

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
11 MARCH 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a remote attendance meeting on Thursday, 11 March 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Clive Carver (Chairman)

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Geoff Collett, Mared Eastwood, Richard Jones, Kevin Rush, Paul Shotton, Andy Williams and Arnold Woolley

SUBSTITUTES: Councillor: Joe Johnson (for Sean Bibby) and Paul Cunningham (for Andy Dunbobbin)

APOLOGY: Chief Executive

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Ian Roberts (Leader and Cabinet Member for Education), Councillor Carolyn Thomas (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Countryside), Councillor Billy Mullin (Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets), Councillor Glyn Banks (Cabinet Member for Finance), Chief Officer (Governance), Corporate Finance Manager, Finance Manager (Corporate Finance) and Customer Contact Service Manager

For minute number 69

Strategic Policy Advisor (Fiona Mocko) and Andrea Powell - Director of Programmes (Deputy Chief Executive) of Community Foundation in Wales

IN ATTENDANCE: Head of Democratic Services and Democratic Services Officers

65. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

On Agenda Item 6 - Flintshire Community Endowment Fund - Annual Report, the Chairman declared a personal interest as he was a member of the grants committee.

66. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2021 were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Shotton and Haydn Bateman.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

67. ACTION TRACKING

The Head of Democratic Services presented the report on progress with actions arising from previous meetings.

As requested by Councillor Richard Jones, the letter to Welsh Government seeking additional support for Out of County Placements would be circulated once it had been finalised.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Geoff Collett and Joe Johnson.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the progress which has been made.

68. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In presenting the report, the Head of Democratic Services reminded Members that all Overview & Scrutiny Committee meetings in April would be cancelled to provide support to the Elections. As there were no items currently scheduled for the next meeting of the Committee on 13 May, the Chairman had agreed that a briefing on Social Values could be held on that date. An indicative forward work programme for the 2021/22 municipal year would be shared at the June meeting.

Councillor Richard Jones requested an early item on the Poverty theme within the Council Plan, which was now under the remit of this Committee. The Head of Democratic Services advised that this would be scheduled for June or July, together with an update on the North Wales Economic Ambition Board. In response to Councillor Jones' request for items on service balances within the budget and reasons for earmarked reserves, the Corporate Finance Manager said that this additional information would be incorporated into the revenue budget final outturn report to be received in June.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Kevin Rush and Geoff Collett.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be approved; 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.

69. FLINTSHIRE COMMUNITY ENDOWMENT FUND - ANNUAL REPORT

The Strategic Policy Advisor introduced the annual report on work undertaken by the Community Foundation in Wales in managing the Flintshire Community Endowment Fund (the Fund) on behalf of the Council. The report also provided an update on the performance of the Clwyd tripartite Welsh Church Act Fund (Clwyd WCAF).

Members were introduced to Andrea Powell - Director of Programmes (Deputy Chief Executive) of the Community Foundation in Wales - who gave a presentation covering the following:

- Community Foundation Wales - update
- Fund History and Overview - Flintshire Community Endowment Fund/Tri-partite Welsh Church Act Fund
- Financial performance
- Summary of grants awarded
- Case studies
- The future

Since the previous report and as a direct response to the national emergency, Community Foundation Wales had awarded over £5m worth of grants to more than 1,000 individuals and organisations across Wales. The Council's website would be updated with regard to information on the three funds available specifically to Flintshire residents - Flintshire Community Endowment Fund, Flintshire Welsh Church Act Fund and the Hawarden and District Relief in Need Fund.

Councillor Richard Jones said that promotion of the correct information would help elected Members to raise awareness amongst communities. Andrea Powell provided details on eligibility relating to schools. Contact details and presentation slides would be shared with the Committee.

In response to questions from Councillor Paul Shotton, clarification was given on the approach to investment management to maximise returns. Members were also informed about the promotion of funds through the website and various forms of social media.

When asked by Councillor Carolyn Thomas about help for community groups to apply for grants, Andrea Powell confirmed that the Flintshire Local Voluntary Council was represented on the grants panel. Whilst the limited amount of funding presented a challenge, alternative funding streams were identified where possible.

Clarification was also given to Councillor Joe Johnson on funding for Church and community groups setting up foodbanks during the pandemic.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Geoff Collett and Paul Shotton.

RESOLVED:

That Members support the work of the Community Foundation in Wales on behalf of the Council.

70. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2020/21 (MONTH 9)

The Finance Manager presented a report on the revenue budget monitoring position for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) at Month 10 prior to consideration by Cabinet. The report reflected the budget position at the close of the financial year if all things remained unchanged and took into account the latest position on Welsh Government (WG) Emergency Grant funding announcements.

