

CABINET

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held in the Town Hall, Ruthin on Tuesday 5 February 2002 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

Councillors E.C. Edwards (Leader), D.M. Holder, R.W. Hughes, G.M. Kensler, D.M. Morris, E.A. Owens, A.E. Roberts, W.R. Webb, K.E. Wells and E.W. Williams.

Observers: Councillors M.L.I. Davies, G. Jones, M.M. Jones, K.N. Hawkins and P.O. Williams.

APOLOGIES

Councillor I.M. German.

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive, Corporate Director of Resources, Financial Controller and the County Clerk.

WELCOME

The Leader welcomed Ian Miller to the post of Chief Executive and his first Cabinet meeting and wished him well in Denbighshire. Ian Miller thanked the Leader and Cabinet for their good wishes.

1221. URGENT MATTERS

The Leader of the Council gave notice of the following items which in his opinion should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972:-

- (i) Papers for information regarding Concessionary Fare Scheme - Agenda Item 10 Cabinet 29.02.2002, and
- (ii) The Leader thanked Members and officers who had participated in the Boundary Commission meeting at Llangollen on 30.02.2002 and said the presentations had been very well received. As a result of the meeting, the Chief Executive said he would be writing to the Boundary Commission on three points:
 - (a) At the meeting, a number of people in favour of moving the Llangollen and Llantysilio boundary said the reasons included services only being provided from Rhyl. This point would be challenged as Denbighshire operated a One Stop Shop in Llangollen, the Cabinet met regularly in Llangollen and face to face services were provided where necessary by Social Services.
 - (b) Health services - issues relating to the National Health Service should not drive decisions on Local Government boundaries. In time there would be a Local Health Board for Denbighshire. The Wrexham Maelor Hospital also served communities such as Bala and Dolgellau as well as Llangollen.
 - (c) The Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC) reported that the final report would be published at the end of March / early April. The LGBC would be asked to adhere to the original extended deadline of February if at all possible as the message from all attendees at the meeting had been the need for an early decision.

1222. MINUTES OF THE CABINET

The Minutes of the Cabinet held on 29 January 2002 (previously circulated) were submitted.

Item 10 - Concessionary Fare Scheme: Councillor D.M. Morris provided an update to the report. A Wales-wide leaflet, a letter and paper for information was provided for Members. Councillor Morris emphasised that the passes should be available from April 2002.

Item 13 - Revenue Budget: Councillor E.A. Owens confirmed that a letter had been received from Edwina Hart AM, Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities confirming a £232k special grant adjustment on the 2001-2002 settlement. The Leader said a letter of thanks had been sent to Edwina Hart AM.

Announcement - Councillor E.W. Williams requested that his statement be included in full in the minutes: "As a member of a politically balanced cabinet & believe in inclusive policies I resign my portfolio held on the cabinet.

The cabinet system has been agreed to be inclusive, unfortunately persistent discrimination & abuse by Independent, Labour & Conservative members lead me to believe that the county policy is not being served well.

I shall retain my seat on the Cabinet to give a critical voice in the decision making process & will only take up a portfolio when reassurances are made that an inclusive policy is upheld".

RESOLVED that subject to the above, the Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 29 January 2002 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

1223. BUDGET 2002/2003

Councillor E.A. Owens, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance presented the report (previously circulated) seeking Members' consideration and agreement of the revenue budget proposals for 2002/2003 and agree the recommendation of the proposals to Council on 12 February 2002.

The Financial Controller asked Members to consider Appendix 2 and said the starting position for 2002/2003 was shown in column 3. He mentioned the non-recurring items of £190k allocated to Directorates from the Contingency fund in the current year only. Inflation had been split amongst the Directorates. Appendix 3 of the report detailed the new burdens which contained few changes from earlier papers. Appendix 3 also detailed potential underfunding of the teachers threshold payments which would be monitored closely during the year with a claim for additional NAW funding possible. The Service Improvements shown at column 8 had been considered by Scrutiny Committees and previously by Cabinet. Certain amendments / new issues previously considered by Cabinet were shown in italics including an annual contribution to a fund for special events e.g. for the 2006 Urdd Eisteddfod, while arrangements for international links and the potential full impact of Members' allowances were covered.

The Chief Executive reminded Members that it was important for the Corporate Priorities to be taken into account. The Priorities at Appendix 4 were for the current financial year and would be updated for the County Council meeting. The new Priorities would reflect the Cabinet's priorities for 2002/2003.

Councillor W.R. Webb, Lead Cabinet Member for Property congratulated Members and Officers on the paper. He questioned where Denbighshire appeared on the school spending league tables and whether consideration should be given at this time to increase funding to the schools' delegated budgets.

Councillor K.E. Wells, Lead Cabinet for Education and ICT said Denbighshire had been 19th in the school spending league tables and to be placed further up the table would take a large injection of money. Denbighshire would however meet the threshold payments and other pressures in full. A rise in the Council Tax to increase the schools' delegated budget would need to be balanced against other considerations.

