

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 MARCH 2017

Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Thursday, 9 March 2017

PRESENT: Councillor Clive Carver (Chairman)

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Paul Cunningham, Andy Dunbobbin, Ron Hampson, Richard Jones, Vicky Perfect, Paul Shotton, Ian Smith and Nigel Steele-Mortimer

APOLOGIES: Councillors Ray Hughes, Brian Lloyd and Arnold Woolley, and Chief Officer (Governance)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Bernie Attridge

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Aaron Shotton, Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Finance; Councillor Billy Mullin, Cabinet Member for Corporate Management; and Chief Executive

Detective Constable Nicholas Hawe, North Wales Police (for minute number 89)

Advice & Homelessness Manager, Service Manager (Customer Support) and Customer Service & Registration Manager (for minute number 90)

Corporate Finance Manager (for minute number 94)

IN ATTENDANCE: Democratic Services Manager and Committee Officer

87. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

88. MINUTES

The minutes of the budget meetings held on 28 September 2016, 30 November 2016 and 20 January 2017 were received, together with the minutes of 9 February 2017.

Minutes of 30 November 2016

As a point of accuracy, Councillor Richard Jones advised that Councillor Peter Curtis had been elected as Chair of the meeting.

Minutes of 20 January 2017

Councillor Jones explained that he had been asked to forward his list of 21 questions to the Chief Executive for a response after the meeting. He said that where time did not allow for a Member to share such a number of questions in advance of a meeting, they should be entitled to raise them at the meeting without interruption by other Members. The Chairman supported this view. Councillor Jones also felt that the Overview & Scrutiny process was more effective when responses given outside meetings were circulated to the full Committee.

The Democratic Services Manager explained his approach to share any responses with the Committee which had been raised by individual Members.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the minutes of 28 September 2016, 20 January and 9 February 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman; and
- (b) That subject to the amendment, the minutes of 30 November 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

89. NORTH WALES POLICE - CYBERCRIME PRESENTATION

The Chairman welcomed Detective Constable (DC) Nicholas Hawe to the meeting to share an overview of the work of the North Wales Cybercrime Unit. The two main types of cybercrime were:

- ‘CEO fraud’ where an attacker was able to spoof a message from a senior officer to trick others at the same organisation into wiring funds to a fraudulent account.
- ‘Ransomware’ (or crypto locker) involving the covert installation of computer malware onto a victim’s device and demand a ransom (via bitcoin payments) from the victim for the decryption of their data.

DC Hawe highlighted the importance of safeguarding against these increasing cyber threats and said that 80% of cases were avoidable by taking simple precautions. A further risk to organisations was the introduction of new Data Protection regulations from May 2018 on the disclosure of breaches to data security. Whilst many larger organisations were adopting a proactive stance to safeguarding against these risks, smaller businesses and members of the public remained the most vulnerable. The recommended approach was for businesses to identify critical data as part of a security plan and regularly backup files away from the network and carry out testing. Any anti-virus software should be kept updated and the workforce trained to raise awareness of how to deal with suspicious emails. Anti-ransom software could offer another layer of protection but there were no failsafe guarantees. Businesses could opt to purchase accreditation of the ‘Cyber Essentials’ scheme, which was

endorsed by the UK Government and offered basic controls to mitigate the risk of internet-based threats.

In the event of a computer becoming infected, the advice was to remain calm and take steps to isolate the infection from the network. Cases should be reported to the Cybercrime team and the 'Action Fraud' centre to establish if the relevant decryption keys were recorded. The website 'nomoreransom.org' also held a list of regularly updated decryption keys.

The Chairman gave an example of a member of the public who had been the victim of ransomware, demonstrating that individuals were at risk as well as businesses. He also commented on the danger of using scanned signatures.

To reassure Members, the Chief Executive said that the Council's IT expertise and infrastructure reduced the level of risk. Information was shared with the workforce on the need for individual vigilance to help reduce the amount of phishing emails which occasionally filtered through the system.

In response to comments from Councillors Marion Bateman and Ian Smith, a cautious approach was recommended when accessing seemingly genuine websites and when sharing personal information on social media.

DC Hawe responded to Councillor Paul Shotton's query on support for schools and the all-Wales approach through the 'schoolbeat.org' programme. He spoke about the team's links with the regional and national teams but highlighted the under-reporting of cases, particularly by businesses, as a risk area. He agreed to a request to give the presentation to the Deeside Forum.

Remarks from the Chairman on the security of data held by Members prompted discussion on ransomware and reinforced the importance of using different passwords.

Councillor Richard Jones shared his approach to IT security and Councillor Andy Dunbobbin spoke about the availability of protective hardware and the safeguards of using 'Cloud computing'.

DC Hawe said that various sources of support and information on cyber scams were signposted on the team's social media pages and the Democratic Services Manager agreed to circulate the team's contact details to the Committee.

The Chief Executive said that specific guidance on the secure storage of data held by Members would form part of the Member Induction Programme.

The Chairman expressed his appreciation for the presentation and welcomed any future updates.

RESOLVED:

That Detective Constable Nicholas Have be thanked for his attendance and presentation.

90. CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

The Service Manager (Customer Support) presented the Customer Service Strategy for 2017-22 and sought views prior to consideration by Cabinet. The strategy focussed on transforming customer transactions through the delivery of services in the most modern and efficient way, and was split into three workstreams reflecting the main customer access channels.

Councillor Billy Mullin thanked the officer team for their work in refreshing the strategy which would be monitored and reviewed by a working group.

The Chief Executive said that the strategy was underpinned by the core Customer Service standards and would help to reinforce consistency on those commitments.

