

CABINET

Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held in Conference Room 1, Council Offices, Ruthin on Tuesday 20 December 2005 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; R W Hughes, Leader and Lead Member for Regeneration; M A German, Lead Member for Children and Young People; 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 M LI Davies; G C Evans; H H Evans; K N Hawkins; T K Hodgson; C L Hughes; N Hugh Jones; G M Kensler, J A Smith; S Thomas and R LI Williams.

ALSO PRESENT

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

APOLOGIES

H W Griffiths, Corporate Director: Lifelong Learning.

ANNOUNCEMENT

On behalf of Members, Councillor R W Hughes thanked Gareth Watson of the PR Department for his work on behalf of the Authority and the new initiatives he had undertaken such as the Cabinet Question Time and Cabinet Watch. She wished him well in his new role as Corporate Communications for the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service.

Councillor R W Hughes referred to the European Structural Funds announcement which said West Wales and the Valleys would benefit by £1.3 billion from 2007 onwards. It was important that Denbighshire planned projects for the next programme and worked strategically, taking account of both the Local Development Plan and Visioning.

Councillor S Roberts referred to the £3.1m grant received from the Arts Council of Wales for the Ruthin Craft Centre project.

The Chief Executive informed Members that the Authority's Local Housing Strategy had been cited as best practice by the Chartered Institute of Housing.

1 URGENT MATTERS

Item 12 Part II - Prestatyn: Offa's Tavern Car Park

2 MINUTES OF THE CABINET

The Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 29 November 2005 were submitted.

Announcement - para 2 should be amended to read - "Councillor D Owens said that according to recent statistics, the Lifelong Learning Student Finance Team were the top in Wales for processing student loan applications within the prescribed timescale, and were 4th overall in England and Wales."

Item 3 Denbighshire International Strategy: Councillor P J Marfleet said he did not support the strategy and the first sentence of the second paragraph should be amended to read ".. Whilst supporting the concept of drawing down of funding, ...".

Councillor Marfleet also referred to the caveat attached to the Delegated Decision he had agreed regarding the visit by some Members and officers to Poland that within 14 days of return, a full assessment of the benefit of the visit, and by 6 January 2006, a draft schedule of all international visits planned for the first six months of 2006 be provided for Members. The Head of Development Services said the Denbighshire International Forum would not meet again until after 06.01.2006 and would therefore be unable to provide an up to date list. He would however supply Members with a provisional list by that date.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 29 November 2005 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

3 SECONDARY CARE REVIEW

Members received a presentation by Derek Griffin, North Wales Regional Director, Health and Social Care Department, Welsh Assembly Government.

A copy of the presentation was provided for all Members.

Mr Griffin outlined the Designed for Life 10 year strategy which covered improving both health and health services, including a review of secondary care services. The Wanless Review had clearly stated that existing arrangements for health services were unsustainable. The Secondary Care covered a review of the larger hospitals - how many would be required and where they would be located. The vision and targets for the future would be included, it was hoped that in 10 years' time a maximum of 26 weeks would elapse between point of contact and commencement of treatment for patients. A higher proportion of people would be treated either at home or in Community Health Centres and value for money and better patient services were required. Three months' public consultation would commence at the end of March 2006, following the Project Board's recommendations following the first draft.

Councillor P A Dobb thanked Mr Griffin for his interesting presentation. As Lead Member for Health and Wellbeing she was involved with the Local Health Board and received the bulletins provided by the Service but still felt removed from what was being proposed. She stressed the importance of involving the Local Authority from the start of any review process and she asked for an undertaking that Denbighshire be involved in what the Welsh Assembly was proposing to achieve in North Wales.

Councillor P J Marfleet said he also found the presentation interesting. He stressed the need for taking opportunities to share experiences and resources and to avoid duplication. He said the point of service delivery fell on the Local Authority and not the Local Health Board when people were moved back to the community for their care, therefore if service provision was moved to the LA then the budget should follow. Mr Griffin confirmed that any monies provided for health could not be moved into social care.

In response to a query from Councillor E W Williams, Mr Griffin said the Review did not cover operational issues except that built in assumptions such as efficiency and productivity requirements would be included to ensure the provision of a robust system for the future. It was important that health professionals advised on how best to deliver efficient and effective services.

Mr Griffin said a genuine attempt had been made to engage with as wide a range of people as possible and a Member and officer had been included from each LA whilst the LHBs were kept abreast of developments by their CEOs.

