

CABINET
23RD JULY 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of Flintshire County Council held as a remote meeting on Zoom, on Tuesday, 23rd July 2024.

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chair)

Councillors: Sean Bibby, Chris Bithell, Mared Eastwood, Dave Healey, Dave Hughes, Paul Johnson, Christine Jones, and Linda Thomas.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Governance), Chief Officer (Social Services), Corporate Finance Manager, Corporate Manager, People and Organisational Development, Corporate Manager, Capital Programme and Assets, Service Manager (Housing, Welfare & Communities) and Community and Business Protection Manager

OTHER MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors: Glyn Banks, Bill Crease, David Coggins Cogan, Carol Ellis, Chrissy Gee, and Andrew Parkhurst.

APOLOGIES:

Chief Officer (Housing and Communities) and Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy)

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

26. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th June were submitted.

RESOLVED:

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

CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA

The Leader of the Council advised that there would be a change in the order of the agenda items to allow for Councillor Linda Thomas to present her reports before having to leave the meeting.

27. ANNUAL AUDIT SUMMARY FOR FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL 2023

Councillor Linda Thomas presented the report which set out the audit and regulatory work completed by Audit Wales, since the last annual report, which was published in March 2023.

No formal recommendations had been made during the year by Audit Wales. There had been proposals for improvement which had arisen from the national and local reviews undertaken by Audit Wales and these had been reported to Governance and Audit Committee, Cabinet and the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees as appropriate during the year, with findings from the national and local reviews risk managed as part of regular monitoring.

The Auditor General gave an unqualified true and fair opinion on the Council's financial statements on 12 April 2024, after the deadline agreed with the Welsh Government of 30 November 2023. The audit was delivered later than in previous years mainly due to the impact of new auditing standard requirements. These were covered in Audit Wales audit plan and considered by the Governance and Audit Committee on 27 September 2023.

The Chief Executive added that the areas of review that had been undertaken involved Homelessness, Springing Forward and a Digital Strategy. The planned work programme was set out within the Audit Wales report, with the assurance and risk assessments having been completed. There were two thematic reviews and a local review which would be reported to Council once completed by Audit Wales.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet is assured by the content and observations of the Auditor General for Wales' Annual Audit Summary Report 2023.

28. DIGITAL STRATEGY – AUDIT WALES REVIEW, RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSED ACTIONS

Councillor Thomas introduced the report which outlined the outcome following the review undertaken by Audit Wales on the Council's digital strategy throughout the Summer of 2023, where auditors reviewed all relevant documentation and interviewed key officers and Cabinet Members. The primary focus of the audit was the extent to which the Digital Strategy was developed in accordance with the sustainable development principle, thereby ensuring that it would help to secure value for money in the use of the Council's resources.

The Final Report had been returned to the Council with four key recommendations to assist in ensuring it secured value for money. Officers had reviewed the recommendations and had devised proposed actions for approval by Cabinet, as outlined within the report.

The Chief Officer (Governance) outlined that the current digital strategy (Digital Flintshire 2021-2026) incorporated the Council's learning, experiences, growth and ambition since it was first published in 2016 and the Council had made good progress in delivering the aims set out, which at the time of implementation focused on making improvements to the delivery and availability of the Council's services to residents, with initial focus around increasing the level of self-service opportunities for residents.

The Action Plan was presented to the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 19th July, with no feedback to provide to Cabinet. In relation to the Action Plan, a pragmatic approach had been taken to identify which recommendations could add value to the Council as an organisation.

The Chief Officer reported on the findings and recommendations of the final report from Audit Wales and the response from the Council, which was detailed within the report.

RESOLVED:

That the action plan be approved.

29. THE NATIONAL RESIDENTS SURVEY

Councillor Thomas introduced the report which sought approval for Flintshire's acceptance of the offer to participate in the free core modules of the National Residents Survey and the implementation of the Nation Resident Survey before the end of the summer 2024.

Data Cymru and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Improvement Programme had developed a modular, resident survey that was being offered free of charge to all local councils in Wales from July 2024. The survey would collect high level local intelligence identifying people's perceptions of Flintshire and the Council (*the 'what'*). The data collected would, in turn, inform areas where the Council may need to undertake further, more in-depth research to better understand those perceptions (*the 'why'*).

Councils across the whole of the UK continued to face unprecedented financial challenges and it was becoming ever more difficult to balance budgets with public expectation. With the growing need to make difficult, often unpalatable, financial decisions it was important to understand the views and opinions of residents and provide people with opportunities to have their say in helping to deliver improvements wherever possible.