Councillor E.A. Owens, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance said the threshold and contingency payments were in one fund. Any reallocation of priorities would be brought to Cabinet for consideration. District Audit have instructed the Authority to build reserves of £1m per year from the next financial year to a prudent level which is at least £3m.

Councillor D.M. Holder, Lead Cabinet Member for Training said he sympathised with the need for education services to be well funded but suggested that this funding should not always be paid for from Council tax increases. It would be beneficial to keep the Council tax increase to a minimum.

Councillor R.W. Hughes, Lead Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Tourism said education faced difficult problems, in particular more funding was required for the social and psychological care of children before they were taught in mainstream schools. The Corporate Director of Lifelong Learning said Educational Psychologists would be employed and funds have been passported into the base budget for specialist staff to be appointed. Schools purchase from the behavioural support unit when required.

Councillor E.W. Williams said education was important and Denbighshire's results were good. All Authorities aimed to be at the top of the performance league tables. Denbighshire and its schools should formulate a partnership for the benefit of the schools. The Denbighshire figures contained in the spending league tables include transport figures whereas some of the other Local Authorities do not include their transport figures.

Councillor G.M. Kensler, Lead Cabinet Member for the Welsh Language welcomed the comments regarding the Education budget. With regard to the Corporate Priorities item C1.3 'Implement Strategies to maximise income opportunities', based on the Price Is Right document from the Audit Commission concerning the sale of assets to raise funds, the outcome of such asset sales would need to be considered in the light of any impact on services. Councillor Kensler also mentioned the Educational Psychologist posts approved at the last Cabinet meeting and asked whether the delay in recruitment would have an adverse effect on the service. Councillor E.A. Owens, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance said if the schools' delegated budget provision was raised this would help with the Educational Psychologist provision.

Councillor E.W. Williams suggested that Cabinet produce an outline partnership between Denbighshire Education Department and Denbighshire schools. Councillor K.E. Wells, Lead Cabinet Member for Lifelong Learning said the dialogue between the Denbighshire Heads Federation, Members and officers was good and the new LMS post would take forward the local management of schools' budgets. Councillor Williams said this should be a noted process to ensure all Council Members were aware of the issues.

Councillor W.R. Webb reminded Members that because of the legacy of Clwyd County Council, Denbighshire had been at the bottom of the schools' spending league tables. He suggested consideration be given to an increase of a further 1% on the Council Tax to enable approximately £250k extra to be added to the schools' delegated budget.

The Chief Executive reminded Members that Denbighshire's performance results were generally good and that extra funding for schools would not necessarily improve on this performance.

Councillor R.W. Hughes, Lead Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Tourism said progress had been made with the CROW funds. Councillor Hughes said as the Cabinet met on a fortnightly basis she supported the £15k allocated to Cabinet Support.

Councillor Hughes also mentioned C1.3 of the Corporate Priorities in relation to the Culture and Leisure Department, which in the main provided non-statutory services. It was essential to have a marketing post within the Department to market Denbighshire.

Councillor E.A. Owens, Lead Cabinet Member for Finance detailed part of the document. The 'hypothecation' figure for CROW funding was £102k. Joint working between the Environment Directorate and the Culture and Leisure Department was required. The funding of the service could be considered further during the course of the year when additional funding may be possible from the £1m contingency, provided progress was made regarding joint working proposals. With regard to the Highways Severe Weather Response Team item, this had been considered by the Scrutiny Panel but no allocation for any improvements to additional expenditure would be included at this stage.

The CCTV contract was recommended for increase by £30k to meet current commitments as this was a recurring maintenance item. With regard to the Social Services Community Agency costs, these would need to be absorbed during the year.

The Head of Economic Regeneration had reported that Objective 1 required capital rather than revenue funding. Therefore, with the exception of the CCTV contract, the other bids would not be supported.

Councillor G.M. Kensler, Lead Cabinet Member for the Welsh Language asked Councillor K.E. Wells for figures on the provision of Educational Psychologists. Councillor Kensler supported joint working, for example with the Health Authorities. Councillor Kensler reminded Members that Denbighshire did not currently have a full time officer with responsibility for the Welsh Language.

The Chief Executive asked for Members' agreement to the amended budget paper being presented to County Council on 12 February 2002 with the final budget report being produced for County Council on 26 February 2002. Included in the paper for County Council on 12 February 2002 would be the breakdown of the proposed further increase to the delegated budget for schools. The Chief Executive asked for Cabinet agreement to put forward 2 options for increases to the schools' delegated budget within the paper to be discussed by County Council on 12 February 2002.

Councillor W.R. Webb, Lead Cabinet Member for Property supported the inclusion of a possible further increase to the schools' delegated budget and said County Council should take the decision. Members agreed.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) *Cabinet confirm acceptance of the principles and objectives which have governed the budget-setting process;*
- (b) *the detailed allocation outlined in Appendices 2 and 3 attached to the report are accepted as the framework for the budget for 2002/2003, and*
- (b) *the budget paper is recommended for discussion at the Council meeting on 12 February 2002 together with consideration of a possible further increase in the schools' delegated budget funded by a small increase in Council Tax.*

The meeting concluded at 11.10 p.m.
