

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 DECEMBER 2021

Minutes of the meeting of Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held remotely on Thursday, 9 December 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Clive Carver (Chairman)

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Sean Bibby, Geoff Collett (Vice-Chair in the Chair for minute numbers 54-56), Mared Eastwood, Patrick Heesom, Kevin Rush, Paul Shotton, Andy Williams and Arnold Woolley

SUBSTITUTE: Councillors: Martin White (for Richard Lloyd)

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Ian Roberts - Leader and Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Billy Mullin - Deputy Leader (Governance) and Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets, Councillor Christine Jones - Deputy Leader (Partnerships) and Cabinet Member for Social Services, Councillor Paul Johnson - Cabinet Member for Finance, Social Value & Procurement, Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Governance), Corporate Finance Manager and Principal Accountant (Corporate Finance)

For minute number 58

Chief Officer (Social Services), Senior Manager (Safeguarding and Commissioning) and Principal Accountant (Social Services)

IN ATTENDANCE: Head of Democratic Services and Democratic Services Officer

54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

55. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2021 were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Shotton and Sean Bibby.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

56. ACTION TRACKING

The Head of Democratic Services presented the update report on progress with actions arising from previous meetings. As an action from the November meeting, it was confirmed that a letter to the Health Board was being drafted.

The Chairman took the opportunity to pay tribute to the Head of Democratic Services prior to his retirement from the Council.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Shotton and Mared Eastwood.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the progress which has been made.

57. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In presenting the updated forward work programme for consideration, the Head of Democratic Services advised that an update on the People Strategy would be added to the January agenda.

Councillor Patrick Heesom asked whether the report on the Regional Emergency Planning Service, scheduled for January, could be shared with Members as soon as it was available.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Patrick Heesom and Haydn Bateman.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be approved, as varied at the meeting; and
- (b) That the Overview & Scrutiny Facilitators, in consultation with the Committee Chairman, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

58. JOINT FUNDED CARE PACKAGES

The Chief Officer (Social Services) presented a report on the Council's financial position regarding joint funded care packages including the level of contributions received and income budget targets over the past three years.

The statutory framework developed by the Welsh Government set out arrangements for Health Boards to deliver NHS Continuing Health Care (CHC) within Wales, in partnership with Local Authorities and other organisations. Working relationships with Health Board colleagues had been developed over the years to agree the most appropriate care for individuals. It was noted that Flintshire and Wrexham had the highest number of CHC packages in North Wales. There were a number of challenges arising from the CHC process including adapting to meet the changing needs of individuals within communities. The report highlighted the additional CHC resources within the Health Board in comparison with the Council where a dedicated CHC Co-ordinator post had been created to support the claims process. Information was also shared on arrangements for monitoring and escalating outstanding debt levels.

The Principal Accountant (Social Services) provided an overview of the financial processes in place for care packages aligned to budget monitoring arrangements and regular review of debt levels, as detailed in the report.

The Chairman thanked the officers for their attendance.

The recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Geoff Collett and Andy Williams.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee is assured of the robust and proactive budget management approach which the Council takes on joint funded care packages; and
- (b) That the Committee notes the amount of annual contributions from Continuing Health Care (CHC) contributions from Health Boards.

59. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND ANNUAL BUDGET 2022/23

The Chief Executive introduced a report on the latest position for the Council Fund Revenue Budget 2022/23 in advance of receipt of the Welsh Local Government Provisional Settlement and formal budget setting process.

The Corporate Finance Manager reminded the Committee of the position reported in July prior to Overview & Scrutiny Committees supporting cost pressures within their respective portfolios. An updated additional budget requirement reported to Cabinet in October was mainly due to the increase in Employer National Insurance contributions from April 2022. The current position - which took into account pay and inflationary assumptions, the draft budget increase from North Wales Fire & Rescue Service and other adjustments - had further increased the additional budget requirement to £20.696m. The report detailed changes since the previous estimate including the impact of inflationary increases on pay and school utility budgets, together with social care commissioning. Ongoing risks such as Out of County Placements would need to be carefully monitored, along with impact of the Hardship Fund ceasing in March 2022. Although a revised efficiency target of £1.250m had been identified, the funding solutions to reach a legal and balanced budget were mainly reliant on an annual uplift in Revenue Support Grant.