The Chief Officer (Governance) outlined that the report linked with the previous Digital Strategy report, specifically around the recommendation from Audit Wales on consulting with residents. The WLGA would be sponsoring the survey, which would ensure a consistent approach across Wales which could be benchmarked. From 2025, individual councils would be able to commission additional bespoke question modules relevant to their own business need at a small cost.

In response to a question from Councillor Chris Bithell, the Chief Officer gave an assurance that residents who were not able to access the online survey could access it via the Aura Libraires or Connects officers, where the Digital Squad would be available to provide assistance. Alternatively, paper copies of the survey could be requested by residents.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet approve Flintshire's acceptance of the offer to participate in the free core modules of the National Resident Survey;
- (b) That Cabinet support Flintshire's implementation of the National Resident Survey before the end of the summer 2024; and
- (c) That Cabinet champion supplementary consultation and engagement activity based on the findings of the National Resident Survey to better understand the 'why' behind the data collected.

30. BUSINESS RATES - WRITE OFFS

Councillor Thomas introduced the report and explained that for individual bad debts more than £25,000, Financial Procedure Rules (section 5.2) asked Cabinet to approve recommendations to write off debts.

Three Business Rate debts, relating to liquidated companies, and totalling £99,085.39, were deemed to be irrecoverable and the writing off the debts was now a necessary step. The debts relate to:

- Ace Rotomould Ltd £40,986.72
- Premier English Manufacturing Ltd £33,062.00
- Premier Grip Trading Ltd £25,036.67

There were no direct financial implications for the Council or local taxpayers by writing off the three debts

RESOLVED:

That the write off of the business rate debts, amounting to £40,986.72 for Ace Rotomould Ltd, £33,062 for Premier English Manufacturing Ltd, and £25,036.87 for Premier Grip Trading Ltd be approved.

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 item by virtue of exempt information under paragraph(s) 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

31. THIRD SECTOR GRANT FUNDING

Councillor Thomas introduced the report which provided an update on progress made in implementing the recommendations and the next steps still required. Recommendations were made in relation to further work and review.

The Corporate Manager, Capital Programme and Assets provided the feedback from the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which considered the report on 19th July, 2024.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet notes the information provided on third sector funding, along with the progress made in implementing a former review;
- (b) That Cabinet supports a further review of Strategic Funding to address the issues identified, including those highlighted by the recent Internal Audit. Noting that the option to extend current grant funding agreements to 31st March 2027 be taken to allow time to undertake and implement this review; and
- (c) That Cabinet endorses a continuation of the Community Chest grant funding scheme, subject to a review to be conducted in 2024/25, to include the terms of reference.

32. BUDGET 2025/26 MTFs

Councillor Paul Johnson introduced the report which set out in detail the forecast cost pressures for 2025/26.

As part of budget setting for 2024/25 an initial additional budget requirement of £28.251m was projected for 2025/26 which was based on broad assumptions for pay, social care commissioning and other known pressures at that time. The forecast for the 2025/26 financial year had been updated to take into account the latest national position on public sector pay, the estimated impact of changes to service demand and the ongoing impacts of inflation. The revised forecast showed that, at this early stage, the Council was likely to have an additional budget requirement of £37.778m for 2025/26.

Appendix A of the report provided the detail of all the cost pressures for 2025/26 as well as early indications of pressures for 2026/27 and 2027/28.

Two budget briefings were held on 9 July to enable members to have a better understanding of the financial position and a further briefing would be scheduled for September as an opportunity to contribute to a developing budget strategy.

Councillor Johnson also advised that there was no feedback from the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which considered the report on the 19th July, 2024.

The Corporate Finance Manager outlined the summary of cost pressures for 2025/26, drawing attention to the National Funding Requirements (Pay Awards) and portfolio cost pressures for Social Care and Housing & Communities. No estimated impact from the current pay offer was included in the forecast at this stage and would be refined once the final outcome was known, either positive or negative. As inflation levels were now much more stable the assumptions for the 2025/26 pay award had

been reduced to 4% from the 5% previously included in the forecast. There continued to be a significant growth in numbers presenting as homeless and needing to be accommodated within temporary accommodation. Due to the continued increase in demand, there was a projected overspend of £2.9m for 2024/25 and a potential additional budget requirement for 2025/26 of around £7.5m and this has been included in the forecast.

To date Welsh Government had provided no indicative figures for the main budget stream - Aggregate External Finance (AEF) for 2025/26. However, independent analysis of the Welsh Government budget advised that only a marginal uplift at best could be expected. Therefore, at this stage it was considered prudent to plan for a cash flat settlement. By way of context each 1% uplift to the AEF would generate £2.585m of funding for the Council's budget.

Councillor Dave Healey commented on the pay awards that were nationally negotiated with no reference to the ability of Local Governments' ability to fund them. He hoped funding would be forthcoming to meet future requirements.

