

CABINET

Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held in Conference Room 1, Council Offices, Ruthin on Tuesday 31 January 2006 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 R E Barton; G C Evans; K N Hawkins, M M Jones.

ALSO PRESENT

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

The Leader welcomed Mrs. Anwen Jones a member of the Housing Options Working Party to the meeting.

APOLOGIES

None

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chief Executive announced that the WLGA had awarded £25k to the Visioning exercise from their Innovation and Improvement fund. He congratulated the Strategic Policy Unit for all their efforts in attracting this substantial funding.

1 URGENT MATTERS

There were no urgent matters.

2 MINUTES OF THE CABINET

The Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 17 January 2006 were submitted.

Matters Arising - Item 3 Asset Review Programme – Councillor P J Marfleet referred to the collaboration agenda and stated that this collaboration should not be the main objective of the Asset Review, although all areas should consider the efficient use of resources.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 17 January 2006 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

3 REVENUE BUDGET 2005-06

Councillor P J Marfleet presented the report asking Members to note the budget performance figures for the current financial year. He reported that the service pressure projections were as at the end of December and not November as indicated in the report, and that the information provided on the pressures and savings within the corporate budgets were as at mid January.

He highlighted savings which had been made in Social Services and Housing of £195k in anticipation of pressures for the coming year.

Due to the improved financial position, a potential underspend of £320k was to be carried forward. He congratulated all involved but urged all Directorates/Departments to consider the best use of any carry forwards/underspends.

Councillor Marfleet referred to Cabinet's agreement to invest money into the Visioning exercise's marketing requirements in terms of 'branding' the County. He said that the Authority needed to establish its identity as some of the major corporations still referred to the Authority as Clwyd and did not recognise it as Denbighshire. He highlighted the importance of starting the work as soon as possible and some of the money earmarked being spent during the 2006/07 financial year.

Councillor J Thompson-Hill asked whether the £50k earmarked for the Visioning exercise was now affected by the £25k allocated by the WLGA. The Leader explained that the money allocated from the WLGA could be used as match funding.

Councillor E W Williams referred to the branding and said that locally, he had not heard people referring to the Authority as Clwyd for a number of years. He said that the Authority had its own individual stamp.

RESOLVED that:

[a] *Members noted the figures in the appendices, and agreed to earmark £25k from 2005/06 budget together with £25k allocated by the WLGA to be carried forward to 2006/07 and used for the Visioning exercise's marketing requirements.*

4 REVENUE BUDGET 2006/07 TO 2008/09

Councillor P J Marfleet presented the report asking Members to consider the budget proposals, and recommend the budget package to County Council for approval. Members were also asked to recommend the resulting 2% impact of the proposals on Council Tax in 2006/07 to Council, and to note the indicative budget position for 2007/08 and 2008/09.

The report provided Members with an update on the position considered by Cabinet on 20 December 2005. Councillor Marfleet commended Managers and staff for rising to the challenge and coming up with the proposals for savings which had been thoroughly debated by Service Scrutiny Committees.

He highlighted the strategy to improve our position on the level of council tax with regard to the other North Wales Councils, and the impact of council tax on pensioners living in Denbighshire.

Councillor Marfleet reported that it had also been possible to recommend providing an additional £470k into the Education budget to look specifically at improvement of Key Stage 3 and above, and that the Corporate Director: Lifelong Learning would be reporting back to Cabinet within the next couple of months with proposals.

It had also been recommended that the Community Capital Scheme be increased by £150k to be used by Directorates in consultation with their Local Members. He also referred to the revenue provision of £385k which, when turned into capital would provide £4m of capital resources which should be invested into the Council's priorities.

Councillor P J Marfleet conveyed his thanks for the support he had received from the Financial Controller and Finance Officers, and thanked all Members for providing their views which had been taken into consideration when putting together the proposals, which had resulted in an excellent budget being achieved, and the lowest increase in council tax in the history of Denbighshire.

Councillor S A Davies commented that the process had been transparent and inclusive.

Councillor J Thompson-Hill commended the report and asked that once the proposals had been agreed, it was important that work was undertaken to earmark how the extra capital would be split.

The Chief Executive drew Members attention to Page 2 of Appendix 4 and to the further resources available through prudential borrowing. He said that a report would be presented to Cabinet in March providing proposals on how the resources had been allocated. Efficiency savings in future years also needed to be considered.

