeting and would liaise with officers to populate the programme thereafter.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Dunbobbin and Bibby.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the Forward Work Programme be approved; and

- (b) That the Head of Democratic Services, in consultation with the Committee Chairman, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

59. RECOVERY STRATEGY UPDATE

The Chief Executive presented a report to update the Committee on the Corporate portfolio risk register and mitigating actions as part of recovery planning.

The Chief Officer (Governance), Corporate Finance Manager and Senior Manager for Human Resources & Organisational Development each gave an overview of the main changes and live issues on risk and recovery within their respective portfolios.

In response to questions from Councillor Jones, officers provided clarification on the risk rating for CF18 relating to the financial impact of the emergency situation. On the reduction in Council Tax collection levels (CF08), the risk trend and underlying risk reflected the impact from the emergency situation which was currently being mitigated through Welsh Government (WG) financial support.

Councillor Mullin thanked officers and raised concerns about the effect of the emergency situation on employee workload, and also future Council Tax collection levels. On workforce, it was noted that there had been an increased take-up of stress-related courses.

As requested by Councillor Heesom, the Chief Officer (Governance) agreed to provide Members with further information on the forthcoming switch to using Microsoft Teams for remote meetings.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Jones and Heesom.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee accepts the latest updated risk register and risk mitigation actions within the corporate portfolios.

60. COUNCIL PLAN 2021/22

The Chief Executive presented a report on the draft Part One of the Council Plan for 2021/22. This initial framework was built around the refreshed structure of six themes (each with priorities and sub-priorities):

- Economy
- Education and Skills
- Green Society and Environment
- Affordable and Accessible Housing

- Personal and Community Well-being
- Poverty

The Overview & Scrutiny Committees were currently reviewing the content of their respective priority and sub-priority areas prior to reporting back to Cabinet. The agreed approach was for Committees to scrutinise performance of their respective areas whilst having oversight of the entire Council Plan. The Committee was asked to consider acting as lead for the Poverty theme which captured a number of sub-priorities spanning across portfolios.

The Strategic Performance Advisor said that the themes were closely aligned with Well-being Objectives and that the Plan had been well received by Overview & Scrutiny Committees thus far. Work was underway on Part Two of the Council Plan which would be shared with Members prior to seeking Council approval by May.

Councillor Jones spoke about the importance of an effective way of measuring against targets, and understanding changes in the format from the previous year. In response to comments on consistency with national plans, the Chief Executive said that the document should only cover what the Council could deliver as the sole or lead public body. As for previous years, performance monitoring reports would show progress against milestones and actual outcomes, supported by data and Key Performance Indicators where available/possible.

The Strategic Performance Advisor explained that Part Two of the Council Plan would support identified actions by including measurements, tasks and risks.

In response to concerns raised by Councillor Collett on the Poverty theme, the Chief Executive asked that officers make reference under 'Income Poverty' to the support available such as the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS). Councillor Collett's concerns about fair rent in the private housing sector would be referred to the Community, Housing & Assets Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Roberts spoke in support of the report and the approach to dealing with cross-cutting issues.

Councillor Johnson welcomed work on empty properties and spoke about the potential to improve green spaces on Council-owned estates. The Chief Executive suggested that this be referred to the Green Council Climate Change Carbon Reduction Member Board currently being established. Councillor Thomas spoke in support of this along with wider actions to deliver environment benefits.

Councillor Banks highlighted the impact of fuel poverty initiatives to communities.

In accepting the content of the Council Plan, Councillor Jones said it was also important to consider the consistency of the framework of the Council Plan at this stage. In response to a suggestion from the Chief Executive, he proposed that the Committee lead on the Poverty theme. This was seconded by Councillor Collett.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee supports the draft Part One of the Council Plan 2021-22 prior to sharing with Cabinet in March 2021; and
- (b) That the Committee be recognised as the lead for the Poverty theme.

61. COUNCIL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2021/22

The Chief Executive invited observations on the Cabinet report and its recommendations for the County Council to set a legal and balanced budget for 2021/22 on at its meeting on 16 February 2021. Any feedback would be reported to Cabinet as part of that process.

The recommendations were to set a legal and balanced budget based on the existing Provisional Local Government Settlement, with a lower minimum budget requirement as there was no provision within the UK Government budget statement for any public sector annual pay awards. This remained an open risk on which the Council would continue to make representations for financial support. As well as protecting services, the proposed budget would provide an uplift in funding for education and schools to help with the declining position on licensed school deficits in secondary schools and additional service demands in Additional Learning Needs (ALN). The proposed Council Tax increase of 3.95% (for the County Council element) met with expectations to keep the rise to an affordable level and below 5%.

The Corporate Finance Manager provided an overview of the main changes to the budget position since last reported, taking into account the latest information on grant funding from Welsh Government (WG) as set out in the report.

In support of the recommendations, Councillor Roberts spoke about the increasing pressures and demands on Council services and the impact from the emergency situation on the Council and residents. He reminded Members of the corporate efficiencies that had been achieved and that no further efficiencies had been identified through consultation with Overview & Scrutiny committees.