Councillor Bithell spoke of the financial challenges which had impacted the Council for a number of years, with no indication of change in the future. He supported the Cabinet Members' comments on the new for a review of the Barnett Formula and hoped that this could be pursued with the new National Government. He requested that all Members consider the financial position of the Council when pursuing policies, which may be desirable, but could not be financed.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet receives the update on the additional budget requirement for the 2025/26 financial year; and
- (b) That Cabinet agrees the process and timeline for budget setting for 2025/26, as detailed in the report.

33. GOVERNANCE FOR THE TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

Councillor Johnson introduced the report which sought approval for i) the criteria for selecting transformation projects; ii) the democratic governance structure for the transformation programme; and iii) endorses the allocation of reserves to fund the additional capacity required to support the programme.

The Council has a duty to set a legal and balanced budget each year. That annual cycle has meant that the Council tends to focus its attention on making savings that can be achieved within a short timescale. There were potential savings that the council could explore which would not deliver inside the usual annual budget cycle. Such savings would typically involve looking at either larger scale projects such as a shared/collaborative service arrangement with another council or would involve redesigning internal working processes (probably aligned to a change of software). Such changes were typically referred to as transformational.

The Council needs to set up a programme to explore such transformational

changes if it is to reduce costs without reducing/stopping services. The governance of such a programme could be fitted within existing reporting structures in the Council. The capacity required to explore and manage a parallel programme of savings did not exist within the council at the present and would need to be recruited, probably temporarily, on an invest to save basis.

Councillor Johnson outlined the feedback from the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which supported the need for a transformational programme but was concerned around the costs associated with staffing. The Committee agreed to the first year costs but would review and scrutinise progress prior to any further expenditure being agreed.

The Chief Officer (Governance) outlined the governance structure, as shown at Appendix 1 of the report and the role of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee, with the Committee fulfilling a collating role where it would bring together the results of such recommendations made by Overview & Scrutiny/decisions by Cabinet to assess their impact on the Council's ability to fulfil its MTFs. It would not be a forum for taking a second look at the detail of proposals which were properly the remit of another Overview & Scrutiny Committee but would be focussed on the effect or impact of the work on the overall programme.

The Chief Officer also addressed the comments/concerns made by the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee around financial resources.

The Leader thanked Councillor Richard Jones, Chair of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee for his input in the development of the Transformation Programme.

Councillor Bithell asked how the budget gap figures outlined within the report for 2026/27 and 2027/28 had been calculated. The Corporate Finance Manager explained that these were initial assumptions based on current known cost pressures to the Council, if a 'cash flat' settlement was provided by Welsh Government.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet approves the:-

1. Criteria for selecting transformation projects;
2. Democratic governance structure for the transformation programme, and
3. Endorses the allocation of reserves to fund the additional capacity required to support the programme.

34. TENANT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

Councillor Sean Bibby introduced the report which presented the Tenant Involvement Strategy.

Flintshire County Council's Housing Service was responsible for over 7,300 homes across the county comprising of general needs and sheltered

accommodation. To support the management of those homes it was important that customers were given the opportunity to share their experiences of those services.

The former Tenant Engagement Strategy expired in 2021 and the Council had been operating an interim strategy whilst the new draft was being developed and the Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) was concluded. The new draft strategy sets out the commitment to tenant engagement and highlights what work was needed to improve our current position.

Further work had been carried out to develop and finalise the full strategy and the report outlined the main details.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet support and approve the Tenant Involvement Strategy.

35. THE COUNCIL'S TRANSITION TO A RESTRICTED CAPACITY RESIDUAL WASTE COLLECTION MODEL

Councillor Dave Hughes introduced the report which outlined the modelling work undertaken and present the proposed collection model to be adopted by the Council in order to achieve the statutory target of 70%.

From 2024/2025, the statutory target for the amount of waste prepared for reuse, recycled and composted had increased to 70%, having previously been set at 64% in the preceding years as part of Welsh Government's (WG) "Beyond Recycling" Strategy. However, as a Council, Flintshire did not manage to achieve the previous statutory target of 64% in any of the preceding four years and, without significant service change, would not meet the 70% target required by 2025. This could lead to further significant financial penalties being imposed by WG, which were already expected to be in excess of £1million for 2021/22 and 2022/23.

Following the public consultation in early 2024 and the Council's adoption of the Resource and Waste Strategy in March 2024, a recommendation was approved by Cabinet to consider a further report in June 2024 to outline the Council's transition to a restricted capacity residual waste collection model, which was committed to in Priority Two of the Strategy and recognised as an effective method of reducing residual waste and maximising recycling collected.