A report by the Welsh Local Government Association detailing the impact of cost pressures across Wales also reflected the local position when taking account of the efficiencies identified and an annual uplift in Council Tax similar to recent years. A collective letter to Welsh Government from all six North Wales Councils in advance of the Provisional Settlement was also shared.

Councillor Paul Shotton raised concerns about the cost pressures which demonstrated the need for a favourable outcome on the Provisional Settlement.

On changes since the previous budget estimate, Councillor Paul Johnson said there were a number of areas on which the Council had little or no control.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Shotton and Haydn Bateman.

RESOLVED:

That having considered the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget 2022/23 report, the Committee confirms that there are no specific matters to be raised at Cabinet.

60. COUNCIL PLAN 2021-22 MID-YEAR PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Chief Executive introduced the mid-year monitoring report to review progress against corporate priorities set out in the Council's Reporting Measures 2020/21 under the remit of the Committee. This exception-based report focussed on areas of under-performance against in-year targets. As the Committee with overall responsibility for performance, a complete outturn report for all portfolios was also shared.

Overall this was a positive report with 97% good or satisfactory progress recorded against activities and a high/medium level of confidence in the achievement of 95% of outcomes.

The Chief Officer (Governance) provided information on changes in performance levels relating to accessing information digitally and retention of digital skills, which reflected different levels of demand throughout the pandemic.

Councillor Paul Shotton thanked the Flintshire Connects teams for the support given to residents as part of the Digital Poverty theme. He commended the success of Summer play schemes across Flintshire and asked about funding for the continuation of the Covid Support Hub in Shotton.

The Chief Executive advised that he would liaise with the Benefits Manager to seek a response on the latter and a response to Councillor Haydn Bateman's question on clarification around food parcel assistance for a constituent who was about to be discharged from hospital into sheltered accommodation.

The recommendations, which were amended to reflect the debate, were moved and seconded by Councillors Andy Williams and Haydn Bateman.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee welcomes the progress shown in the Mid-Year Performance Monitoring Report; and
- (b) That the Committee is assured by explanations given for underperformance, which in the main are explained by the interruption of the pandemic.

61. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2021/22 (MONTH 7)

The Corporate Finance Manager presented a report on the revenue budget monitoring position for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) at month 7, prior to consideration by Cabinet.

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 £0.655m (excluding the impact of the pay award to be met from reserves) which reflected a favourable movement of £0.428m from month 6. This would leave a year-end contingency reserve balance of £6.543m. The main areas of movement were set out in the report including Housing & Assets where there was a recommendation for Cabinet to approve a presentational budget virement for centralised utility costs to Central & Corporate Finance. The report also included an update on the current position with the pay award, emergency funding claims and unearmarked reserves.

On the HRA, a projected overspend of £0.539m would leave a closing un-earmarked balance of £3.933m, which was well above the recommended guidelines on spend.

In response to concerns raised by Councillor Patrick Heesom on void properties, the Chief Executive spoke about the contributing factors and economic impacts on voids and reported that increasing the number of contractors to turnaround properties was helping to improve overall performance.

In highlighting the work undertaken on budget monitoring and Council Tax collection rates, Councillor Paul Johnson thanked the Corporate Finance Manager, Revenues Manager and their respective teams.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Patrick Heesom and Haydn Bateman.

RESOLVED:

That having considered the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2021/22 (Month 7) report, the Committee confirms that there are no specific matters to be raised with Cabinet.

62. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10am and ended at 11am)

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Chairman