The Corporate Director: Social Services and Housing expressed her concern regarding the level of engagement. The early stages of the review had not detailed the implications for services such as suitable and appropriate housing requirements in the community. It was important that the budget was thoroughly discussed, particularly any risks for the LA in provision of community care. By working together at an early stage better future service provision could be provided.

The Chief Executive referred to the Beecham Review. He also discussed pooled budgets or giving the Local Authority a budget to provide a package of services. He said a debate on social care and health services was required. Engagement with the public would take place when proposals emerged.

Councillor S A Davies asked Mr Griffin to inform the Minister that the Local Authority would not be able to pay for service provision if the smaller hospitals were closed. Mr Griffin said the health budget was solely for health and the social care budget for that provision. There was a grey area that needed clarifying.

Councillor R W Hughes thanked Mr Griffin for his presentation.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the presentation.

4 WEST RHYL REGENERATION STRATEGY

Councillor R W Hughes presented the report for Members to approve the acquisition of property at 50-57 West Parade; 1a John Street and two garage properties in the rear lane, Rhyl through either voluntary or compulsory purchase action with our partner the Welsh Development Agency; and to confirm their support for the Welsh Development Agency to acquire 50-57 West Parade, Rhyl , 1a John Street and the two garage properties within the rear lane by the use of their Compulsory Purchase Powers if required.

Councillor P A Dobb said she was pleased with the provision of parking on the site.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

[a] *approve progressing the first phase of the West Rhyl Regeneration Strategy by supporting the acquisition of 50-57 West Parade, 1a John Street, and the two garage properties within the rear lane, by the Welsh Development Agency*

[b] *confirm their support for the Welsh Development Agency to use their compulsory purchase powers to progress this acquisition if required.*

5 REVENUE BUDGET 2005-2006

Councillor P J Marfleet presented the report for Members to note the budget performance figures for the current financial year as detailed in the appendices to the report and consider any actions necessary to bring the Directorates' projected spending in line with available budgets. All Directorates had made a great effort to contribute to the potential underspend totalling £243k. The schools delegated budget position highlighted pressures and use of accumulated balances of £361k. The Social Services and Housing forecasted underspend was now £199k due to reduction in staffing costs.

Other pressures remaining included Single Status Pay Review, Council Tax revaluations, school transport, health and safety and possible severe weather implications.

Councillor Marfleet, referring to the Schools Delegated Budget, said opportunities for efficiency savings had been made and asked for these to be used to underpin some of the pressures identified by schools if possible. He also asked the Corporate Executive Team to consider opportunities for applying the underspending.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the figures in the Appendices and receive the report.

6 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2005 / 2006

Councillor P A Dobb presented the report for Members to note the latest financial forecast position of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for 2005-2006, which showed a potential net underspend of £248k at the year end. This was lower than previously reported owing, for example, to additional staff costs for maternity leave cover and agency costs, additional costs on central heating systems and increase in debt charges. However, the rental income forecast was higher than estimated at £148k.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the latest financial forecast position of the Housing Revenue Account for 2005-2006.

7 THREE YEAR REVENUE BUDGET REPORT 2006-2007 TO 2008-2009

Councillor P J Marfleet presented the report for Members

- 1.1 to note the current budget proposals as outlined in appendices 1 to 4
- 1.2 to seek the views of Scrutiny Committees on the budget bids and proposed efficiencies relating to their Directorate; for the committee to advise Cabinet of any proposed amendments, with an indication of priorities
- 1.3 to ask Resources Scrutiny in addition to consider the overall proposals
- 1.4 to reconsider the budget at its meeting on 31.01.2006 with a view to making its recommendations to Council.

The Welsh Assembly Government final settlement details for revenue 2006/2007 was £119.367m (an increase of £280k over the provisional settlement and a 5.9% increase on this year). New money of £2.2m (2%) was provided mainly as a result of increase in the number of elderly people.

Councillor Marfleet said it was possible to deliver a budget based on a 0% increase in Council Tax. However, the options considered by Cabinet would then will be further considered by Scrutiny Committees and then decided upon by full Council. There were still areas where the Authority was in correspondence with the Minister regarding population numbers and the deprivation grant but any increases are unlikely to impact upon the next financial year.

A modest sum of £320k was available for investment in priority service areas if Council Tax maintained at current level. Every 0.5% increase in the level of Council Tax would realise £158k and would realise substantial prudential borrowing for capital projects.

The latest proposals provide for additional resources of £470k for schools to address issues around the need to improve examination results. Councillor Marfleet asked that the Lead Member and Corporate Director: Lifelong Learning consider proposals to target specific needs in Education and asked that the data be broken down on individual basis.