To support with this, the Council engaged with WRAP Cymru, Local Partnerships and their consultants, WPS and CRS, to undertake a modelling exercise to simulate different residual waste collection methods for the purpose of identifying the optimum model for:

1. maximising recycling potential and improving performance.
2. reducing the impact on the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
3. reducing operational costs

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) outlined the modelling outcomes and reported that the modelling exercise had identified that Option 2a

(180L black wheeled bin collected 4 weekly - 5 day working week (45L capacity per week)) achieved the highest performance increase at 5.9 percentage points, against the Enhanced Baseline. The greatest restriction on available weekly residual capacity resulted in the highest diversion of food and dry recycling from the residual stream, while the 4-weekly collection frequency meant that captured was maximised.

The Chief Officer also reported that the proposals set out for approval by Cabinet were not supported by the Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The Leader proposed an amendment to the recommendation that residual waste collections be reduced to once every three weeks while retaining the 180L black wheeled bin. This was supported by Councillor Hughes.

Councillor Healey said that whilst the four weekly model provided the maximum savings, reduced emissions and offered the best opportunity to meet the increased statutory targets set by WG, he supported the proposals to move to a three weekly collection and said that the findings outlined within the report that 58% of the waste found in the black bin could be recycled was unacceptable.

Councillor Bithell said that this was a difficult decision to make but outlined the dilemma the Council found itself in due to the possible infraction fines being faced and the need to demonstrate to WG that the Council was doing its level best to meet the increased statutory targets. He also outlined the efficiencies which would be released and assist with the current budget gap.

Councillor Bibby spoke in support of the amendment from the Leader which he said was a pragmatic compromise.

The Chief Executive reported that the overall objectives of the proposals were to reduce the number of recyclable items placed in the black bin and thanked residents who continued to recycle all possible items. The environmental impacts of not recycling were well known and the impacts to climate change were significant, and in order to make a positive contribution for future generations it was important that the Council improve recycling rates.

The Corporate Finance Manager reported that the Revenue Budget Monitoring report detailed significant financial risks and that the decision to move to a three weekly collection would reduce the amount available to be mitigated and therefore the levels of reserves would reduce. This would also reduce the projected contribution to meet the budget gap, which would have to be met by other decisions. There was also an increased risk around the infraction fine and the £1.2m compound impact had not been included in the budget and would need to come from the reduced contingency level of reserves.

The Chief Officer reported that there were no proposed changes to recycling and food collections. The Council provided a comprehensive kerb side collection, and those services would continue. A great deal of work had been undertaken around communication with residents, attending events and projects being drawn up for the collection of waste at flats, HMO's which would deliver significant benefit. The

modelling showed that three weekly collections would generate 66% of recycling collection which did not meet the revised statutory target of 70% set by WG.

The Chief Officer also clarified that the proposals to move to a 5 day working week would be retained as part of the amended proposal and that a report outlining the implementation and communication plan would be presented to Cabinet in the autumn.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet acknowledges and notes the outcomes of the modelling work undertaken on restricting the capacity of residual waste collections; and
- (b) That Cabinet supports a transition to the most effective service delivery model of retaining a comprehensive weekly recycling collection service and reducing residual waste collections to once every three weeks while retaining the 180L black wheeled bin to realise maximum recycling performance increase, greenhouse gas emission reduction and cost reduction.

36. SOCIAL SERVICES DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

Councillor Christine Jones introduced the Social Services Director's Annual Report 2023/24.

The Director of Social Services was required to produce an annual report summarising their view of the local authority's social care functions and priorities for improvement as legislated in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 (RISCA). The annual report must evaluate the performance of the local authority in relation to the delivery of its social services functions in respect of the reporting year. It must also set out objectives in relation to promoting the well-being of people who need care and support, and carers who need support, for the forthcoming year.

The 2023/24 report highlighted positive practice and developments, as outlined within the report.

The Chief Officer (Social Services) reported that the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered the report and the priorities for 2024/25, which have informed its work programme.

The report, in terms of design and layout, had been designed by Double Click, an organisation for people with mental health needs.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet approve the Social Services Director's Annual Report 2023/24 and priorities identified for the 2024/25 financial year.

37. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2023/24 (OUTTURN)

Councillor Johnson introduced the report which provided the revenue budget final outturn position for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account for the financial year 2023/24 (subject to audit).

The Accounts for 2023/24 were now effectively closed, and the formal Statement of Accounts and supporting notes were submitted to Audit Wales on 25th June which was within the timeframe set by Welsh Government.

As reported previously, a moratorium on non-contractually committed spend was put in place alongside a vacancy management process with the aim of reducing in year expenditure to 'dampen' the projected overspend at that time. This work made a positive impact on the outturn position.

