

CABINET

Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held in Conference Room 1, Council Offices, Ruthin on Tuesday 21 December 2004 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

Councillors S A Davies, Lead Member for Business & Communications; P A Dobb, Lead Member for Health & Wellbeing; E C Edwards, Lead Member for Communities; M A German, Lead Member for Children and Young People; R W Hughes, Leader and Lead Member for Regeneration; P J Marfleet, Lead Member for Finance and Personnel; D Owens, Lead Member for Lifelong Learning; S Roberts, Lead Member for Promoting Denbighshire; J Thompson Hill, Lead Member for Property and Asset Management and E W Williams, Lead Member for Environment.

Observers: Councillors R E Barton; J Butterfield; J Chamberlain Jones; M LI Davies; D Hannam; M M Jones, N Hugh Jones and J A Smith.

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive; Deputy Chief Executive / Corporate Director: Resources, County Clerk and the Financial Controller.

APOLOGIES

None.

502 URGENT MATTERS

- [i] Head of Transport and Infrastructure - verbal report by Corporate Director: Environment
- [ii] Directorate Seminars - verbal report by Councillor R W Hughes, Leader
- [iii] Tribute by Councillor E C Edwards to the Assistant Chief Executive [Strategy] on his retirement.

503 MINUTES OF THE CABINET

The Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 2 November 2004 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 2 November 2004 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

The Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 23 November 2004 were submitted.

Item 9 Free Swimming for Older People: Councillor S Roberts updated Members that Denbigh High School have agreed to the proposals and further meetings with other schools are being arranged.

RESOLVED that subject to the above, the Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 23 November 2004 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

504 DRAFT INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY

Councillor R W Hughes presented the report seeking Cabinet approval to adopt a strategy for developments with regions who wish to co-operate with Denbighshire and to approve the memorandum of understanding with Powiat Gliwicki, Poland. Cabinet were also asked to agree that international activity be considered at one of the Directorate days to identify future opportunities.

Councillor Hughes outlined the financial benefits of working with international areas and said Denbighshire was the lead Authority in Wales on international work. She said it was important to have a strategy which would allow Denbighshire to be more focused and plan the work and programmes which the Authority would wish to participate in.

Councillor P A Dobb said she was pleased to see the strategy, particularly in regard to recruitment needs as this could be of benefit to both the Authority and the independent sector in areas where recruitment of staff was proving difficult.

Councillor S A Davies thanked Economic Development for the recently held Llangollen Food Festival, which a group from Poland had attended. The international dimension of such events was helping with the local economy.

Councillor E C Edwards asked for more detail on the community development, an update on the Vasternorrland, Sweden and County Clare, Ireland links and said he was pleased to see the results of the Rhyl regeneration project outlined in the appendix to the report. In response, the Head of Development Services said that community development included twinning with other areas and there could be areas with which the Authority could help with funding streams and development of databases. Europe was also providing significant resources for twinning with regional local authorities but this was not currently available to Denbighshire. A Memorandum of Understanding had been signed with Vasternorrland and they would visit Denbighshire in the spring of 2005, with Denbighshire County Council representatives going to Vasternorrland in 2006. County Clare was the Authority's partner in Interreg projects for the next 3 years and there could be merit in pursuing a link with them on the community strategy.

Councillor P J Marfleet, whilst supportive of initiatives of financial benefit to Denbighshire, reminded Members of the cost of officer and Member time in working with international areas, particularly on tourism issues. He suggested more work should be carried out to try and achieve more tourists from the rest of the UK to visit the County and this would give more income for less cost. He expressed his concern over the CANTATA which meant higher costs and higher risks. He asked that this should be monitored over all stages over the coming months, particularly what value was gained in monetary terms from each trip.

Councillor E W Williams said he welcomed the strategy and said each visit had been of benefit to Denbighshire. Whilst appreciating the concern over costs, he said it could take some time before financial benefits were realised.

The Chief Executive apologised for the error on the Welsh Agenda, where 'international' had been translated as 'internal'. With regard to monitoring of visits, a section on monitoring and control was included in the appendix to the report. He expressed his thanks to the Leader and staff for the strategy.

Councillor M LI Davies said he had originally been sceptical about international visits but after his recent visit to Poland he had seen the benefits and thanked Councillor Hughes for the report.

Councillor M A German expressed his support for the report and also agreed with Councillor Marfleet that more should be done to encourage tourists from other UK areas to visit Denbighshire, as Prestatyn in particular had over recent years lost revenue owing to the lack of visitors.

It was agreed that future reports would include the name of the countries referred to, not just the regions.

