

RECOVERY COMMITTEE
5 AUGUST 2021

Minutes of the remote attendance meeting of the Recovery Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Thursday, 5 August 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Richard Jones (Chairman)

Councillors: Mike Allport, Marion Bateman, Clive Carver, Geoff Collett, Paul Cunningham, David Healey, Patrick Heesom, Joe Johnson, Hilary McGuill, Vicky Perfect, and Kevin Rush

APOLOGIES: Councillor Helen Brown

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Ian Roberts - Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Billy Mullin – Cabinet Member for Corporate Management & Assets, Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy), Chief Officer (Education & Youth), Chief Officer (Housing & Assets), Regulatory Service Manager, Strategic Performance Advisor, Revenues Manager, Housing & Assets Senior Manager, Housing & Prevention Senior Manager, Business Manager – Housing & Assets, Benefits Manager, Head of Democratic Services, Environment & Social Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator, and Democratic Services Officer.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

23. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2021 were submitted. The minutes were moved as an accurate record by Councillor Joe Johnson and seconded by Councillor Marion Bateman.

Matters arising

Page 9, the Chairman asked if a response had been received regarding risk CW06. The facilitator advised that the information would be provided as soon as possible.

RESOLVED

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

24. STREETSCENE AND TRANSPORTATION PORTFOLIO RECOVERY BUSINESS PLAN

The Regulatory Service Manager presented the Recovery Business Plan for the Streetscene and Transportation portfolio. She reported on the recovery objectives concerning service delivery as detailed in the report, and advised that all services were now fully operational. She also gave an overview of the recovery risks as

detailed in the report and said that there were currently 26 risks which were being actively monitored (3 red, 13 amber, 3 yellow, 7 green and 14 closed).

Councillor Marion Bateman raised a concern regarding the postponement and prioritising of schemes scheduled under the highway construction works. The Regulatory Services Manager said she would seek further information on a specific scheme raised by Councillor Bateman following the meeting.

Councillor Glyn Banks paid tribute to officers and employees in the Streetscene and Transportation service for their work and resilience throughout the ongoing challenges of the pandemic.

Councillor David Healey commented on the impact of climate change on resources and the recovery of services.

In response to the comments and concerns made by Councillors Marion Bateman and David Healey, the Chairman suggested that the matters raised could be referred to the Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The Chief Executive explained that the compounded impact of supply chain delays on the capital programmes (including all schemes) would be considered. He also said that the resources and commitment to climate change and flooding was not affected by recovery work and flood prevention and response capacity was being enhanced for next year.

The Regulatory Services Manager responded to the questions raised by Councillor Hilary McGuill concerning recording of data on the vaccination and self-isolation of front-line employees. She advised that self-isolation of employees was recorded monthly to monitor and assess the impact of the pandemic on forward planning. The Chief Executive explained that the Council was not allowed to hold a record of vaccination of employees as this was private data which belonged to the individual. In response to Councillor McGuill's comments he suggested that a report on workforce impacts across the Council be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

Referring to the concerns expressed by Councillor David Healey around the impact of climate change, and specifically on the problem of local flooding, Councillor Ian Roberts suggested that a meeting be held with Welsh Water to consider their modelling programmes. Councillor Roberts took the opportunity to thank all employees in the Streetscene and Transportation Service for their sterling work during the pandemic.

In response to the comments made by Councillor Patrick Heesom the Regulatory Services Manager agreed to discuss the issues raised regarding transport with Councillor Heesom with a view to resolving local issues.

The Chairman commented on the need for grass cutting on verges and public footpaths along highways and said this was causing complaints to be made in some areas by the general public. Councillor Paul Cunningham also expressed concerns around overhanging hedges/branches on public footpaths.

The Regulatory Services Manager gave reassurance that full service delivery was being resumed within the constraints of the policies and schedules in place prior to Covid-19.

Councillor Marion Bateman proposed that the impact of the pandemic on the prioritisation of highway schemes be referred to the Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Following a request from Councillor Ian Roberts, the Regulatory Services Manager agreed to provide costings for the purchase/hire of additional gulley cleansers plus the staffing costs for 12 months operation and the implication on Council Tax.