The final year end position was as follows:

Council Fund

- An operating deficit of £1.446m which was a positive movement of (£0.979m) from the deficit figure of £2.445m reported at Month 10.
- A projected contingency reserve available balance as at 31 March 2024 of £2.972m (after taking account of previously approved allocations including those approved as part of the 2024/25 Budget).

Housing Revenue Account

- Net in-year revenue expenditure was forecast to be £0.315m lower than budget which was a favourable movement of £0.773m from the figure reported at Month 10.
- A projected closing balance as at 31 March, 2024 of £3.5129m

During the financial year, £2.144m of deferred and/or delayed expenditure had been identified and was analysed by service within Appendix 2. The robust challenge of budget lines and commitments would continue into the next financial year 2024/25, with updates provided in future reports.

The Corporate Finance Manager reported that after taking into account the outturn and previously approved allocations the final level of Council Fund Contingency Reserve available as at 31 March, 2024 was £2.972m including those approved as part of the 2024/25 budget, and was shown in Appendix 4. As in previous years a review and challenge of all earmarked reserves would be undertaken over the summer to ensure that they were still relevant and required at the same level.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet note the overall report and the Council Fund contingency sum available as at 31 March, 2024 (subject to audit);
- (b) That Cabinet note the final level of balances on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) (subject to audit); and

- (c) That Cabinet approve the carry forward requests as outlined in paragraph 1.13.

38. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2024/25 (INTERIM)

Councillor Johnson introduced the report which provided the first overview of the budget monitoring position for the 2024/25 financial year. At this early stage only financial risks had been highlighted within the report.

The ability to mitigate risks during the financial year would again centre on review and challenge of delayed and deferred spend, maximising income streams and grant funding. As reported previously, a moratorium on non-contractually committed spend was put in place during 2023/24 alongside a vacancy management process with the aim of reducing in-year expenditure to 'dampen' the projected overspend and this would continue into 2024/25.

The Base Level Reserves had been increased to £8.985m by using the remaining balance of £3.216m of the COVID-19 Hardship Fund Reserve from 2023/24. In addition, there was an amount of £3m available which was approved as a "Budget Risk" Reserve.

A full detailed monitoring report would be provided in September which would include a projection on the overall financial position for 2024/25.

Councillor Johnson reported that there was no feedback to provide from the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee, who considered the report on the 19th July, 2024.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet note the report and the potential financial risks on the 2024/25 budget; and
- (b) That Cabinet note the allocations of £0.200m from the Contingency Reserve for Cambrian Aquatics and £0.277m for Free School Meals holiday provision – Paragraph 1.14 refers.

39. CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING 2023/24 (OUTTURN)

Councillor Johnson introduced the report which summarised the final outturn position for 2023/24 and changes made to the Capital Programme during the last quarter.

The Capital Programme had seen a net decrease in budget of (£16.834m) during the last quarter which comprised of:

- Net budget decrease in the programme of (£12.875m) (See Table 2 – Council Fund (CF) (£10.125m), Housing Revenue Account (HRA) (£2.750m));
- Carry Forward to 2024/25 approved at Month 9 of (£1.810m);

- Switch of School Maintenance grant (£0.401m) and Additional Learning Needs grant (£1.575m) (all CF); and
- Identified savings at outturn of (£0.173m) (CF)

Actual expenditure for the year was £69.807m (See Table 3).

The final outturn funding surplus from the 2023/24 – 2025/26 Capital Programme was £2.815m which was £0.819m more than the projected £1.996m when the 2024/25 – 2026/27 Capital Programme was approved on the 6th December 2023.

Following receipt of the final local government settlement, the Council would receive a reduced allocation of £0.017m per year compared to the estimated funding when the budget was set.

The final outturn for 2023/24 therefore has the impact of a revised opening funding position surplus of £0.820m (compared to £0.052m when the budget was set), prior to the realisation of additional capital receipts and/or other funding sources.

RESOLVED:

- That Cabinet approve the overall report;
- That Cabinet approve the carry forward adjustments, as set out at 1.15.
- That Cabinet approve the additional allocation, as set out in 1.19

40. PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS – ACTUALS 2023/24

Councillor Johnson introduced the report which provided details of the Council's actual prudential indicators for the 2023/24 financial year compared with the estimates set for:-

- Prudential indicators for Prudence
- Prudential indicators for Affordability

The Corporate Finance Manager drew attention to the ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream, shown at Table 6, and reported that the actual ratios were lower than the previous year due to the Council's expected borrowing levels for both short and long term being lower than anticipated during the year.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet approve the prudential indicators within the report.