RESOLVED that Cabinet support the Draft International Strategy as a basis for further consultation and approve the memorandum of understanding with Powiat, Gliwicki, Poland. It was further resolved that international activity be considered at one of the forthcoming Directorate days to identify future opportunities.

505 SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

Councillor D Owens presented the report for Members to review the decision taken by the Cabinet in January 2004 to amend the School and College Transport Policy in respect of eligibility for free transport to denominational schools in the County.

Councillor E W Williams said school transport had always impacted on budgets. In particular rural school transport caused problems where children did not attend the nearest school. He suggested that as many village schools were closing due to lack of pupil numbers as children were taken to the nearest town to school, school transport should only be provided to the nearest school.

Councillor E C Edwards said the problem was compounded as parents worked away from the area and wished their children to attend schools on their route to work. He suggested the legal implications of only providing transport to the nearest school should be examined.

Councillor N Hugh Jones referred to the effect on the religious education communities if the decision of Cabinet earlier in the year was confirmed.

Councillor P J Marfleet said although there was an opportunity for savings, the cost of officer time was high and on balance he felt Cabinet should rescind the decision.

RESOLVED that Members rescind the previous Cabinet decision to amend the School and College Transport Policy in respect of eligibility for free transport to denominational schools and maintains the existing Policy.

506 REVENUE BUDGET 2004-2005

Councillor P J Marfleet presented the report for Members, in the light of the budget performance figures for the current financial year as detailed in the appendices attached to the report, to consider any actions necessary to reduce the balance of overspending on services. He expressed his disappointment in the figures and said improvements in performance were required each month. The Chief Executive's Department figures were likely to be less than stated at the end of the financial year.

With regard to Lifelong Learning, Councillor Marfleet expressed his concern that the previous £483k overrun was now £525k overrun and the original £329k in the SEN budget was now £348k due to a shortfall of income. He said officers and Members should give extensive consideration, in a robust and speedy manner, to the budgets over the next few weeks to redress the situation and ensure the expenditure was not carried forward to the next financial year. The Head of Education Services agreed with Councillor Marfleet's comments and said the SEN budget was volatile and care orders in particular added to the budget pressures.

Councillor Marfleet discussed the Culture and Leisure expenditure, in particular the increase in staffing costs at the Royal International Pavilion which required more management control; the gas invoice which should have been anticipated at the Leisure Centre and the impact of reduced revenue at the Pavilion Theatre, Rhyl. In response, the Acting Director of Lifelong Learning said Culture and Leisure had a bad year and had no reserves in the system to cope with unforeseen problems and issues. The increase in staffing costs at the Royal International Pavilion was the result of regrading. However, the top slicing of the budget to contribute to Llais y Sir / County Voice had an effect on attendance at the Rhyl Pavilion Theatre as marketing had been affected. She said progressive savings were being made each month.

Councillor E C Edwards queried the restricted community access to Ruthin Leisure Centre for early morning swimming. The Acting Director Lifelong Learning said the school were insistent the public were away from the site before the pupils arrived each morning which had led to changes in shift patterns and increased costs. Councillor Edwards said child protection was of the utmost importance but the school would have to work with the Authority as the public had right of access to the

swimming pool. He agreed with Councillor P A Dobb's comment that the Task and Finish Group formed to look into access to leisure centres based in schools had to pursue the matter as a matter of urgency.

Councillor Marfleet said any department showing a surplus should also be encouraged to achieve further savings as these would assist with the level of Council Tax rise the following year and service delivery.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the figures in the Appendices and agree the remedial actions to align projected spending levels with approved budgets.

507 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2004/2005

Councillor P A Dobb presented the report for Members to note the latest financial forecast position of the housing Revenue Account for the current financial year. Councillor Dobb was pleased that the provision for bad and doubtful debts was overfunded by £286,612 and this would be transferred back to the Housing Revenue Account reserves.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the figures in Appendix 1 to the report.

508 COUNCIL TAX BASE 2005-2006

The Deputy Chief Executive / Corporate Director: Resources presented the report seeking Cabinet agreement to the Council Tax Base for 2005-2006. This was the first time that Cabinet would make the decision on this annual process. A letter had been sent to all Members a couple of weeks previously by the Head of Revenues, outlining how the Council Tax revaluations affected each area.

Most areas in the County, with the exception of Rhyl, were experiencing increases in the Council Tax bandings, as a result of the re-evaluation process carried out. Councillor D Hannam said the increases would affect people who could least afford to pay. The Chief Executive said many properties in Rhyl would in fact pay less as they would move from Band D to Band C.

