

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 APRIL 2023

Minutes of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a hybrid meeting on Thursday, 20 April 2023

PRESENT: Councillor Richard Jones (Chairman)

Councillors: Bill Crease, Chris Dolphin, Alasdair Ibbotson, Gina Maddison, Allan Marshall, Vicky Perfect, Jason Shallcross, Sam Swash and Linda Thomas

SUBSTITUTE: Councillor: Rob Davies (for Bernie Attridge)

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Paul Johnson (Cabinet Member for Finance, Inclusion & Resilient Communities), Councillor Billy Mullin (Cabinet Member for Governance and Corporate Services), Chief Executive, Chief Officer (Governance), Corporate Finance Manager, Strategic Finance Manager, Corporate Manager (Capital Programme & Assets) and Strategic Executive Officer (Capital Programme & Assets)

For minute number 94

Andrea Powell - Community Foundation in Wales

For minute number 99

Steve W Jones - Managing Director of NEWydd Catering & Cleaning Ltd
Rachael Corbelli - Strategic Finance Manager (Commercial and Housing)

IN ATTENDANCE: Democratic Services Manager and team

90. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

91. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2023 were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillors Bill Crease and Linda Thomas.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

92. ACTION TRACKING

The Democratic Services Manager presented an update on actions arising from previous meetings.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Allan Marshall and Bill Crease.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the progress which has been made.

93. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager presented the current forward work programme for consideration and noted the following changes:

- Outturn report for Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2022/23 - to be moved from May to July
- Revenue Budget Monitoring 2023/24 Month 1 to be removed from June to allow for an Interim Revenue Budget Monitoring 2023/24 Report in July.

On that basis, the recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillors Bill Crease and Linda Thomas.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme, as amended, be noted; and
- (b) That the Democratic Services Manager, in consultation with the Committee Chairman, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

94. FLINTSHIRE FUNDS IMPACT REPORT 2022

The Chief Executive introduced the Flintshire Funds Impact Report for 2022 which outlined progress with the Flintshire Community Endowment Fund and Tri-partite Welsh Church Act Fund, both of which were overseen by the Community Foundation Wales.

The Committee was introduced to Andrea Powell of Community Foundation Wales who gave a short presentation on the following areas, as appended to the report:

- Introduction
- Update including distribution of grants
- Fund History and Overview
- Financial Performance
- Case Studies

In response to questions from Councillor Alasdair Ibbotson, clarification was given on the grant panel membership and distribution of awards. It was also confirmed that ethical investment policies were adapting over the longer term to support climate change.

The Chairman welcomed the presentation and accompanying case studies which highlighted the benefits to individuals and groups.

His comments were echoed by Councillor Paul Johnson who made particular reference to the work of 'Emerge Community Arts', one of the groups which had benefitted from a grant.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Bill Crease and Rob Davies.

RESOLVED:

That having considered the contents of the Flintshire Funds Impact Report 2022, the Committee supports the work of the Community Foundation Wales.

95. COUNCIL PLAN 2023-28

The Chief Executive presented a report on the refreshed priorities, sub-priorities and well-being objectives within the Council Plan for 2023-28 which reflected a long-term view of recovery, projects and ambitions over the period. Part 2 of the Council Plan was being considered by Overview & Scrutiny committees to ensure full coverage of Part 1 and its respective measures and targets, prior to adoption by County Council.

Under Learning Environments, Councillor Bill Crease highlighted the development of a school modernisation strategy within the Saltney area by March 2024. He referred to previous plans for work at St. David's High School which had not been progressed due to site issues and commented on the urgent need to develop further proposals to improve conditions at the school.

The Chief Executive noted the specific point regarding the condition of the roof and reminded the Committee that the school had the option to utilise its delegated budgets to undertake repairs before minor repairs became significant requiring LEA intervention. On the specific matter of the school modernisation strategy and more specifically Saltney St. David's, the Chief Executive agreed to refer the matter to the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Under Green Society and Environment, Councillor Sam Swash asked why reference to forthcoming legislation on councils establishing their own municipal bus companies was not included in actions for the Active and Sustainable Travel Options sub-priority.

The Chief Executive reported that further information on the changes had not yet been received from Welsh Government. He agreed that some reference could be included and would refer back to the Chief Officer.

The following points were raised by the Chair to be referred to the relevant Overview & Scrutiny committees and Cabinet:

- To review the rationale for removing sub-priorities on Empty Properties, Renewable Energy and Spending Money for the Benefit of Flintshire.