41. ANNUAL REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES 2024

Councillor Johnson introduced the report which outlined the outcome of the 2024 review of fees and charges which had been completed in line with the Council's Income Generation Policy, which set out the rationale and process for an annual

review of fees and charges. The outcome of this review was set out in Appendix A and would apply from 1st October 2024.

Applying the principles contained within the Council's Income Generation Policy had ensured that any changes to charging has been appropriately managed and the latest version of the policy was attached as Appendix B.

The report also outlined the ongoing requirements of the annual review of fees and charges for 2024, particularly for those fees and charges who were still to demonstrate that they achieve full cost recovery.

The Chief Executive reported that estimations of income generated through the application of fees and charges, and any increases to them, was monitored and factored into the budget setting process. The 2024 review was estimated to generate an additional £0.085m per annum, with £0.050m of that already built into 2024/25 budgets, so this was an additional contribution of £0.035m to the 2025/26 budget.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet approves the schedule of fees and charges documented in Appendix A for implementation on 1st October 2024.
- (b) That Cabinet agrees that a customer friendly version of the schedule of fees and charges, documented in Appendix A, be produced and published.

42. SHELTERED HOUSING REVIEW UPDATE

Councillor Bibby introduced the report which provided an update on the progress of the sheltered housing review which adopted a holistic approach to the sustainability of the sheltered housing stock and was designed to review each scheme from:-

- An asset management perspective - to identify the current and future investment needs of each scheme, WHQS works, de-carbonisation and compliance considerations; and
- A housing management perspective - to address any demand / turnover and desirability issues and to determine the sustainability of each scheme.

The Service Manager (Housing, Welfare & Communities) advised that scheme would be assessed against an approved sustainability matrix which would result in it being awarded one of 4 possible recommendations, as outlined within the report.

There were 142 schemes in Flintshire which provided a total of 2,641 units of accommodation. A thorough desktop and kerbside review had been carried out over the last couple of months which had provided more detailed information in relation to the location and layout of the schemes. From this information, several workstreams had been developed and each workstream would be assessed using the asset and housing management matrix and the process for review would follow the agreed communication plan.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet note the progress of the Sheltered Housing Review.

43. CHILDCARE AND EARLY YEARS CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2022-25

Councillor Jones introduced the report which outlined two proposed projects for phase 2 of the Childcare and Early Years Capital Programme 2022-2025 and the potential building locations that have been identified. The projects within the programme had been selected using Childcare Sufficiency Assessments, and Welsh Government funding criteria.

The projects, if approved, would deliver new Childcare facilities, and increase childcare provision across Flintshire in various locations. The focus was on early years, however, the buildings could be used for childcare wrap-around, after school and holiday provision.

The first project was Cornist Park Flint and, subject to Cabinet approval, the Flintshire Childcare and Early Years Capital Team would like to progress this project onto the next stage of a 'design and build' request to Welsh Government (WG). The second project was at Ysgol Terrig/Ysgol Parc Y Llan, Treuddyn. Feasibility options had been identified for this site and further work was required with partners to finalise the preferred scheme before seeking approval to proceed with a 'design and build' request to WG .

The Chief Officer (Social Services) reported that phase 1 of the Childcare and Early Years Capital Programme ran between 2019-2022 and saw the delivery of nine new modular buildings and the refurbishment of an existing building. Phase 1 projects were completed within the allocated budget and a list of sites were outlined within the report.

The feasibility studies have been completed and informed options for both sites, with option 2 being the preferred option for the site at Flint. Further work was required with partners for the Treuddyn site to ensure that the most appropriate option was identified to balance a range of needs and factors relating to the site.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet approve a submission to the Childcare and Early Years Capital Programme 2022-2025 for the Cornist Park Flint, scheme to proceed from the 'starting a project' stage and to request agreement to the 'design and build' phase of the programme from Welsh Government;
- (b) That Cabinet approves a Direct Award process to appoint an experienced contractor to meet the WG deadline of 31 March 2025. The award will be through the existing Pagoba framework; and
- (c) That Cabinet notes the identification of the Ysgol Terrig/Ysgol Parc Y Llan, Treuddyn as a potential second project, subject to further work with partners. If options are viable within the timescales prescribed by Welsh Government

approval will be sought from Cabinet to proceed based on the timelines, costings and partnership agreement.

44. ENFORCEMENT OF CLOSURE NOTICES AND CLOSURE ORDERS UNDER THE ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR, CRIME AND POLICING ACT 2014

Councillor Bithell introduced the report which requested authority for the Chief Officer for Planning, Environment and Economy to be delegated to exercise the Council's powers in relation to Closure Notices and Orders, under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

A Closure Notice could be issued for up to 48 hours if the Council or Police were satisfied on reasonable grounds:-

- that the use of a particular premises has resulted, or (if the notice is not issued) is likely soon to result in nuisance to members of the public; or
- that there has been, or (if the notice is not issued) is likely soon to be, disorder near those premises associated with the use of those premises and that the notice is necessary to prevent the nuisance or disorder from continuing, recurring or occurring.