In response to a query, the The Deputy Chief Executive / Corporate Director: Resources said the Welsh Assembly Government would cover increases over and above one Band. The Authority had built assumptions into the calculations of the likely number of appeals.

RESOLVED that the calculation of the Council's Tax Base for the year 2005/2006 be approved and in accordance with The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base)(Wales) Regulations 1995 No 2561 as amended, the amount calculated as the Tax Base for each Community area for the year 2005/2006 shall be:-

| Community Area | Tax Base 2005/2006 |
|----------------|--------------------|
| Aberwheeler | 177 |
| Betws GG | 153 |
| Bodelwyddan | 721 |
| Bodfari | 181 |
| Bryneglwys | 156 |
| Cefn Meiriadog | 206 |
| Clocaenog | 103 |
| Corwen | 922 |
| Cyffylliog | 217 |
| Cynwyd | 230 |
| Denbigh | 3,099 |

| | |
|------------------|-------|
| Derwen | 207 |
| Dyserth | 1,123 |
| Efenechtyd | 282 |
| Gwyddelwern | 209 |
| Henllan | 352 |
| Llanarmon Yn Ial | 555 |
| Llanbedr D C | 444 |
| Llandelga | 259 |
| Llandrillo | 265 |
| Llandyrnog | 443 |
| Llanelidan | 148 |
| Llanfair D C | 544 |
| Llanferres | 384 |
| Llangollen | 1,546 |
| Llangynhafal | 312 |
| Llanrhaeadr Y C | 490 |
| Llantysilio | 238 |
| Llanynys | 317 |
| Nantglyn | 147 |
| Prestatyn | 7,230 |
| Rhuddlan | 1,709 |
| Rhyl | 8,587 |
| Ruthin | 2,142 |
| St. Asaph | 1,331 |
| Trefnant | 608 |
| Tremeirchion | 596 |

509 DELEGATIONS

Councillor R W Hughes presented the report seeking Cabinet consideration of amendments to the existing Cabinet Delegations, as listed in Appendix 1 to the report. Members were also asked to agree, following County Council's decision on 14.12.2004, to assign the calculation of the Council Tax Base to the Cabinet and for the Cabinet to delegate this function to the Chief Executive in respect of 2006-2007 onwards.

Councillor Hughes said decisions should be taken at the most appropriate level and it was important that officers enjoyed a level of trust by Members. Councillor P A Dobb agreed with Councillor Hughes, whilst at the same time expressing her concern regarding the perceived 'burden' on Members.

In response to a query from Councillor J Thompson Hill, the County Clerk said a review of Asset Management functions would be carried out at a date in the future and if appropriate the results would be brought to Cabinet. Councillor R W Hughes said a seminar was being organised for all Members on Asset Management, particularly the agricultural estate functions.

Councillor P J Marfleet said he supported the report in principle but also wished to safeguard the Authority at the same time. He said Scrutiny Committees could safeguard the processes and suggested a review of the delegations in 12 months if required.

In response to a query from Councillor J Butterfield, the Chief Executive said commuted sums would be used for open space and play in the relevant community wherever possible unless there were adequate facilities already provided, in which case the monies would be spent in the nearest community.

Councillor E W Williams said local Members were sometimes unaware of delegations in their areas and it was essential that Members should be asked for their comments.

RESOLVED that Cabinet approves the proposals for changes to the existing Cabinet Delegations, as listed in Appendix 1 to the report. Cabinet also agrees to delegating the calculation of the Council Tax Base to the Chief Executive in respect of 2006-2007 onwards.

510 PFI BUILDING: NAMING AND OFFICIAL OPENING OF COUNCIL OFFICES

The Chief Executive presented the report seeking Cabinet approval to the suggested name for the new PFI office building and to agree arrangements for the opening ceremony. He confirmed the opening would take place once the works in the courtyard were complete, probably in May 2005.

RESOLVED that Cabinet agree the name 'Neuadd y Sir / County Hall' as the official name for the new offices and the opening arrangements as detailed in the report.

511 CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor S A Davies presented the report and asked officers to ensure that Lead Members were fully involved in developing the Cabinet Forward Work Programme and involving Members from the start.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the contents of the Forward Work Programme.

512 URGENT ITEMS

512.1 HEAD OF TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The Corporate Director: Environment verbally reported that the Head of Transport and Infrastructure had resigned to take up a new post with Cheshire County Council. It was hoped to include the recruitment of this post with the Corporate Director: Lifelong Learning advertisement and appoint as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that Members note the report.