On the Council Fund, the projected year-end position - without new actions to reduce cost pressures and improve the yield on efficiency planning - was an operating surplus of £0.924m, leaving a projected contingency reserve balance of £2.339 at the end of the financial year. This projection excluded the impact of the pay award to be met by reserves. The main reasons for the favourable movement of £0.552m from month 9 were set out in the report.

An update was provided on the key financial risks and additional risks on free school meals and severe weather impact, together with the position on the achievement of planned in-year efficiencies as detailed in the report. On un-earmarked reserves, it was noted that negotiations with WG were ongoing on the eligibility of some grant funding claims.

On the HRA, a projected underspend of £1.642m would leave a closing un-earmarked balance of £3.651m, which was above the recommended guidelines on spend.

Councillor Richard Jones raised concerns about the implications of the lesser contribution by Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) towards joint-funded care packages; he said that agreements should be challenged to avoid the Council identifying mitigating measures to accommodate such losses. The Finance Manager described the process for agreeing joint funding arrangements and the challenges on accurate projections for budget purposes. The Corporate Finance Manager said that more information on the reason for the difference could be determined and shared at the next meeting.

On significant movements, Councillor Jones asked that Hardship Fund claims in Streetscene & Transportation be separated for future reports. He also asked about the perceived increase in risk which had led to an additional contribution for corporate bad debt provision. The Chief Officer (Governance) explained that the position had been impacted by decisions taken on the safety of debt enforcement due to the national emergency. The Corporate Finance Manager said that it was prudent for the Council to set aside sufficient contributions as part of the year-end accounting process.

Speaking in support of Councillor Jones' concerns on joint-funded care packages, Councillor Ian Roberts cited increased costs of care providers as a factor. He suggested that the Committee may wish to request a more detailed report on the matter.

The Chairman suggested that it was appropriate to refer the topic to the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Banks thanked officers for the positive report. On the requests for carry forward of funding, he commended the work of the teams in Revenues and Internal Audit throughout the emergency situation.

The Chief Officer (Governance) also paid tribute to those involved in ensuring a positive year-end outturn on the budget, despite the emergency situation.

As an update on emergency funding announcements, the Corporate Finance Manager confirmed that the Council had recently received two amounts of £1.181m for the recent WG announcements on unachieved savings and digital transformation and that this would improve reserves for the year end. In addition, further announcements by WG on funding for schools were expected.

Councillor Jones proposed Councillor Roberts' suggestion that the Committee look at joint-funded care package agreements in more detail including the sharing of risks arising from increased provider costs. He said that this was a funding issue and was therefore under the remit of this Committee.

The Head of Democratic Services spoke in support of the Chairman's view and advised that the matter should be considered by the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Roberts said that as a finance issue, this was best considered by this Committee. On that basis, Councillor Jones moved the proposal and was seconded by Councillor Bateman.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That having considered the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2020/21 Month 10 report, the Committee confirms that there are no specific matters to be reported to Cabinet; and
- (b) That the Committee consider how the difference between the BCUHB expected and actual contribution for joint funded packages has arisen as soon as possible.

71. REVIEW OF THE CORPORATE COMPLAINTS POLICY

The Chief Officer (Governance) introduced the report on the new Concerns and Corporate Complaints Policy for the Council, which was based on a model complaints handling procedure for public service providers in Wales.

The Customer Contact Service Manager explained that changes to the Complaints Policy made greater use of trends with a reporting timetable established to share performance data and identify changes to improve service delivery. A new Managing Customer Contact Policy was also shared to provide

clear guidance on managing unacceptable behaviour from customers to protect the workforce. Both policies were to be implemented and published from 1 April 2021.

Councillor Mullin welcomed the policies which would provide clear guidance to customers and protection for employees.

On the performance timetable, Councillor Richard Jones proposed that the report be received by the Committee half-yearly - in line with that of Cabinet and Audit Committee - rather than annually. As requested, the model guidance would be shared with the Committee following the meeting.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the officers provided clarification on the process for dealing with a complaint where an officer fails to respond to an enquiry.

Councillor Jones' proposal was seconded by Councillor Haydn Bateman.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

- (a) Supports the implementation of the Concerns and Complaints Policy from 1 April 2021;
- (b) Supports the implementation of the Managing Customer Contact Policy from 1 April 2021;
- (c) Notes the performance timetable as outlined in paragraph 1.15 of the report; and
- (d) Receives reports on a half-yearly rather than annual basis as indicated in the report.

72. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10am and ended at 11.50am)

.....
Chairman