

**CABINET**  
**19<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2021**

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of Flintshire County Council held virtually via Zoom on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

**PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chair)**

Councillors: Glyn Banks, Chris Bithell, Dave Hughes, Paul Johnson, Christine Jones, and Billy Mullin.

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Governance), Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation), Chief Officer (Housing and Assets), Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy), Chief Officer (Education and Youth), Corporate Finance Manager, Revenues and Procurement Manager, Senior Manager Human Resources and Organisational Development, and Team Leader – Democratic Services.

**APOLOGY:**

Councillor Derek Butler

**OTHER MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Councillor Patrick Heesom.

Councillor Roberts took the opportunity to pay tribute to the Chief Executive who was leaving the authority the following week after 14 years of loyal service. His contributions to the Council had been immense and he had led the Council through a number of difficult times due to 10 years of austerity and challenging settlements. He had also had a huge presence on a national level including during elections. He thanked him for his years of dedicated service to Flintshire County Council and wished him well for the future.

All Cabinet Members also paid tribute to the Chief Executive who had always been loyal, approachable, pleasant, personable, helpful, supportive and kind.

**47. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Banks declared a personal and prejudicial interest in agenda item number 13: Procurement of Voids Contractor Framework.

**48. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2021 were submitted and confirmed as a correct.

**RESOLVED:**

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

**49. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY / BUDGET 2022/23 – STAGE 2 – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY RESPONSES**

Councillor Johnson introduced the report and explained that during September and October the Overview and Scrutiny Committees reviewed the costs pressures, and the opportunities for cost control and efficiency, under their respective terms of reference.

The sequence of meetings and the resolutions from each were outlined in the report with all of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees supporting the portfolio cost pressures with no further cost efficiency areas being explored further.

The Chief Executive said all Members had given confidence to the process undertaken. The Welsh Local Government Association had developed their evidential base for need which had been submitted to Welsh Government (WG) the previous week.

The Corporate Finance Manager added that during each of the consultations, Members were reminded of the announcement on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2021 that, from April 2022, a new health and social care tax would be introduced across the UK to fund reforms to the care sector and NHS funding in England. The tax would begin as a 1.25% increase in National Insurance paid by employees, the self-employed and by employers. There would be 'consequential' payments to WG as a result of that decision. However, as a major employer, it would also have a significant impact on the council's budget.

Councillor Roberts thanked all Members who had taken part in the budget process which demonstrated that there were no further efficiencies to be found.

**RESOLVED:**

That the result of the consultation on the 2022/2023 budget proposals from the Overview and Scrutiny function be received.

**50. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020/21**

Councillor Mullin introduced the report which reviewed progress against the Council Priorities as detailed in the Flintshire County Council Reporting Measures 2020/21.

2020/21 had been an exceptional year for all organisations as they had to cope with the threats and challenges of a global pandemic. Performance against the Council Plan measures was positive overall, with 67% of the performance indicators meeting or exceeding target for the year, with 48% showing improvement or remaining stable.

The Chief Executive explained that the Annual Performance Report must be published by 31<sup>st</sup> October and was being submitted to Council for approval later that day.

## **RESOLVED:**

That the 2020/2021 Annual Performance Report be recommended to Council for adoption.

### **51. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2021/22 (MONTH 5)**

Councillor Johnson introduced the report which provided the latest detailed revenue budget monitoring position in 2021/22 for the Council Fund and the Housing Revenue Account for the financial year, and presented the position, based on actual income and expenditure, as at Month 5.

The report projected how the budget would stand at the close of the financial year, without new actions to reduce cost pressures and/or improve the financial return on efficiency planning and cost control, which was:

#### **Council Fund**

- An operating surplus of (£0.182m) (excluding the impact of the pay award which would be met from reserves), which was a favourable movement of £0.921 from the deficit figure of £0.739m reported at Month 4
- A projected contingency reserve balance as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 of £5.875m

#### **Housing Revenue Account**

- Net in-year revenue expenditure forecast to be £0.633m higher than budget
- A projected closing balance as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 of £3.839m

The Corporate Finance Manager explained that the report also detailed the position by portfolio; significant variances that month; achievement of planned in-year efficiencies; emergency funding; unearmarked reserves and earmarked reserves.

