

**CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**11 NOVEMBER 2021**

Minutes of the meeting of Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held remotely on Thursday, 11 November 2021

**PRESENT: Councillor Clive Carver (Chairman)**

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Sean Bibby, Geoff Collett, Mared Eastwood, Patrick Heesom, Richard Jones, Richard Lloyd, Kevin Rush, Paul Shotton, and Arnold Woolley

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors: Billy Mullin - Deputy Leader (Governance) and Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets, and Andy Williams

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Colin Legg attended as an observer

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Councillor Ian Roberts - Leader and Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Paul Johnson - Cabinet Member for Finance, Social Value & Procurement, Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Governance), Corporate Finance Manager, Revenues & Procurement Manager, Strategic Finance Managers and Principal Accountant

For minute number 46

Dawn Docx, Chief Fire Officer of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Head of Democratic Services and Democratic Services Officer

**44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Paul Shotton declared a personal interest on agenda item 4 as a member of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority.

**45. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2021 were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Shotton and Arnold Woolley.

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

**46. NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE - A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE FROM THE NEW CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

The newly appointed Chief Fire Officer, Dawn Docx, was in attendance to give a presentation on her perspective of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service. The presentation covered:

- Aims
- Observations
- Key risks
- Future of the Service
- Future focus - Community resilience
- People missing from home
- Forcing entry
- Community Assistance Team (CAT)

The presentation highlighted the challenges in the recruitment and training of retained firefighters, the impact from the pandemic and rising demands to respond to extreme weather incidents such as wildfires and flooding. The Chief Fire officer asked Members to promote the role of the retained firefighter within their communities in order to assist the recruitment campaign to fill outstanding vacancies. Continued partnership working would help to support the priority on community resilience.

Councillor Ian Roberts expressed his gratitude for the work undertaken by the Fire and Rescue Service, in particular the continued reassurance given to residents of the high-rise flats in Flint following the Grenfell Tower fire. In turn, the Chief Fire Officer welcomed partnership working with the Council on the installation of sprinkler systems in those buildings.

The Chief Executive spoke about regular positive engagement with the Service and thanked the Chief Fire Officer and her team for their work.

In welcoming the review of the Service, Councillor Paul Shotton referred to the benefits of the Community Assistance Team and the 'Phoenix' initiative for young people. In response to comments, the Chief Fire Office said that prevention work remained a priority for the Service.

Councillor Paul Johnson took the opportunity to pay tribute to the way in which Fire Officers had dealt with a serious incident in his ward earlier in the year.

Councillor Richard Jones said that the importance of the Fire & Rescue Service was widely acknowledged. In response to a question on fire risk assessments, the Chief Fire Officer welcomed new responsibilities to assess the suitability of new building plans.

Following questions by the Chairman and Councillor Richard Lloyd, the Chief Fire Officer provided information on the Community Assistance Team and the recruitment of firefighters.

On behalf of Members, the Chairman thanked the Chief Fire Officer for her attendance and presentation. This was formally proposed by Councillor Richard Jones and seconded by the Chairman.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Chief Fire Officer be thanked for her attendance and her presentation.

#### **47. ACTION TRACKING**

In presenting the update report on progress with actions arising from previous meetings, the Head of Democratic Services read out the response from Jo Whitehead, Chief Executive of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) on joint-funded care packages, which had been circulated to the Committee.

Councillor Richard Jones reminded Members that concerns about disparity in the appeals process for disputed joint-funded care packages with the Health Board had arisen following a loss of £0.133m in funding reported at the March meeting. He said that the outstanding figure of £0.937m reported in July was a significant debt owed to the Council which impacted upon the budget position.

In acknowledging the concerns, the Chief Executive welcomed the fact that the newly appointed Chief Executive of BCUHB had raised the matter herself in recognising the need for change. The Chief Executive assured Members that he would continue to follow this up through regular contact with BCUHB to ensure that the Council had a right of reply on appeals. He also advised that the Chief Officer (Social Services) and his team were continuing to work to reduce the level of debt arising from joint-funded care packages.

On further discussion, Councillor Jones proposed that a letter be sent to BCUHB, signed by the Chairs of both this Committee and the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee in appreciation of the response and to await progress on the appeals process. This was seconded by Councillor Geoff Collett.