The Community and Business Protection Manager reported that the power to issue Closure Notices and Orders on premises where there was anti-social behaviour was an effective alternative enforcement tool that the authority could use to combat such behaviour. It could be used in relation to shops selling illicit goods such as tobacco, vapes or alcohol, licensed premises that fail to address bad behaviour caused by their customers and any other premises where there was persistent anti-social behaviour.

The recommendation had been considered and endorsed by the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16th July 2024. At the Committee, Members asked a number of questions and those had been addressed in the report.

RESOLVED:

That the Chief Officer for Planning, Environment and Economy on behalf of Flintshire County Council be given delegated authority to issue Closure Notices under section 76 of The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 and authorise officers to enforce, closure orders, in accordance with the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

45. OPEN ACCESS AGREEMENT WITH FRESHWAVE

Councillor Healey introduced the report which proposed the development of Open Access Agreements in Flintshire with the first one to be signed with Freshwave Facilities Limited and others to follow.

The Council Plan and Digital Strategy highlight the importance of improving digital connectivity in Flintshire for residents and businesses. Connectivity had grown

in importance over recent years to enable social interaction, access to information and services, education, and employment whether from home or in other locations. Despite this, mobile connectivity remained poor in many areas of the County.

UK Government was encouraging local government to use Open Access Agreements to make it easier for the Mobile Network Operators to invest in improved connectivity through the use of the Council's Street furniture assets.

The recommendations had been considered and endorsed by the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16th July 2024.

The Community and Business Protection Manager highlighted section 1.09 of the report which explained what Open Access Agreements were, specifically highlighting that they would be cost neutral to the Council.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet supports the proposed development of Open Access Agreements as a tool to improve digital connectivity in Flintshire;
- (b) That delegated authority be given to the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to sign the proposed Open Access Agreement with Freshwave Facilities Limited and to amend the agreement in the future as required; and
- (c) That delegated authority is given to the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to develop and amend further Open Access Agreements with other companies.

46. INVESTMENT ZONE FOR FLINTSHIRE AND WREXHAM

The Leader of the Council introduced the report which provided a summary of the Investment Zone programme and the progress made to date on its development in Flintshire and Wrexham. Whilst the announcement of a General Election had created a degree of uncertainty to the process, development work on the Investment Zone has continued in readiness for further discussion with the two governments post-election.

The Investment Zone would focus on the nationally important cluster of advanced manufacturing businesses in Flintshire and Wrexham to enable the sector to thrive, expand, increase skills and wages and increase their contribution to the economy of the region.

Advanced Manufacturing has been selected as the sector that the Flintshire and Wrexham Investment Zone would support, based on the available data and analysis from the two governments showing the scale and importance of this existing cluster.

The Chief Executive reported that the UK Government announced two Investment Zones for Wales in the Spring Budget of 2023. The Autumn Statement in

November 2023 subsequently confirmed that Flintshire and Wrexham would join the Cardiff City Region as the second Investment Zone. This followed a period of significant work, which was driven by local business leaders, to highlight how the potential of the functional economic area of Flintshire and Wrexham, aligned with the assessment of both governments of the strategic fit with the policy intervention. Subject to the Investment Zone proposal meeting specific requirements, a funding envelope of up to £160m was available to that Investment Zone for a period of 10 years.

The approach being taken was not without a level of risk, but there were believed to be mitigations to the risks, as outlined within the report.

Councillor Healey reported that the proposed Investment Zone was discussed at Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16th July 2024. Whilst the recommendations were supported, a number of Members raised concerns which were highlighted in the report. Councillor Healey provided a detailed response to the concerns raised.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet recognises the progress of work on the Investment Zone and supports the Council to work with Wrexham County Borough Council and the Corporate Joint Committee to work at risk through the required Gateways outlined over the next six months, to secure the funding of £160m over the next 10 years.

47. CARE CLOSER TO HOME: PLACEMENT COMMISSIONING STRATEGY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Councillor Jones introduced the report which confirmed progress in delivering the first phase of our 'Care Closer to Home' strategy and proposed the approach to updating the 'Care Closer to Home' Strategy within the context of the Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill which was laid before the Senedd Cymru on 20 May 2024.

The report also proposed a workshop for Elected Members to outline the new legislation, the context of current placement commissioning (often referred to as Out of County Placements) and to explore options for developing the strategic approach for placement commissioning and further development of in-house placement provision. The outcome would inform the development of an updated phase 2 'Care Closer to Home' Strategy.