On emergency funding, he explained that the Hardship Fund was initially allocated £206.6m to support local government for the first six months of 2021-22 in the Welsh Government Final Budget 2021-22. In addition £23.3m was allocated to support free school meals during the school holidays. A further £97.5m had subsequently been allocated until the end of the financial year based on spend patterns to date, any changes to policy approaches and the current alert level.

The Principles and Guidance for the Hardship Fund had been revised from 1<sup>st</sup> October with changes impacting on eligibility for various service areas including schools costs, additional waste tonnages (reduced by 50%) and vehicle costs due to social distancing being removed. Costs for additional cover where staff were off sick due to COVID-19 or self-isolating were eligible until October, pending further review. The potential significant impacts of that would be reflected in future reports although where able mitigating actions would be put in place.

## **RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the report and estimated financial impact on the 2021/22 budget be noted;

- (b) That the change of use for a Planning, Environment and Economy service balance be approved; and
- (c) That the release of £0.585m of unused balances and reserves back to the general reserve be approved.

**52. CONSULTATION ON THE REMOVAL OF ELIGIBLE CARE LEAVERS' LIABILITY FOR PAYMENT OF COUNCIL TAX**

Councillor Jones introduced the report and explained that care leavers aged 24 or under subject to Council Tax and residing in Wales were usually exempt from Council Tax since regulations were first introduced by Welsh Government from April 2019.

Welsh Government were consulting on proposals to remove the risk of care leavers needing to pay Council Tax in joint and several liability cases in potential circumstances where another person in the household, who was not exempt from Council Tax, failed to pay their Council Tax.

Whilst such cases were not common, to mitigate the risk to care leavers being held jointly and severally liable for the Council Tax bill on their home, it was proposed that regulations were amended to provide an exemption for care leavers from April 2022.

The additional provisions as set out in the consultation would ensure that care leavers were not personally held liable for Council Tax in circumstances where the care leaver was joint or severally liable for Council Tax as a result of living with a spouse or partner, or in households with more than one adult.

The Chief Officer (Social Services) welcomed the proposals which strengthened the support the authority provided to care leavers.

**RESOLVED:**

That the policy intentions as set out in the Welsh Government consultation of removing care leavers aged 24 or under from joint and several liability for Council Tax be supported.

**53. ENDING OF THE UNIVERSAL CREDIT UPLIFT**

Councillor Mullin introduced the report and explained that on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the Government announced the equivalent of a £20 per week increase to the Universal Credit (UC) standard allowance basic element worth up to £1,040 for one year for those facing the most financial disruption as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It applied to all new and existing UC claimants.

The uplift officially ended on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021 and the report provided high level information in relation to residents in Flintshire who would be affected by the change, and highlighted the support that the Council provided.

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) explained that if any residents found themselves in financial difficulty they could contact the Council's Welfare Team who would help to support them and signpost them to other agencies who could offer assistance.

Councillor Roberts said the Notice of Motion on the Council agenda for later that day on the removal of the Universal Credit top up had been withdrawn following the awful events at the weekend and the sad death of Sir David Amess.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report and the negative impacts on those in Flintshire's communities be noted.

**54. HOUSING RENT INCOME – AUDIT WALES**

Councillor Hughes introduced the report which provided an operational update following the publication of a recent Audit Wales report on Housing Rent Income. The Audit Wales review had acknowledged the proactive measures already taken by the Council in supporting tenants and stabilising rent collections during a period of unprecedented change, especially with the rollout of Universal Credit (UC) and the recent impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) explained that the review had concluded that Council had, by March 2020, successfully stopped the increase in Council tenant rent arrears. In summary, the Audit Wales report set out two recommendations to collect additional performance measures to better understand the overall income and rent arrears performance and to build on the improvements already made. The two additional indicators being proposed were:

- Total rent collected during the year from both former and current tenants; and the amount written off during the financial year in unpaid rents; and
- The collection of more comprehensive datasets including strengthening integrated tenant engagement arrangements to better understand the needs and experiences of tenants and to inform future housing service delivery

