

CABINET
20TH APRIL 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of Flintshire County Council held virtually via Webex on Tuesday 20th April 2021.

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chair)

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

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Governance), Chief Officer (Housing and Assets), Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy), Chief Officer (Social Services), Chief Officer (Education and Youth), Corporate Finance Manager and Team Leader – Democratic Services.

OTHER MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors: Ian Dunbar and Patrick Heesom.

APOLOGY:

Councillor Derek Butler

118. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chief Officer (Governance) advised that a personal interest would be recorded in relation to agenda item number 5 – Education & Youth Self Evaluation Report 2020/2021 – for those Members who were school governors (Councillors Banks, Jones and Mullin).

119. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th March 2021 were submitted and confirmed as a correct.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting be approved as a correct record.

120. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2020/21 (MONTH 11)

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 11. 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 was:

Council Fund

- An operating surplus of £1.912m (excluding the impact of the pay award which would be met by reserves), which was a favourable movement of £0.988m from the surplus figure of £0.924m reported at Month 10.
- The operating surplus of £1.912m equated to 0.67% of the Approved Budget, which was marginally above the target Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for a variance against budget of 0.5%.
- A projected contingency reserve balance as at 31st March 2021 of £5.689m.

The Corporate Finance Manager explained that the improved position had predominantly arisen from the confirmation of further funding from the Welsh Government (WG) Hardship Fund for Income Losses incurred during the financial year (£0.665m). In addition, WG had also adjusted the eligibility criteria for grants within Social Services (Adults and Children's services) which had resulted in a further positive movement on the outturn (£0.258m).

Previous forecasts included potential losses of income totalling £0.665m within the Planning and Environment and Governance portfolios. This was due to the fact that WG had only confirmed funding for up to 50% of those losses at that stage. As funding for the full amount had now been confirmed, the positive impact on the projected outturn had now been reflected.

Housing Revenue Account

- Net in-year revenue expenditure forecast to be £1.675m lower than budget.
- A projected closing balance as at 31st March 2021 of £3.684m.

The Corporate Finance Manager provided details on the projected position, the projected position by portfolio, significant movements from Month 9, open risks, new emerging risks, achievements of planned in-year efficiencies, carry forward requests and reserves and balances.

He explained that as with all Councils, the pandemic had significantly impacted on Council Tax collection. At this stage Council Tax income was 1% below target which equated to £1.0m. Income was recovering slower than anticipated, but was expected to recover over time now that the recovery processes had resumed in full and when agreed payment deferrals were settled.

Councillor Roberts thanked all colleagues across the authority who continued to work hard to ensure that costs were kept to a minimum.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the overall report and the projected Council Fund contingency sum as at 31st March 2021 be noted;

- (b) That the projected final level of balances on the Housing Revenue Account be noted; and
- (c) That the carry forward requested included in the report be approved.

121. EDUCATION AND YOUTH SELF EVALUATION REPORT 2020/2021

Councillor Roberts introduced the report and explained that the council undertook an annual self-evaluation of its education services. Normally it was written against the framework for the inspections of Local Government Education Services published by Estyn but as the framework for the inspections of Local Government Education Services published by Estyn was suspended as a result of Covid-19, the report was presented in a different format with each service area focusing on its work over the last 12 months and how it had responded and adapted to the ongoing health emergency.

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) explained that each section of the report provided an overview of the service area, how it had adapted and its ongoing development priorities which would be reflected in the Council Plan and the Portfolio Business Plan for 2021/22. Where progress had been possible against the Estyn recommendations following the 2019 inspection of Education Services in Flintshire, those were reflected in each service report.

Estyn had maintained regular contact with schools and education officers despite all formal inspection frameworks for schools and local authority education services remaining suspended. Welsh Government (WG) commissioned Estyn to undertake a review of the work of local authorities in supporting their learning communities in schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) during the period March to October 2020. The feedback report was based on virtual meetings with Education Officers, the Cabinet Member for Education, the Chair of Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a sample of headteachers in schools and PRUs.

The feedback report was appended to the Cabinet report and outlined the swift and effective response of the Council to support children and schools from the outset of the pandemic. It acknowledged the strong leadership from the Council's Emergency Response Team and the Education Portfolio. It highlighted the strength of the shared collaborative approach across the Council and with external partners, e.g. GwE, to effectively adapt services to meet the needs of children, young people and their families during the national emergency. It also noted the thorough review of the Council's response through the work of the Education, Youth and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The report was very positive and did not identify any recommendations for further improvement.