The Chairman suggested that the specific matters raised on the impact of the pandemic on highway schemes, gulley cleansing, grass cutting, and flooding be referred to the Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The recommendation in the report was moved by Councillor Paul Cunningham and seconded by Councillor Hilary McGill.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Streetscene & Transportation Portfolio Recovery Business Plan content be noted;
- (b) That the Committee is assured by the Streetscene & Transportation Portfolio Recovery Business Plan;
- (c) That the following be referred to the Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee:-
 - impact of the pandemic on prioritising highway schemes, gulley emptying, grass cutting, and flooding.
- (d) That the following be referred to the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee:-
 - a report on the impact of self-isolation on the workforce be submitted to the next meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny committee in September.
 - the impact of the pandemic, supply chain delays, and inflation on the capital programme be considered by the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee

25. HOUSING AND ASSETS PORTFOLIO RECOVERY BUSINESS PLAN

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) presented the Recovery Business Plan for the Housing and Assets portfolio. He advised that there were 47 current risks (6

red, 23 amber, 5 yellow, 9 green, 4 closed) and reported on the main risk areas which were rental income, homelessness, and raw material supplies.

The Chairman asked the Chief Officer for an update on the voids position. The Chief Officer advised there were currently in the order of 200 voids in the Councils housing stock which needed to be brought back into use. He explained that the current shortage of building supplies, materials, and labour, and cost increases due to the pandemic and Brexit was likely to have an impact on future decisions to commit to capital schemes and the quick turnaround of voids. Commenting on the Councils industrial and commercial estates he noted that there were very few which were void and that demand was generally high across all tenures.

In response to the further comments by the Chairman on rental income the Chief Officer advised that the projected void loss for its housing stock was 2% modelled into the business plan. He explained this was currently running at a higher level which impacted on the Housing service which was funded exclusively by rental income.

The Chairman suggested that the impact of the increase in void properties and the issue of non-payment of rent on the financial position of the portfolio be referred to the Community & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee. This was agreed by the Committee.

The recommendations in the report were moved by Councillor David Healey and seconded by Councillor Patrick Heesom.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Housing & Transportation Portfolio Recovery Business Plan content be noted;
- (b) That the Committee is assured by the Housing and Assets Portfolio Recovery Business Plan;
- (c) That the following be referred to the Community, Housing & Assets Overview & Scrutiny Committee:-
 - the impact of the increase in void properties and non-payment of rent on the financial position of the portfolio.

26. POVERTY AND VULNERABILITY RECOVERY

The Benefits Manager presented a report to provide an update on community recovery on the theme of poverty. She provided background information and advised that as part of the pandemic response work a tactical group had been developed to consider the impacts of poverty and vulnerability on the residents of Flintshire. She reported on the key considerations as detailed in the report and referred to the work of the tactical group, successful outcomes, the Covid support hub, isolation payments, and tenancy hardship grant.

Councillor Marion Bateman referred to the recent press/media coverage concerning items returned to Amazon and suggested that contact be made with Amazon's distribution warehouse on Deeside Industrial Park which may be able to offer support to people in poverty. The Benefits Manager agreed to look into this.

That Members support the current work programme established to support and protect residents who are vulnerable or experiencing poverty as part of community recovery.

Councillor Vicky Perfect commended the Benefits Manager and her team on the delivery of 46,800 meals to shielded or vulnerable households during the pandemic. She also commented on the success on the Fit, Fed and Read sessions at Flint Castle which were well received and attended.

In response to a question from the Chairman concerning the re-defining of services, the Benefits Manager explained that this meant working in greater collaboration with partnership organisations. Responding to the further question from the Chairman on support for people in rent arrears, the Benefits Manager reported on the Discretionary Housing Payment for people in receipt of benefits, and the Hardship Grant which provided support to tenants in private rented accommodation.

It was agreed that a link to the private sector rent arrears support scheme would be circulated to Members of the Committee.

In response to Councillor Hilary McGuill's comments around enabling people who had been supported during the pandemic to regain their independence, the Benefits Manager explained that all the programmes were designed, in collaboration with partner organisations, to support people during the Covid-19 crisis and be tapered off when they could support themselves.