Councillor E W Williams queried whether community groups could link into the County's Prudential Borrowing Scheme.

The Deputy Chief Executive / Corporate Director: Resources agreed to review the matter.

The Leader thanked Officers and Members for their work in providing the Council with such an excellent budget.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- (a) *recommend to Council the budget package for approval;*
- (b) *recommend to Council the resulting 2% impact of the proposals on Band D of Council Tax in 2006/07, and*
- (c) *note the indicative budget position for 2007/08 and 2008/09*

5 CAPITAL PRIORITISATION PROCESS

Councillor P J Marfleet presented the report seeking approval of the capital programme prioritisation process.

Councillor Marfleet highlighted the need to ensure that the Council continued to invest in areas it considered a priority and that those projects were clearly defined. He referred Members to the guidance document which explained the three different types of capital projects. He reported the importance of understanding at an early stage any risks and revenue implications concerned with the projects. He referred Members to the flow chart and said that one area that had not been sufficiently addressed was the need for capital projects to be discussed at an early stage with Members, and that this had now been included on the flow chart.

Councillor E W Williams referred to Appendix A, the Project Proposal and Mandate and asked whether consultation with the Lead Member could be included, as it was important from the onset that the Lead Member was aware of any projects being considered.

Councillor E C Edwards commended the report which was long overdue and agreed that Member involvement needed to be included, and that all community projects needed to be considered by their relevant Elected Members' Group.

The Leader referred to the appraisal of projects being discussed by CET and asked that Members be involved before any proposals are rejected by the

Corporate Executive Team. She also referred to the scoring system and her concern that non-statutory projects would not fair well in the scoring system.

In response to the comments made, the Deputy Chief Executive / Corporate Director: Resources advised Cabinet that Lead Member involvement would feature predominantly at every stage and that this had now been included in the flow chart. He also pointed out to Members that the Scoring methodology was a guide and would be reviewed after six months' time.

The Chief Executive referred to the capital block allocations stating that these would also be subject to this process.

The Deputy Chief Executive / Corporate Director: Resources confirmed with Members that the prioritisation process would only be used on future projects. Councillor E W Williams asked for reassurance that the process did not affect the Community Allocation Bids, and that the money was not removed from projects within communities already agreed.

Councillor E C Edwards explained that the purpose of the Area Elected Members' Groups was to ensure all appropriate parties were represented.

RESOLVED that Cabinet agree the approval of the process, with a review to take place in September 2006.

6 IMPROVING THE COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK

1 Councillor P A Dobb presented the report seeking approval to recommend to Council the Housing Stock be retained and the Housing Stock Business Plan (HSBP) be implemented. She also sought agreement for the HSBP to be monitored on a monthly basis with an annual report as part of the Housing Revenue Account budget setting process, and a formal review in 2009.

Councillor Dobb thanked everyone involved for all their work and dedication over the last six years. A telephone survey of tenants had been undertaken which revealed that 74% wished to stay with Denbighshire, 4% wished to transfer and 22% did not know, which clearly demonstrated that the HSBP was the preferred option.

The Stock Transfer option needed the support of the tenants and following the telephone survey, it was clear that it would not have been supported by the tenants and that a ballot would have failed, although this option would have provided a better financial outcome in future years.

Councillor Dobb reported that it had now been agreed that the HSBP was workable, but concern had been expressed by WAG and the Wales Audit Office that the plan operated on a very tight financial margin, and suggested that milestones were established to measure progress with the Plan with monthly reports to Cabinet, a yearly report as part of the Housing Revenue Account budget setting process and a formal review of options in 2009.

Councillor P J Marfleet welcomed the report which proved how complex an issue the whole process had been. He referred to the varying sale figures of the right to buy and asked whether it would still be an option to resurrect the Stock Transfer option if the scenario were to change.

The Head of Housing explained that the plan would be monitored monthly, and if there appeared to be a problem, a major review would be undertaken, and the option of Stock Transfer could be reconsidered.

In response to Councillor G C Evans' question about the future involvement of tenants, the Head of Housing explained that he did not wish to lose the involvement and support of tenants; for example a tenant representative regularly attended the Scrutiny meeting on any housing issues. He explained that the County Clerk was now looking into the tenant representative being given voting rights at such meetings on any matters in relation to housing.