Councillor Roberts thanked the Chief Officer and her team, and the Integrated Transport Unit, for the work that had been undertaken over the past year against the significant challenges they had been faced with. All Members echoed those

comments, and also paid tribute to the teaching and support staff who had continued to provide face to face education for vulnerable children and children of key workers.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the content of the self-evaluation report be noted; and
- (b) That the positive thematic report undertaken by Estyn on the work of the education services in Flintshire to support children and young people during the pandemic be noted.

122. TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION – PROPERTY INTERVENTION

The Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) introduced the report and explained that town centres faced escalating economic challenges and the current patterns of property ownership hampered attempts to help them to adapt.

The report acted as the first stage in the process of developing an ambitious but deliverable programme of interventions to support the reinvention and regeneration of town centres in Flintshire.

The intention of the programme was to:

- Reduce the number of long-term empty properties in town centres;
- Reduce the overall quantum of retail provision in town centres by repurposing units on the fringes;
- Find more sustainable uses for retail units and increase community enterprises on the High Streets;
- Plan to repurpose less viable shopping centres;
- Develop starter units for new retail enterprises in town centres;
- Encourage private sector investment in town centre properties; and
- Co-ordinate and support other Flintshire County Council portfolio interventions to maximise the regenerative effects of investment and resource.

Details of the projects within the programme and what they would include were outlined in the report. Also outlined in the report were details of the next steps that had been identified.

The Chief Executive explained that the region was due to switch from response to recovery due to the positive position it was in, in managing the pandemic. One of the six themes of recovery was town centre regeneration and evidence would be provided to governments when seeking funding.

In response to a question from Councillor Bithell, the Chief Officer explained that the local authority did have the power to intervene in empty properties, with the assistance of the support package from Welsh Government (WG) outlining enforcement powers, with some of the worst examples of properties not being looked after, to bring them back into good use in the interests of the local community and town centres.

Councillor Thomas spoke about positive initiatives that would help town centres, citing the repair café in Buckley and pop-up shops. The Chief Officer explained that this proposal was taking those steps one stage further, by taking a property and repurposing it.

In response to a question from Councillor Mullin, the Chief Officer explained that work would be done in partnership with Town Centre Managers and Town Councils.

Councillor Jones stressed the importance of people with learning and physical disabilities, mental health and dementia, being considered as part of the process. The Chief Officer said a report on specific town centres was being prepared and he would ensure those points were included.

RESOLVED:

That the role of the Council in regenerating town centres through property-focussed interventions be agreed.

123. 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

- **Street Works Fees and Charges for 2021/22**
The fees and charges levied for various licenses and applications issued within Street Works have been reviewed and the proposed charges for 2021/22 are set out in the report.
- **Proposal to Construct Sinusoidal Humps and Flat Top Raised Tables / Junctions on King George Street, Mostyn Street, Plymouth Street and Woodland Street, Shotton**
To advise of the objection received following the advertisement of the Proposal to Construct Sinusoidal Humps and Flat Top Raised Tables / Junctions on King George Street, Mostyn Street, Plymouth Street and Woodland Street, Shotton.

Housing and Assets

- **Council Rent – Application to Write Off Tenancy Arrears**
Financial Procedure Rules (section 5.2) stipulates that individual and bad and irrecoverable debts in excess of £5,000 are considered for write off in conjunction with the relevant Cabinet Member. The decision to write off in respect of one tenant who is subject to a Debt Relief Order (DRO). Rent arrears of £6,210.08 are included in the DRO which are now irrecoverable as a result of the award of the DRO.

**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).

124. GRAPHIC DESIGN AND PRINT FRAMEWORK

Councillor Mullin introduced the report which provided details of the current shared print and design procurement framework Flintshire shared with Denbighshire.

The framework was last updated in 2017 and was reviewed in 2020 when a Dynamic Purchasing System was proposed. The current framework, whilst fit for purpose, needed to have greater flexibility in terms of having more choice of providers to ensure value for money.

RESOLVED:

That the new Dynamic Purchasing System framework be approved.

125. APPROVAL OF COSTS FOR NEW HOUSING SCHEME AT DUKE STREET, FLINT

Councillor Hughes introduced the report which sought approval to develop two new Social Rent homes at Duke Street, Flint.

The report and appendices provided detailed information on the proposed scheme, including location, proposed property types, design, layout and projected build costs.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the development of two new Social Rent homes at Duke Street, Flint, be approved; and
- (b) That the required prudential borrowing (as outlined in the report) (subject to final approval and verification) to fund the proposed development at Duke Street, Flint, be approved.

126. 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 11.20 a.m.)

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Chair