The recommendation in the report was moved by Councillor Paul Cunningham and seconded by Councillor Joe Johnson.

RESOLVED:

That Members support the current work programme established to support and protect residents who are vulnerable or experiencing poverty as part of community recovery.

27. REGIONAL RECOVERY UPDATE

The Chief Executive gave a verbal update on work at a regional level and referred to the main issues of vaccinations and social care capacity.

The Chief Executive advised that on current projections within the next two weeks, based on people vaccinated and people booked in for vaccination within the region, 85% of the North Wales population would be double vaccinated. The Welsh Minister had set a target of 80% across Wales to proceed to alert level

zero. The Chief Executive also advised that 75% of the 18-39 age group had been vaccinated. Vaccination drop-in centres continued to be available and work was progressing on the booster programme which could be live in North Wales from beginning of September.

Referring to social care capacity the Chief Executive explained that shortfalls were becoming apparent in workforce availability for social care. He explained that this was due to a number of reasons and commented that it impacted on the ability to keep up with demand in domiciliary care and said some packages were being reduced as a result, and that there was also concern around recruitment and retention in the independent sector for residential care which impacted on health and delayed discharges. He advised that the situation was replicated in other parts of Wales and the United Kingdom and solutions were being considered..

In response to a question from the Chairman the Chief Executive advised that Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) would contact people direct to inform of the booster programme.

In response to the concerns expressed by Councillor Hilary McGuill around the vaccination of 16-17 year olds before the start of the academic year, the Chief Executive advised that this age group would be added to the general programme of vaccinations and work would begin with BCUHB to implement as speedily and practical as possible.

Councillor Marion Bateman expressed praise for how the vaccination programme had been delivered. She commented on level zero and asked when this would be implemented. The Chief Executive said that an announcement was expected from the First Minister tomorrow and it was expected to be in August.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee is assured by the update provided by the Chief Executive

28. UPDATE ON THE PANDEMIC/ENDEMIC POSITION AND FORECASTING

The Chief Executive gave a verbal update on the pandemic/endemic position and forecasting. He advised that detailed risk assessments were being undertaken on the Council's buildings in County Hall, Ewloe, Flint, and Alltami with a view to the workforce returning to offices in the future. He explained that hybrid models of working were being considered and further detail would be shared with Members during the coming months.

The Chief Executive provided explanation on the current incidents ratings in Flintshire which he said was reducing. He also referred to the current position on testing and commented that less people were being tested and therefore there were less known cases of Covid. He said the positivity rate in Flintshire was 13.1% (13 out of 100 tested have a positive result). The Health service was under increasing pressure due to service demands and the resumption of services. In summary the Chief Executive outlined the forecast for the next few months.

In response to a question from Councillor Hilary McGuill around employee tests for Covid-19, the Chief Executive explained that the Council could not enforce employees to undertake regular testing. However, in some services there was a need for employees to take frequent tests due to the nature of their work and cited Social Care services as an example. He commented on the mobile drop-in testing centres at County Hall and Alltami for employees and the general public and said take-up and feedback had been positive. If any employee tested positive or had been informed they had been in contact with someone tested positive they were required to follow Test, Trace, and Protect guidance on self-isolation.

In response to a further question from Councillor McGuill on testing for teaching and ancillary staff in schools, the Chief Executive explained that general guidance had been received on the reopening of schools from the First Minister but the details on testing was still awaited.

29. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Chief Executive commented on the following reports to be presented to the next meeting of the Committee on 9 September.

- Corporate Recovery Objectives;
- Corporate Recovery Risk Profile;
- risk and issues within portfolios;
- allocation of risks to Committees
- Regional Recovery Update
- Community Recovery Update
- Forward Work Programme
- overall workforce issues and risks in relation to the opening of schools in September and social care capacity
- long Covid to be included in workforce report to the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee

This was moved by Councillor Hilary McGuill and seconded by the Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That the agenda items for the next meeting on 9 September 2021 be agreed.

30. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS

There were one member of the press in attendance.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and finished at 12.51 pm

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Chairman