The Housing Service continued to develop strategies to increase collections and in respect of the collection of former tenant arrears, the service had recently deployed an additional software module specifically targeted at former tenant arrears. The software deployed existing analytical and predictive technologies using the Mobysoft 'Rent Sense' solution to quickly identify former tenants who were at risk of not making repayments on time. The deployment of new software, along with enhanced reporting tools, would enable officers to make further improvements in the collection process and to also provide additional reporting information to Cabinet and to Scrutiny Committee on former tenant arrears, as well as better visual information on write off levels.

In addition to that, and in respect of the collation of data to capture tenants' feedback and to better understand the needs of tenants, the housing service was proposing to send out a detailed questionnaire to solicit customer feedback which would assist and support future models of service delivery.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the proposals for improvement be adopted.

## **55. EXERCISE OF DELEGATED POWERS**

An information item on the actions taken under delegated powers was submitted. The actions were as set out below:-

### **Housing and Assets**

- **Bagillt Bowling Green, Highfield Road, Bagillt CH6 6BW**  
Community Asset Transfer (CAT) of the premises known as Bagillt Bowling Green, Highfield Road, Bagillt: area to be transferred is shown edged red on the plan.

### **Revenues**

- **Business Rates Write Offs**  
Financial Procedure Rules requires the Corporate Finance Manager and the Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets to write off debts between £5k and £25k. There is an outstanding Business Rates debt of £13,419.34 for West Flintshire Community Enterprises which has accumulated from 2018/19 to 2020/21, for an empty property at 49-51 High Street, Holywell. The debt is now deemed irrecoverable and a write off is considered necessary as the company is no longer trading.
- **Business Rates Write Offs**  
The Corporate Finance Manager and the Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets are authorised to write off debts between £5k and £25k. Two Business Rate debts totalling £21,474.96 are deemed to be irrecoverable and are subject to write off:
  - Mr A D Evans T/A Ultra Tiles Ltd, formerly of 4-6 Chester Street, Flint, is no longer trading and owed £15,230.46
  - Ginger Monkey Play Café and Boutique Ltd, formerly of 16 Marley Way, Saltney, is no longer trading since the company entered into liquidation on 20/08/20 and owed £6,244.50

### **Corporate Debt**

- **Corporate Debt Write Offs**  
Financial Procedure Rules requires the Corporate Finance Manager and the Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets to write off debts between £5k and £25k. The write off totalling £5,513.82 is for outstanding commercial rent due to the Council. The owner of KWT Business Accounting

Services passed away in March 2021. As there were no funds remaining in the deceased's estate, the commercial rent is now irrecoverable.

### **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 and 15 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

#### **56. NEWYDD CATERING AND CLEANING LIMITED: SERVICES CONCESSION AGREEMENT EXTENSION**

Councillor Mullin introduced the report the purpose of which was to propose a new/extended Services Concession Agreement from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (a) That Cabinet agrees to enter into a new/extended Services Concession Agreement with NEWydd Catering and Cleaning Limited from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024; and
- (b) That authority be granted to the Chief Executive to make variations to the terms of the current agreement and the level of the management fee as set out in the report, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets.

#### **57. SOCIAL SERVICES WORKFORCE – CHILD CARE SOCIAL WORKERS**

Councillor Jones introduced the report which highlighted the urgent need to consider alternative employment solutions to ensure the Council had sufficient capacity and resilience to effectively support children and families.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That a time-limited market pay supplement for level 3 child care social workers be approved from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2021.

**58. PROCUREMENT OF VOIDS CONTRACTOR FRAMEWORK**

Councillor Hughes introduced the report which sought approval to procure a number of contractors through a framework agreement to deliver major void works thus ensuring that the service could deliver on its targets for empty property management and ensure void properties were re-let as efficiently and effectively as possible.

**RESOLVED:**

That the procurement of a select number of contractors through a framework agreement in order to complete major void works as efficiently and effectively as possible be approved.

**59. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE**

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

(The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and ended at 11.12 a.m.)

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**Chair**