- Income Poverty - to consider the timeliness of actions, particularly bullet-point 7 on maximising benefit entitlement.
- Child Poverty - to clarify how outcomes could be controlled and measured where external grant funding was involved.
- Housing Support and Homeless Prevention - whether the amended wording to ensure homelessness “is rare, brief and non-recurring” could be viewed as lowering that target.
- Net Zero Carbon Council - to consider whether wording on actions being “central to Covid-19 recovery” should apply to this five year Plan.
- Climate Change Adaptation - query on how Flood Risk Management could be controlled and measured if this service was outsourced and also no mention of renewable energy projects.
- Transport Connectivity - disagreed with the second bullet-point on supporting the establishment of Corporate Joint Committees.
- Independent Living - clarity on how ensuring children had the best start in life could be measured.
- Safeguarding - questioned the lengthy period to prepare for the implementation of the new Liberty Protect Safeguard procedures.
- Educational Engagement and Achievement - to consider an earlier target date to develop options to support the rising number of pupils struggling to engage with education due to mental health issues.
- People - to clarify whether implementing a compliant and sustainable new pay model by October 2023 meant that the current model is not compliant.

Part 2 of the Council Plan:

- Poverty - Income Poverty and Fuel Poverty - some 2023/24 targets do not show improvement from the 2021/22 baseline data.
- Affordable and Accessible Housing - Housing Support and Homeless Prevention and Social Housing - no improvement shown in targets for 2023/24.
- Green Society and Environment - Phosphates Mitigation - to clarify how the Council could influence outcomes on the upgrade of Mold and Buckley wastewater treatment works given the involvement of an external organisation.
- Economy - Business sub-priority - significant reduction in targets.
- Personal and Community Well-being - Independent Living and Safeguarding - some 2023/24 targets do not show improvement from the 2021/22 baseline data.
- Education and Skills - Educational Engagement & Achievement and Learning Environments - targets do not show improvement.
- Education and Skills - Digital Learning Opportunities - no targets set for some achievement measures.
- Education and Skills - Specialist Educational Provision - no achievement measures indicated.
- Well Managed Council - People - reduced target for apprenticeships with positive outcomes.

- Well Managed Council - Digital - target for the percentage of answered calls to the corporate Contact Centre should align to the wording in the achievement measure.

On the sub-priority for Local Development Plan (LDP) targets, Councillor Alasdair Ibbotson referred to the associated risk on slow progress with the Strategic Development Plan failing to set context for LDP 2. He questioned why work on developing the second LDP was not reflected in this Council Plan, particularly given the significant work involved.

The Chief Executive noted that the LDP had only recently been adopted by the Council and that progress with LDP2 would need to consider the links with the Strategic Development Plan. He agreed to refer this specific matter within the plan to the Chief Officer (Planning, Economy and Environment) for consideration.

Due to the number of comments made, the Chairman moved an amendment to the recommendation and was seconded by Councillor Bill Crease.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That subject to the comments, the Committee receives and notes the Council Plan 2023-28 Part 1 and Part 2 documents that outline the actions, measures and risks that underpin the Priorities, Sub-Priorities and Well-being objectives of the Council Plan 2023-28; and
- (b) That the comments made by the Committee be referred to respective Overview & Scrutiny committees and Cabinet for consideration.

96. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2022/23 MONTH 11

The Strategic Finance Manager presented the 2022/23 month 11 position for the revenue budget monitoring for the Council Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA), prior to consideration by Cabinet.

On the Council Fund, the projected year-end position reported an operating surplus of £2.106m (excluding the impact of the pay award met by reserves). This would leave a contingency reserve balance of £8.364m at year-end which included the in-year additional cost of £3.955m for 2022/23 pay awards to date and £2.4m of earmarked reserves transferred in from the additional revenue support 2021/22 allocation, approved in December 2022. Significant movements from month 10 were mainly due to changes to grant funding across Social Services and the allocation from the Regional Integration Fund which impacted positively on the position with Out of County Placements. The positive movement in Central & Corporate was due to one-off windfall income from NDR savings and a further reduction in short-term borrowing costs in the Central Loans & Investment Account, in addition to increasing income from temporary investment resulting from rising bank interest rates. There were a number of requests to carry forward funding into the 2023/24, totalling £1.4m across portfolios, as set out in Appendix 6.