It was noted that a report on the amounts lost to joint-funded care packages, as requested previously, was scheduled for the December meeting.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Committee notes the progress which has been made; and
- (b) That a joint letter be sent to the Chief Executive of the Health Board signed by the Chairs of this Committee and the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee to (i) express appreciation of the response, and (ii) reinforce concerns about the appeals process for disputed funded cases and the current debt level.

#### **48. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

In presenting the updated forward work programme for consideration, the Head of Democratic Services advised that a report on the People Strategy and Return to Work Protocol would be added to the December meeting.

On that basis, the recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Shotton and Mared Eastwood.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be approved, as varied at the meeting; 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.

**49. HOUSING RENT INCOME - AUDIT WALES**

The Chief Executive introduced a report on the findings of an Audit Wales report on housing rent income. This was a positive report which reflected on the work undertaken by the Council in supporting tenants and stabilising rent arrears during a period of unprecedented change.

The Revenues & Procurement Manager provided background to the review which had been commissioned by the Council due to the strategic risks arising from increasing rent arrears and changes to Universal Credit. The report by Audit Wales acknowledged the significant work undertaken across the Housing service to stabilise the position by March 2020 and sought to further improve existing arrangements through two minor recommendations on the collection of additional data and performance reporting. Changes introduced in managing complex cases were already proving effective in targeting support and preventing escalation. Further work was also being done to better understand the needs of tenants and to strengthen management information on write-off levels and analysis on former tenant arrears.

In response to a question from Councillor Paul Shotton, officers spoke about the approach to engaging with tenants at risk of falling into arrears and the collective responsibility of teams in Revenues and Housing to work with tenants to create sustainable tenancies.

In response to a question from Councillor Richard Lloyd, clarification was given on contractual arrangements with water companies.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Richard Jones and Richard Lloyd.

**RESOLVED:**

That the proposals for improvement, as set out within the report, be adopted.

**50. CAPITAL STRATEGY INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2022/23 - 2024/25**

The Corporate Finance Manager presented the updated Capital Strategy prior to submission to Cabinet. The Strategy was an overarching document which brought together various strategies and policies, split into a number of sections incorporating details of the Council's Prudential Indicators for 2022/23 - 2024/25.

There were no significant changes to the Strategy since the previous year. A summary of the key Prudential Indicators included estimated planned capital expenditure, capital financing and the impact on Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). The expected minor increase in the proportion of financing costs to net revenue stream would continue to be monitored.

Councillor Richard Jones was informed that the projected increase in MRP was mainly due to policy changes and new borrowing in the future Capital Programme. On long-term debt, the Treasury Management report submitted to the Governance & Audit Committee would be made available to all Members.

On commercial activities, the Chief Executive explained the approach to managing down the Council's agricultural portfolio and work to review industrial units to meet demand and legislative changes.

Councillor Paul Johnson reflected on some of the changes during the year and thanked officers for the report.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Geoff Collett and Mared Eastwood.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Committee recommends the Capital Strategy to Cabinet; and
- (b) That the Committee recommends to Cabinet:-
  - The Prudential Indicators for 2022/23 - 2024/25 as detailed within Tables 1, and 4-7 of the Capital Strategy, and
  - Delegated authority for the Corporate Finance Manager to effect movements between the separately agreed limits within the authorised limit for external debt and the operational boundary for external debt (Table 6 of the Capital Strategy).

**51. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2022/23 - 2024/25**

The Corporate Finance Manager presented a report on the proposed Capital Programme 2022/23 - 2024/25 which set out investment in assets for the long term to enable the delivery of high quality and value for money public services split between three sections: Statutory/Regulatory, Retained Assets and Investment.

A detailed presentation covered the following:

- Structure - Council Fund Capital Programme
- Current Programme 2021/22 - 2023/24
- Projected Funding 2022/23 - 2024/25

- Proposed allocations - Statutory/Regulatory, Retained Assets and Investment
- Summary generally funded Programme
- Specifically funded schemes
- Summary Capital Programme
- Potential future schemes
- Next steps

As requested by Councillor Paul Shotton, the Chief Executive and Chief Officer (Governance) shared information on proposed improvements to the Council's ICT systems and equipment.

Councillor Paul Johnson thanked Finance officers for the detailed report in recognition of the level of work involved.

Councillor Ian Roberts welcomed the investment in school buildings across Flintshire, some of which would be carbon neutral, and reinforced the Council's commitment to maintaining provision across a range of public services.