The Leader thanked Councillor Dobb, Officers and all the tenants for their involvement. The commitment to this process had been evident at the Seminar held earlier in the month between Members and Tenant Representatives.

RESOLVED *that Cabinet:*

- (a) *recommend to Council that the Housing Stock be retained and the Housing Stock Business Plan be implemented; and*
- (b) *that the Housing Stock Business Plan be monitored on a monthly basis with an annual report as part of the Housing Revenue Account budget setting process and a formal review of the options in 2009 to confirm progress to Welsh Housing Quality Standards by 2012.*

7 DENBIGHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL (HIGH STREET AND CHURCH LANE) COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER 2004

(The Chief Executive declared an interest in the item and left the meeting).

Councillor E W Williams presented the report seeking Cabinet approval to extend the indemnity agreement currently in place.

RESOLVED that the County Clerk be authorised to affix the Common Seal of the County Council to a Deed of Variation extending the current indemnity agreement with Tesco to 31st October 2006 whereby it agrees to endeavour to acquire the land which is the subject of the compulsory purchase order by private treaty and in any event to bear the compensation and acquisition costs together with associated expenses incurred by the Council in the acquisition of such land the costs and expenses associated with the compulsory purchase order.

8 SOCIAL SERVICES FEES AND CHARGES 2006 - 2007

Councillor P A Dobb presented the report seeking approval of the proposed increases in fee levels for providers of Nursing and Residential Care, Day Care and Home Care services for 2006/07. Cabinet was also asked to agree the proposed increases in charges for Domiciliary and Day Care Services, Meals on Wheels and Local Authority Residential Accommodation for 2006/07.

Councillor Dobb explained that in accordance with the Corporate Guidance on Setting Fees and Charges that states that fees should be increased annually, the Department was proposing to increase the fees paid to providers by more than inflation.

Councillor P J Marfleet asked what provision had been made for the elderly to cope with the increase in fees.

The Corporate Director: Personal Services explained that a Charging Policy is operated and that all individuals are means tested to establish how much they can contribute to the costs.

The Leader reported that she had received representations from other Councillors asking whether a leaflet campaign could be undertaken advising service users that if they are not able to cope with the increase in fees, that help was available.

The Corporate Director: Personal Services assured Members that all service users, who wished to be, were referred to the Welfare Rights Unit for a benefit check.

Councillor E C Edwards agreed with the recommendation and commended the Department for the way it was running the Residential Homes and highlighted the importance of protecting the Authority's residential homes and Community Hospitals.

RESOLVED that Cabinet agreed the fee levels and charging rates for services provided in 2006/2007 for implementation from April 2006.

9 DISCOUNT ON COMMUNITY COUNCIL BY-ELECTION CHARGES

Ian Miller, the Returning Officer presented the report seeking approval from Cabinet to revoke the decision made by the Council's Policy and Performance Committee in July 1996 to grant a discount on by-election charges to Community Councils with less than 1000 electors.

Councillor P J Marfleet asked about the current position and as to what the how many discounts had been given.

The Returning Officer explained that the costs involved would be dependant on a contested election, and that in the last 4 years all the contested elections had been held in the urban areas.

***RESOLVED** that Cabinet revokes the current policy of giving a percentage discount on Community Council By-Election costs.*

10 CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor S A Davies presented the Cabinet Forward Work Programme. He explained that the Beyond Area Partnerships report would now be presented to the March meeting.

***RESOLVED** that Cabinet note the Cabinet Forward Work Programme.*

11 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

12 THREE YEAR CAPITAL PLAN

Councillor P J Marfleet presented the report asking Members to note the latest projected position on the 2005/06 element of the Capital Plan. Members were also asked to agree to slip funding of £1m into 2006/07 to match the forecast further slippage in expenditure.

Councillor Marfleet referred to the total capital expenditure and the need to incur increased levels of expenditure from now until the end of the financial year in order to ensure revised forecasts were achieved. He explained that any schemes not agreed in the Plan would need to go through the Capital Prioritisation Process.

RESOVLED that Cabinet:

(a) *note the position of the 2005/06 element of the Council's agreed 3 year Capital Plan, and*

(b) *agree to slip funding of £1m into 2006/07 to match the forecast further slip,*

The meeting concluded at 11.15 a.m.