Councillor Marfleet reminded Members that Denbighshire had the second highest Council tax rate in Wales and this year could be used to narrow the

gap which would help residents on fixed incomes. He said he personally favoured a 1.5% increase in Council Tax which would align with what other Local Authorities in Wales would be likely to impose.

In response to a query from Councillor C L Hughes, Councillor Marfleet said health and safety had been built into the budget figures.

Councillor P A Dobb said she favoured an increase of 1.5% on the Council Tax and the opportunity to improve capital projects should not be missed. She referred to paragraph 2.14 of the report and reminded Members that rural roads had been designated a Council priority and she asked for an assurance that this priority would be addressed first.

Members discussed the health and safety requirements for the next 12 months along with the Council priorities.

Councillor E W Williams said he supported the report being considered by the Scrutiny Committees. It was important that efficient efficiency savings were made, but expressed concern that not cleaning gullies would lead to other problems and rural communities needed support. He felt that as low as possible an increase would be seen as acceptable by the public, near the inflation rate. The transient population figures were being considered for inclusion by the Welsh Assembly Government and when incorporated in the future would also have an effect on the budget.

Councillor J Thompson Hill took the opportunity to thank all the staff who had worked to achieve the figures. He supported an increase of 1.5%. He reminded Members that a report on health and safety had previously been considered and said building condition surveys would be updated to allow an assessment of full liabilities.

Councillor S A Davies also thanked Members and officers for their work and said he supported a rise of 1.5% in the Council Tax.

Councillor R LI Williams reminded Members that rebanding, particularly in rural areas, would have a serious effect.

The Chief Executive thanked Members for their kind comments regarding the hard work undertaken by staff. In response to an earlier query, he confirmed that town councils were included with the community councils. He said health and safety issues had to be addressed. Although the Fire Authority did not impose a precept the Authority still contributed which had an effect on Council Tax and was detailed in appendix 4 to the report.

Councillor S Roberts welcomed the position the Authority had achieved and expressed her appreciation of the work done by officers. She asked that Scrutiny Committees consider the report in detail.

RESOLVED that Cabinet

- 1 *note the current budget proposals as outlined in appendices 1 to 4 of the report*
- 2 *seek the views of Scrutiny Committees on the budget bids and proposed efficiencies relating to their directorate; for the Committee to advise Cabinet of any proposed amendments, with an indication of priorities;*
- 3 *ask Resources Scrutiny in addition to consider the overall proposals*
- 4 *reconsider the budget at its meeting on 31.01.2006 with a view of making its budget recommendations to Council.*

At this juncture (12 noon) the meeting adjourned for 10 minutes to allow Members to participate in refreshments.

8 CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor S A Davies presented the Cabinet Forward Work Programme.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the Cabinet Forward Work Programme.

9 URGENT ITEMS

There were no Part I Urgent Items.

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 paragraphs 1 and 8 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

PART II

10 COLLABORATION

Councillor R W Hughes presented the report seeking Cabinet's approval to participate in that Welsh Local Government Association's [WLGA] Regional Partnership Board for North Wales and approve signature by the Leader of the statement of intent on collaboration at the initial meeting of the Partnership Board on 03.02.2006. Members were asked to note the progress by the Authority in extending and deepening collaborative working with other bodies, in line with the Welsh Assembly Government's policy statement "Making the Connections".

The Chief Executive detailed collaborative work undertaken to date and said a report on further work being progressed would be provided to Members on a quarterly basis but would not be discussed at the meeting.

Councillor E W Williams supported the report and said political change could also affect collaborative working. It was important for the Welsh Assembly

Government to be made aware of how well the North Wales Authorities were working together.

Councillor J Thompson Hill welcomed the report. However, the Agricultural Estates management was no longer a joint function with Flintshire County Council.

In response to a query from Councillor M Ll Davies regarding the Welsh Language Forum, Councillor S A Davies said he attended the meetings and would report back with relevant issues through the usual channels.