Flintshire County Council had a strategic vision to provide sufficient local good quality accommodation to meet the needs of looked after children. The 'Care Closer to Home: Placement Commissioning Strategy' set out the intention to invest in the development of in house fostering, residential care and to forge effective partnerships with high quality providers that operate not for profit principles.

The Chief Officer (Social Services) reported that the Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill would fetter the Council's ability to commission freely with providers of certain business models outside of Wales as well as in country and locally. This policy would, and was already, changing the landscape of placement options for

children and young people, therefore, local authorities must proactively identify opportunities for change and manage the emerging risks. The Council was committed to the national policy intent. The implementation timeline was, however, very challenging and would necessitate significant planning to transition safely for the children and young people.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet approves progress to deliver phase one of our 'Care Closer to Home' strategy; and
- (b) That Cabinet supports a workshop for Elected Members in September/October 2024 to outline the new legislation, the context of current placement commissioning (often referred to as Out of County Placements) and to explore options for developing a strategic approach for placement commissioning and further development of in-house placement provision.

48. CHARGING FOR APPOINTEESHIP

Councillor Jones introduced the report to seek approval to implement a charging structure for local authority managed Appointeeship cases.

Flintshire County Council offers services through its Deputyship Team to help vulnerable individuals to manage their financial affairs. Support was offered by undertaking a role as either an Appointee of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) or a Deputy of the Court of Protection (COP). A DWP Appointee receives an individual's DWP benefit payments and was able to support them to budget and pay their rent and utility bills.

To date this work had been undertaken free of charge. It was proposed that the Council charge a sliding scale management fee to individuals for whom the Council acts as a Corporate Appointee.

The Chief Officer (Social Services) reported that the Appointeeship Service was not a statutory service meaning the authority was not legally obliged to provide this. However, given the number of individuals who were currently supported and the high number of referrals received it is clear there was a need for this. Budgetary pressures on local authorities were well documented and due to this, consideration was being given to charges levied for services to ensure they could continue into the future.

Across the UK, there was evidence that there were an increasing number of local authorities who had introduced charges for their Appointeeship services. In Wales when consulted, many local authorities responded to say that they were actively considering introducing charging for Appointeeship Services in the near future and 3 responded to say that they already have charges in place.

The Chief Officer reported that the report was discussed at the Social and Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18th July 2024. An additional recommendation was proposed by Councillor Alasdair Ibbotson which was discussed

by the Committee. This additional option proposed by Councillor Ibbotson suggested that there be no distinction in charges between community based individuals and those living in residential care. It had not been possible to estimate the potential income from this option based on the individuals supported by the Deputyship Team, due to the short timeframe between Committees. It was suggested that further calculations be made by the Deputyship Team to provide an estimate which had been calculated using the same core information as that used for Option 1 and 2, as outlined within the report.

An initial consultation was conducted with all individuals who receive Appointeeship service and their carers as well as advocacy services and representative agencies. Prior to full implementation a full consultation would be undertaken regarding proposed charging structure and implementation.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet approve the implementation of a charging structure for local authority managed Appointeeship cases.

49. EXERCISE OF DELEGATED POWERS

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

Education and Youth

- **Provision of payments during the school Summer holiday to parents of children eligible for free school meals 2024**
Provision of payments during the school Summer holiday to parents of children eligible for free school meals 2024. Payment to be £50.00 per learner.

The estimated cost for the payments during the Summer holiday 2024 is £276,000.

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).

50. RECOMMISSIONING OF UNPAID CARERS SERVICES

Councillor Jones introduced the report which set out the proposals for the recommissioning of carers services for a five year period starting from April 2025 as per the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Cabinet acknowledges the feedback received locally with regards to carers services as part of the review; and
- (b) That Cabinet approve the proposals made for the recommissioning of carers services for a five year period starting from April 2025 as per the Contract Procedure Rules.

51. THEATR CLWYD BUSINESS PLAN – ANNUAL UPDATE

Councillor Mared Eastwood introduced the report which presented the updated Theatr Clwyd Business Plan 2023 to 2029, along with an Impact Report highlighting achievements, and Theatr Clwyd’s financial accounts for the year ending 31st March 2023.

Whilst the Business Plan and Impact Report cover all Theatr Clwyd activities, the report did not cover the audited accounts for the Music Trust, which ran aligned to the academic year and were currently being signed off by external auditors.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet notes the content of the Theatr Clwyd Business Plan, the achievements delivered as identified in the Impact Report, and the financial position as detailed in the accounts provided.

52. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the public in attendance.

(The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and ended at 1.15 p.m.)

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Chair