A summary of tracked in-year risks reported the current position with Council Tax collection levels and pay awards, along with other risks such as the waste recycling infraction charge on which a decision by Welsh Government was awaited.

An update on unearmarked reserves reported the current balance on the Covid-19 Emergency Reserve as £3.610m, to be utilised to meet Covid-related costs and wider demands.

On the HRA, net in-year revenue expenditure was forecast to be £2.839m higher than budget and would leave a closing un-earmarked balance of £3.635m, which was above the recommended guidelines on spend.

In response to questions from Councillor Sam Swash and the Chairman on the waste recycling infraction charge, it was explained that a demand had been issued to the Council and that negotiations were ongoing to establish the penalty imposed. This risk would be assessed as part of year-end commitments in terms of a contingency allocation in the accounts depending on the outcome of those negotiations.

As requested previously, the Chairman asked that future reports include explanation on movements (however minor) in approved budgets to add clarity.

The recommendation, as amended to reflect the debate, was moved and seconded by Councillors Bill Crease and Rob Davies.

RESOLVED:

That having considered the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2022/23 (month 11) report, the Committee wishes the risk around the potential waste recycling infraction charge to be raised with Cabinet.

97. DELIVERING PUBLIC SERVICES IN THE 21ST CENTURY - AN OVERVIEW

The Chief Executive introduced a report to explore the benefits and limitations of outsourcing and/or creating shared services as a means to deliver Council services, as requested previously by the Committee.

The Committee was introduced to Kelly Oldham-Jones, the Strategic Executive Officer (Capital Programme & Assets), who provided an overview of the main areas of the report. She explained that in addition to summarising a wider selection of alternative delivery models (ADMs), the report highlighted broader core principles and legislative requirements that should be considered. In setting out the Council's approach, reference was made to key criteria - including Welsh Government guidance - and the need to develop each model to meet specific needs and with appropriate resources to implement, as demonstrated in the examples shared.

The Chairman said that managing back-office services from a central location to achieve cost savings worked well in the private sector, acknowledging

the impact on staff, and suggested a further report to consider options for the Council and potential impacts.

In highlighting the Joint Procurement Unit as a shared service with Denbighshire County Council, the Chief Executive said it should be recognised that a significant level of work had been undertaken over the past few years to transform services, including protecting services for communities through ADMs and Community Asset Transfers (CATs). As such, a key consideration for options for shared services should be an understanding of the benefits to the Council and its partners.

The Chairman acknowledged the complexities involved and suggested that the Committee identify one option to enable a detailed report to be shared to consider the implications.

Councillor Paul Johnson said it was important that any change improved upon that service.

In commenting on the comprehensive list of options shared in the report, Councillor Bill Crease said that scrutinising proposals and cost analysis to understand benefits should become an embedded culture across the organisation.

The Chief Executive advised that any considerations should have due regard to key criteria such as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and TUPE¹ rights. In response to the comments raised, he assured Members that consideration was given to the viability of appropriate models.

The Chairman proposed an amendment to the recommendations to reflect the debate. He was seconded by Councillor Allan Marshall.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee notes the different models that can be used as alternatives to deliver services;
- (b) That the Committee recognises the wider factors, such as legislative parameters and core principles, which need to be observed when considering the delivery of services through alternative delivery models;
- (c) That the Committee is assured that the Council considers all appropriate alternative delivery models, and the benefits and limitations of these, as part of a broader options appraisal when reviewing services; and
- (d) That the Committee receives a future report on shared services at a future date.

¹ Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)

98. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 - TO CONSIDER THE EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Exclusion of the press and public was moved and seconded by Councillors Allan Marshall and Bill Crease.

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting as the following item was considered to be exempt by virtue of paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

99. NEWYDD BUSINESS PLAN 2023/24

The Chief Executive introduced the annual Business Plan 2023/24 for NEWydd Catering & Cleaning Ltd for consideration prior to submitting to Council for formal approval.

Steve W Jones, the Managing Director of NEWydd Catering & Cleaning Ltd, provided a summary of the key elements of the Business Plan along with financial pressures identified for 2023/24 with associated mitigating actions.

In response to questions from Members, the Managing Director and Strategic Finance Manager (Commercial and Housing) provided clarification on responsibilities and financial arrangements.

The recommendation was moved and seconded by Councillors Bill Crease and Rob Davies.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee notes the strategic risks facing the business and the Business Plan 2023/24, which includes the mitigation of the risks identified, and commends the Business Plan to Cabinet.

100. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

None.

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

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Chairman