Also speaking in support, Councillor Banks said that despite an additional amount set aside, pressures in Out of County Placements remained an ongoing risk on which the Council was exploring longer term solutions.

In response to comments from Councillors Shotton and Dunbobbin about the need for a review of the national local government funding formula, the Chief Executive said that representations had been made in the Council's response to the Provisional Local Government Settlement.

Councillor Jones reiterated the need for a national solution to address ongoing escalating pressures on Out of County Placements. Councillor Roberts agreed and said that the Council continued to lobby on this matter. He shared

Councillor Jones' concerns about the impact of the funding formula upon Council Tax levels. Officers responded to questions on pressures in Central and Corporate and unrealised efficiencies in the Governance portfolio. Officers confirmed that an update on grant funding would be shared with Members when the Final Local Government Settlement was received in March.

Councillor Jones proposed that the recommendations be supported and was seconded by Councillor Collett.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee supports the six recommendations which are contained in the Cabinet report.

At this point, there was a brief adjournment before the remaining items were considered.

62. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2020/21 (MONTH 9) AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING 2020/21 (MONTH 9)

The Corporate Finance Manager and Finance Manager presented a report on the revenue budget monitoring position for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) at Month 9, together with the month 9 position on the Capital Programme of 2020/21 prior to consideration by Cabinet.

Revenue Budget Monitoring

The report reflected the budget position at the close of the financial year if all things remained unchanged and took into account the latest position on Welsh Government (WG) Emergency Grant funding announcements.

On the Council Fund, the projected year-end position - without new actions to reduce cost pressures and improve the yield on efficiency planning - was an operating surplus of £0.372m, leaving a projected contingency reserve balance of £1.787m at the end of the financial year. This projection included savings achieved through the continued review of non-essential spend and vacancy management. The reasons for the favourable movement of £0.102m from month 8 were set out in section 1.04 of the report. An update was provided on the key financial risks and new emerging risks, together with the position on the emergency ring-fenced fund, achievement of planned in-year efficiencies, reserves and balances as detailed in the report.

On the HRA, a projected underspend of £1.641m would leave a closing un-earmarked balance of £3.650m, which was above the recommended guidelines on spend.

During the presentation, the Chairman asked for a pause to remind Members of the previously circulated guidance on Remote Attendance Meetings: all present should conduct themselves as formally as they would do at a meeting in County Hall.

On emerging risks, the Chief Executive and Councillor Thomas said that representations were being made to WG for a reclaim of the capital reinstatement costs from the recent severe flooding.

Following questions, officers would provide a separate response on the types of fines involved in the variance within Governance and the reason for the increase in insurance reserves. Further explanation would also be shared on the number of service users affected by incorrect charges under the Financial Assessment Regulations and the type of support services involved. A response to Councillor Heesom's request for contact details in the Planning, Environment & Economy portfolio to explain the movement in variances from Month 8 would be shared with the Committee.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Heesom and Jones.

Capital Programme

The total for the revised programme for 2020/21 was £76.962m taking into account all carry forward sums and savings transfer back to the programme. Changes during the period were mainly due to the introduction of grant funding streams and budget re-profiling. The summary position on capital expenditure at Month 9 showed a projected underspend of £4.352m on the Council Fund to be carried forward into 2021/22 and a break even position on the HRA. A summary was given of amounts to be carried forward into 2021/22 together with some additional allocations as set out in the report. The position on funding of 2020/21 approved schemes including the impact of capital receipts and savings achieved indicated a revised projected surplus of £1.267m. An update on the Capital Programme 2021/22 - 2023/24 reported that the Provisional Local Government Settlement had a positive impact of £1.406m.

In response to requests from Councillors Jones and Heesom, officers agreed to provide a more detailed breakdown on investment in county towns.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Jones and Bateman.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That having considered the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2020/21 Month 9 report, the Committee confirms that there are no specific matters to be reported to Cabinet; and
- (b) That having considered the Capital Programme 2020/21 Month 9 report, the Committee confirms that there are no specific matters to be reported to Cabinet.

63. ANNUAL AUDIT SUMMARY FOR FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

The Chief Executive presented the Annual Audit Summary for 2019/20 (formerly the Annual Improvement Report and Annual Audit Letter) which summarised the findings of audit and regulatory work previously undertaken at the Council by Audit Wales (AW). The report concluded positively that ‘the Council has met its legal duties for improvement planning and reporting’. No formal recommendations were made during the year. There were new minor proposals for improvement and proposals for development arising from three of the reviews.

The report had been well received by the Audit Committee where discussion had taken place about the description of the Council’s ‘high risk’ financial strategy which reflected its unwillingness to compromise services and reliance on the Local Government Settlement to balance the budget.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Jones and Woolley.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee is assured by the Auditor General for Wales’ Annual Audit Summary for 2019/20.

64. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10am and ended at 12.55pm)

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Chairman