RESOLVED that:

- [a] *Cabinet approves participation in the Regional Partnership Board for North Wales and signature by the Leader of the statement of intent on collaboration.*
- [b] *Cabinet notes the information on recent collaborative projects in Annex 3 and support the priority areas for future collaboration in Annex 4.*

11 CAPITAL PLAN 2005-2006

Councillor P J Marfleet presented the report for Members to note the latest projected position in the 2005/06 element of the capital plan. Members were asked to consider recommending to Council the earmarking of the balance of £1m from the capital receipt from the sale of the former temporary car park in Ruthin to fund the Tir Morfa Phase II project and to use up to £500k of the funding for scheme costs that have slipped into 2006-2007 to fund the increased cost of the balance of the 2005-2006 plan. Members were also asked to agree to the splitting of the contract for works at the Scala centre and the awarding of the contract for initial works in the current year to enable additional one off grant aid from the WDA to be claimable.

Councillor Marfleet expressed his concern regarding slippage in the plan and also the increase in the anticipated costs of the Prestatyn Primary School project. He urged that future project management schemes include all relevant costs in the figures put forward and a better understanding between schools, the Directorate and Design Services was required. Generally, projects should be ready to be implemented, as soon as approval had been given for them. However, there were success stories with regard to the plan of such items as the housing stock upgrade which had both come in on budget and ahead of schedule.

Councillor J Thompson Hill said a clear plan was required and all Departments needed clear and timely instructions to ensure schemes were on a better footing.

Councillor E W Williams agreed with Councillor Marfleet and said evaluation of schemes was a problem. He suggested funding for schemes should be allocated to allow work to be done before seeking prudential borrowing. With

regard to work in schools, he reminded Members that contractors were not always available to carry out work at short notice.

Councillor P A Dobb supported the Scala project and asked for clarification on the financial support required. The Chief Executive said the Council supported the project up to £1.9m, but the WDA had awarded £300k which meant the maximum cost to the Authority was now £1.6m. However, the Friends of the Scala were actively pursuing grants and the final figure should be less.

Turning to the Prestatyn Primary School project, she expressed her strong concern regarding the escalated anticipated costs. Councillor D Owens outlined the “add ons” which had lead to the increases. The Head of Development Services agreed with Members’ comments that forward planing was essential for project working. Members agreed that the fourth sentence in paragraph 2.12 be amended to read “Negotiations are still underway with the landowner.” He was encouraged by the stance taken by the Corporate Director: Lifelong Learning that no further increases in project costs were likely unless there were changes in legislation.

The Financial Controller clarified the overspend on the year’s generally funded part of the Capital Plan.

The Corporate Director: Environment said he would welcome an opportunity to have an in depth review of how the Capital Plan was structured. He said many projects, such as the Drift Park and the housing scheme, had been completed on time and within budget but there was a need for multi year and more effective planning. However, the legislative framework increased on a yearly basis and procurement and consultation also added to costs and timing of projects.

The Chief Executive agreed that capital projects had generally been delivered on time and on budget but emphasised the need for forward planning.

Councillor E C Edwards supported the need for forward planning and its restructuring and if possible having projects which could be implemented at short notice.

Councillor P J Marfleet said if any further slippage was anticipated it should be included in the next month’s report. He suggested the Corporate Executive Team provide information on changing the structure of capital planning for an informal discussion by Cabinet early in January 2006.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

[i] *note the position of the 2005/06 element of the Council’s agreed 3 Year Capital Plan*

- [ii] recommend to Council the earmarking of the balance of £1m from the capital receipt from the sale of the former temporary car park in Ruthin to part fund the Tir Morfa phase 2 project*
- [iii] agree to the use of up to £500k of the funding for scheme costs that have slipped into 2006/07 to fund the increased cost of the balance of the 2005/06 plan*
- [iv] agree to the splitting of the contract for works at the Scala centre and the awarding of the contract for initial works in the current year to enable additional one off grant aid from the WDA to be claimable.*

12 PRESTATYN: OFFA'S TAVERN CAR PARK

Mr I K Hearle, County Clerk declared an interest in the item and left the meeting.

Councillor J Thompson Hill presented the report seeking Cabinet approval to the disposal of Offa's Tavern Car Park to the party named in the report.

Members discussed the site proposals and valuation in detail. Following the recent Asset Management Committee support for the disposal, the Transport and Infrastructure Department wished to retain part of the site for disabled parking. The Valuation and Estates Manager confirmed the land was in the development boundary but was not designated for any particular use and it was not practical for it to be restricted to one particular use. The land valuation had been carried out by external valuers.

Members sought reassurance about how the position of the Authority would be protected regarding the end use of the site and the robustness of the valuation.

RESOLVED that Cabinet, subject to the above, approves the disposal of Offa's Tavern Car Park to the party named in the report, on terms to be agreed by the County Clerk and Head of Development Services.

The meeting concluded at 1.35 p.m.