Councillor Richard Jones queried whether school buildings works such as upgrading ventilation systems, health and safety issues and gas safety fire inspections should be categorised as Statutory/Regulatory rather than Retained Assets. The Strategic Finance Manager agreed to review those items.

The recommendations, which were amended to reflect the debate, were moved and seconded by Councillors Richard Jones and Paul Shotton.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Committee:

- (a) Supports the allocations and schemes in Table 3 (paragraph 1.09) for the Statutory/Regulatory and Retained Assets sections of the Council Fund Capital Programme 2022/23-2024/25; noting that officers will review potential changes between allocations in the Retained Assets and the Regulatory sections as requested;
- (b) Supports the schemes included in Table 4 (paragraph 1.29) for the Investment section of the Council Fund Capital Programme 2022/23-2024/25;
- (c) Notes that the shortfall in funding of schemes in 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 in Table 5 (paragraph 1.38) at this point in the approval process allows flexibility. Options including a combination of future capital receipts, alternative grants (if available), prudential borrowing or the re-phasing of schemes will be considered during 2022/23, and included in future Capital Programme reports;

- (d) Supports the schemes included in Table 6 (paragraph 1.44) for the specifically funded section of the Council Fund Capital Programme which will be funded in part through borrowing; and
- (e) That the Committee confirms that it has no comments for Cabinet to consider before the Capital Programme 2022/23-2024/25 report is considered by Council.

**52. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2021/22 (MONTH 6) AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING 2021/22 (MONTH 6)**

The Strategic Finance Managers presented reports on the revenue budget monitoring position for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) at month 6, together with the month 6 position on the Capital Programme of 2021/22 prior to consideration by Cabinet.

Revenue Budget Monitoring

On the Council Fund, the projected year-end position - without new actions to reduce cost pressures and improve the yield on efficiencies - was an operating surplus of £0.227m (excluding the impact of the pay award to be met from reserves) which reflected a favourable movement of £0.045m from month 5. This would leave a year-end contingency reserve balance of £6.322m which included previously agreed allocations from earmarked reserves. An update on in-year risks included Council Tax collection levels, the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the latest position on pay awards. Following the announcement by Welsh Government (WG) of additional Social Care and Health grant funding across Wales, the Council's increased allocation from £1.7m to £2.8m through the Social Care Recovery Fund would be reflected in future reports. Information was given on the claims process for emergency funding and officers were currently assessing the impact of changes to guidance on the Hardship Fund.

On the HRA, a projected overspend of £0.755m would leave a closing un-earmarked balance of £3.717m, which was above the recommended guidelines on spend.

Councillor Richard Jones acknowledged the amount of work done across the Council to improve the projected year-end position since month 4. On the overspend for Out of County Placements, he welcomed the contribution from the Social Care Recovery Fund and asked about other options to mitigate this continued risk. The Corporate Finance Manager said that the increased allocation of Social Care and Health grant funding would be assessed to identify best use.

The Chief Executive said that the Capital Programme sought to provide capacity within the County to help reduce Out of County Placement costs.

In respect of assessing the impact of changes to Hardship Fund criteria, officers were working with portfolios to identify mitigation measures where possible in advance of the Hardship Fund ceasing at year-end. The current main risk was supply cover for employees affected by Covid and this grant funding

would continue until the end of December when it would be reviewed. Any ineligible claims that could not be mitigated would need to be funded by the remainder of the amount set aside for Covid-19 emergency funding.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Chief Officer (Governance) provided information on changes in the profile of Council Tax payments.

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

#### Capital Programme

The summary position at month 6 showed a revised budget of £74.962m taking into account agreed carry-forward amounts, changes during the period and savings transferred back in. Changes were mainly due to the introduction of grant funding and previously approved borrowing to match expenditure of schemes in-year. Capital expenditure compared to budget indicated a projected underspend of £0.939m on the Council Fund which would be recommended for carry forward to complete schemes in 2022/23. An update was given on the funding of additional schemes in the Programme and savings identified during the quarter. The overall funding position at month 6 indicated a revised projected surplus in the Capital Programme of £4.147m which was an increase from month 4.

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

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (a) That having considered the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2021/22 (Month 6) report, the Committee confirms that there are no specific matters to be raised with Cabinet; and
- (b) That having considered the Capital Programme Monitoring 2021/22 (Month 6) report, the Committee confirms that there are no specific matters to be raised with Cabinet.

#### **53. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE**

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10am and ended at 12.25pm)

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**Chairman**