512.2 DIRECTORATE SEMINARS

Councillor R W Hughes verbally reported that 30 forms had been returned regarding Directorate Seminars and it was proposed over the next few months to hold seminars on Economic Development; a combined Environmental Services and Transport & Infrastructure seminar; Personal Services; Education Services and Culture and Leisure seminars, with the first seminar covering Finance.

RESOLVED that Members note the report.

512.3 ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE [STRATEGY]

Councillor E C Edwards asked Members to join him in wishing Steve Hatton, Assistant Chief Executive [Strategy] a long and happy retirement. He said he had worked with Steve when he was Leader and Denbighshire had become a unitary authority, facing a big change and challenge with the new Modernising Agenda. With Steve's hard work and time commitment Denbighshire had been one of the first Authorities in Wales to have the Cabinet system working. Councillor Edwards thanked him on behalf of the Cabinet and Council and wished him well on his move to a new home in Scotland.

The Assistant Chief Executive [Strategy] said he had enjoyed working with Denbighshire Members and officers and he said Denbighshire could be proud of the co-operation between the two. He hoped that the Authority would continue to grow in the future. Steve thanked Councillor Edwards and Members for their kind words.

RESOLVED report agreed.

At this juncture (11.20 a.m.) the meeting adjourned for 10 minutes to allow Members to participate in refreshments.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

***RESOLVED** under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 8 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.*

PART II

513 CAPITAL PLAN 2004-2005

Councillor P J Marfleet presented the report seeking Members' consideration of any actions necessary in the management of the Capital Plan. He detailed the current position and said any slippage would be carried forward to the following year. Some of the slippage was due to capacity issues which needs to be addressed.

In response to a request from Councillor P A Dobb, Councillor Marfleet agreed to meet with her in the new year to discuss proposals to provide loans instead of grants for housing improvements. Councillor E C Edwards agreed with Councillor Dobb's concern regarding housing improvement grants and said it was vital that people were helped to live in their own homes for as long as possible. He suggested more partnerships were required.

Members discussed the issue of capacity in detail. The Corporate Director: Environment said some highways capital schemes remained unfinished owing to protracted negotiations with landowners and such issues as school building design had to be programmed in workload terms. Members further agreed that lack of contractors posed problems to the development of schemes and it was essential that a link was forged with all colleges in the County to encourage education and training programmes which could address the lack of electrical, plumbing or bricklaying courses for example.

Councillor E W Williams said it was essential that the Authority continued to fund community projects and this was one of the most successful areas of expenditure by the Authority. He suggested Members should have project based issues as part of their portfolios.

Councillor J Butterfield said that many contractors wanted to carry out minor works for Denbighshire but they felt the Council were too restrictive in their requirements in regard to insurance etc. She suggested the Care and Repair Scheme, partly funded by Denbighshire, was an option which should be considered.

Councillor E W Williams suggested that training could be included as part of the Housing Improvement Programme, regardless of whether it was financed by Housing Stock Transfer or Prudential Borrowing.

Councillor E C Edwards said many contractors were unable to afford to train apprentices unless special schemes were available and there would always be a shortage of good workers. He suggested partnerships were the way forward and cited Brynhyfryd School as an example of partnership working which had been completed to cost and had won the Ruthin and District Civic Association Quayle Award award.

Councillor R W Hughes agreed to discuss education and training programmes and affordable practices with other North Wales Leaders. Councillor Hughes also agreed that the Housing Revenue Account budget and the Capital Plan would be discussed at an Informal Meeting of the Cabinet in January 2005 to progress the issue.

Councillor D Owens said ELWa were working on developing training programmes, and Denbighshire was continuing to develop its vision for 14-18 year olds. The Head of Education Services said both Llysfasi and Rhyl Colleges would be able to develop these requirements. Councillor P A Dobb

reminded Members that there was a need for people to be re-trained later in life and re-training should also be included along with education and training.

Councillor P J Marfleet said 3 year programmes were required as community issues also affected the wellbeing of the County as a whole. He paid tribute to the Principal Management Accountant and his staff for their work on the Capital Plan.

Councillor R E Barton suggested working closely with neighbouring Authorities and replicate good practice by using Objective 1 to fund the training.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

[a] note the updated position in respect of the Capital Plan

[b] agree, in accordance with Council's recommendations regarding the management of the Capital Plan, the resources made available from the identification of slippage are distributed in line with the amounts set out in column G of Appendix 3 to the report.

Councillor R W Hughes thanked Cabinet Members and officers for all their hard work over the past 6 months and said she looked forward to working together in 2005, to make Denbighshire the best Authority in Wales.

The meeting concluded at 12.25 p.m.