The Chairman pointed out that the Customer Service Policy had not been appended to the strategy, as had been indicated, and that two versions of the policy were available on the website. He said that the Council's standard to respond to digital correspondence within 10 working days differed from his own experience and that a log was kept by Member Services to record Members' written enquiries sent to officers.

The Customer Service & Registration Manager advised that enquiries submitted through the website, rather than individual officer email addresses, was the preferred method as these were subject to performance monitoring. She would ensure that the updated policy was shown on the website and liaise with Member Services on their method of recording enquiries. It was also explained that the new strategy complemented the Customer Service Policy which remained unchanged.

Councillor Richard Jones said that customers choosing telephone contact via Customer Services should be given the full name of the officer to enable any follow-up. He was given assurance that this was not required as information on each call was logged.

In supporting the strategy, Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer agreed that more work was needed, particularly on response times. The Chief Executive acknowledged that further improvements were required to achieve more consistency on standards. He went on to refer to work which was ongoing and spoke about the expectation on individuals to provide full explanations on the process involved in responding to more complex enquiries. He welcomed Members' feedback on any areas of concern and suggested that the Committee receive a progress report on the strategy, including reporting frequency of data, six months into the new municipal year.

Councillor Paul Shotton said that Members making enquiries on behalf of residents should be provided with a copy of the response by email. He went on to thank the Flintshire Connects team in Connah's Quay.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee welcomes the Customer Service Strategy and that the Cabinet be informed accordingly.

91. COUNCIL'S WELL-BEING OBJECTIVES

The Chief Executive presented the proposed Well-being Objectives for consideration prior to submitting for Cabinet approval. The Committee's views were sought on the Objectives, which aligned to the priorities of the Improvement Plan, to enable publication by the statutory deadline and review by the new administration.

Councillor Aaron Shotton referred to the timing of the report and the statutory requirement to publish the Objectives before 31 March 2017.

Councillor Richard Jones referred to the objective to maximise recovery and recycling of household and business waste, pointing out that most businesses used private companies. The Chief Executive acknowledged this point and said that the Council could have some degree of influence with no direct control.

The Committee indicated support for the Objectives with the change suggested by Councillor Jones.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the removal of the words 'household and business' from the third Green Council Objective, the draft set of Well-being Objectives be supported and the Cabinet informed accordingly.

92. QUARTER 3 IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2016/17 MONITORING REPORT

The Chief Executive presented the update report to consider progress towards the delivery of the impacts set out in the 2016/17 Improvement Plan, focussing on the areas of under-performance relevant to the Committee during Quarter 3. An overall positive position was reported on risk management and performance indicators.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee accepts the Quarter 3 Improvement Plan 2016/17 Monitoring Report.

93. WALES AUDIT OFFICE REPORT ON FINANCIAL RESILIENCE: SAVINGS PLANNING: COUNCIL RESPONSE

The Chief Executive introduced a report to receive and endorse the findings of the Wales Audit Office (WAO) review on financial resilience carried out in 2016. In line with the agreed protocol, comments from this Committee and the Audit Committee would be reported to Cabinet.

The WAO report concluded that 'the Council has a sound financial planning framework and it continues to strengthen its financial planning to better support future financial resilience'. There was one proposal for improvement to which the Council had responded. The findings for all 22 Welsh councils would be captured in a national summary report by WAO.

The Chief Executive spoke about the benefits of the phased budget process at an earlier stage and the intention to recommend a target of achieving a minimum of 95% of efficiency targets in year for 2017/18. The Council's rigorous approach to monitoring the achievement of efficiencies had been recognised by WAO.

Councillor Aaron Shotton spoke about the importance of the new Council continuing to make the case for financial support from Welsh Government. He welcomed recognition by WAO of the real-term reduction of 10.1% funding per head in Flintshire since 2013-14.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the Council's response to the WAO proposal for improvement of the Council's arrangements for financial savings planning.

94. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2016/17 (MONTH 10)

The Corporate Finance Manager introduced a report on the revenue budget monitoring position for 2016/17 as at Month 10 for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) prior to consideration by Cabinet.

On the Council Fund, the net in-year position comprised of an operating deficit of £0.705m which was a decrease from the Month 9 position. As reported previously, the change in Minimum Revenue Provision accounting policy had eliminated the in-year operating deficit, leaving projected net spend £2.181m lower than budget.

Significant budget changes made since the last report were explained and included the transfer of efficiency savings between portfolios and central and corporate, and also the virement previously approved for Social Services.

A slight improvement was reported on the programme of efficiencies with 90% of planned efficiencies expected to be achieved by year end.

An update was also given on the income strategy and included recommendations for the implementation of new sources of income which would contribute to the efficiency target included in the budget.

The projected level of contingency reserve available as at the end of March 2017 was confirmed as £5.333m with a recommendation in the report to allocate £0.050m to support initial setup costs and technical support for the Community Asset Transfer in Holywell which would help ensure the delivery of the following year's budget saving.

On the HRA, in-year spend was projected to be £0.037m higher than budget, leaving a year end balance of £1.061m which was above the recommended minimum level of 3%.

The Chief Executive reported that disposal of the orphaned industrial site in Sandycroft was currently underway which would end this liability for the Council. He thanked the Committee and the Chief Officer (Organisational Change) for their input on this complex project.

In response to a question from Councillor Richard Jones on the transfer of rollover amounts to external companies, the Chief Executive said that this was not the practice and he explained the arrangements for reserves and balances.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee approves the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2016/17 (Month 10) report and confirms that there are no specific issues to be brought to the attention of the Cabinet.

95. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10am and ended at 12 noon)

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Chairman