

CABINET

Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held in Conference Room 1, County Hall, Ruthin on Tuesday 25 April 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 and J Thompson Hill, Lead Member for Property and Asset Management.

Observers: Councillors J R Bartley; R E Barton; M LI Davies; G C Evans; K N Hawkins; C L Hughes; M M Jones and J A Smith.

ALSO PRESENT

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

APOLOGIES

Councillor E W Williams, Lead Member for Environment; Corporate Director: Environment and the Corporate Director: Lifelong Learning.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Councillor E C Edwards informed Members of the death of Peter Law MP / AM. He paid tribute to Peter whom he had known for over 30 years and said he had been a great ambassador for Wales. The Chief Executive agreed and added that whilst he was Minister for Local Government he had been instrumental in the write off of the inherited Denbighshire debt. The Leader agreed to send a sympathy card to Peter Law's family on behalf of the Authority. Members stood in silent tribute.

1 URGENT MATTERS

There were no Urgent Matters.

2 MINUTES OF THE CABINET

The Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 21 March 2006 were submitted.

Accuracy:

Item 8 Capital Prioritisation - Councillor P A Dobb said improved facilities were required at Aberwheeler and a study into the practicalities of new build on a leased site was required.

High School Item - Councillor P J Marfleet clarified the position regarding the provision of £100k investment in fire alarm systems.

Matters Arising:

North Wales Secondary Care Review - Councillor S A Davies said a disappointing reply had been received from Dr Gibbons, Minister for Health and Social Services to the letter sent by the Authority regarding various issues. The Corporate Director: Social Services and Housing agreed with the Chief Executive that the reply was wholly inadequate and Members agreed that a further letter be sent pressing for answers to the important issues raised.

School Toilets - Councillor D Owens updated Members regarding the situation and said that 11 refurbishments had been carried out the previous year and £180k was available for the coming year's work. A meeting was to be held within a week at which work prioritisation would take place. This would then be followed by a meeting with representatives from some school councils. Councillor P A Dobb reminded Councillor Owens that Ysgol Llanbedr had been on the priority list for some time and that it was important that it was not moved down the list. Councillor Owens agreed to send a copy of the complete priority list to all Members for information.

The Chief Executive explained there was no High School present at the meeting as the Cabinet papers had been produced during the course of the Easter holidays and the Policy Unit had therefore been unable to go to the school to brief the pupils.

Cabinet Minutes - it was agreed that the Cabinet Minutes would be circulated to Cabinet Members prior to their despatch and if there were issues/amendments regarding the minutes, Members should contact the Cabinet Officer. This should mean no amendments would be required to the minutes at the meeting.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 21 March 2006 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

3 UPDATE ON CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT ASSESSMENT

The Chief Executive presented the report for Members to note the progress made to date and to agree the work that was ongoing and the future actions.

He referred to praiseworthy achievements by staff, for example the Revenues collection had been amongst the worst in Wales 4 years ago and now it was amongst the best and the improvement was being sustained.

In regard to school improvements KS3 and KS4, he stressed there was a need to sustain focus on the issues for a few years. He said stability of placement was required for looked after children within Children's Services.

The Chief Executive went on to stress the need to continue to focus on organisational development work, in particular sickness absence

improvements within the HR Management; more services to be accessed through the Customer Contact Centre; and a review to be carried out of how Support Services are delivered.

In response to a query from Councillor P A Dobb regarding the need for a common approach to the high risk issue of project management, the Chief Executive said that the Corporate Executive Team met on a monthly basis as an overseeing body for projects. He agreed it was important to keep track of issues and any problems that arise had to be resolved. Further project managers were required for example for the Scala project and a senior officer was required to oversee the work of the team.

Councillor E C Edwards said he was a firm believer and supporter of both the Corporate Executive Team and Monthly Management Conference meetings and asked that more information from these meetings should be forwarded to all Members on a regular basis. He said it was imperative that information on all projects should be provided in a timely manner for the Area Elected Members' Groups. He also said a review of the scheme of delegation was required and he hoped that officers would ask all Members for their views on the current scheme.

The Deputy Chief Executive / Corporate Director: Resources, in response to a query from Councillor R W Hughes, said the Focus Group work had been pulled together and could be used as a benchmark for future work. Each Directorate had different approaches on involving their staff.

In response to a query from Councillor M LI Davies, the Deputy Chief Executive / Corporate Director: Resources agreed the figures in the report for the Craft Centre had been overtaken by events and the latest figure was that contained in the Capital Plan report, which had been produced at a later date.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the progress being made and endorse the areas for improvement and development as detailed in paragraphs 2.5 and 2.6 of the report.

4 ACHIEVEMENT AGAINST IMPROVEMENT PLAN 05/06 WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor R W Hughes presented the report for Members to note progress against the key targets in their portfolio in the Improvement Plan's Work Programme as attached at Appendix I to the report and request further information where required.

Councillor Hughes said some progress had been made but further achievements were still required.

The Policy Unit Manager said the 3 year work programme was being produced, alongside the 2006 programme and a draft report would be prepared for the May 2006 Cabinet meeting.

Members briefly outlined progress within their Portfolios:

Councillor P A Dobb referred to the extra care housing in Rhyl and said tenders were being evaluated and they were on target to commence building in July. The Welsh Assembly Government had informed the Authority that the numbers of homeless families in bed and breakfast accommodation would not affect the PIG grant. She congratulated staff on work done to meet the targets.

Councillor E C Edwards referred to the lack of staffing following the retirement of the Principal Community Safety Officer and said a Crime and Disorder team was required to work within the strong partnership created with the North Wales Police. He referred to the targets not met and said achievable and more positive targets should be set. Councillor R W Hughes agreed that targets such as reducing violent crimes by 15% seemed unrealistic and had been set by Central Government as Police targets. Therefore, what we reported should be re-examined. Councillor Edwards said the Authority had signed up to some of the targets with the North Wales Police and the Authority should be challenging them on the targets. The Policy Unit Manager said the Authority had a community safety theme and the Authority could select which targets should be included.

Councillor D Owens said work was ongoing on KS1 and KS2 targets. He then referred to the partial achievement on SEN expenditure but reminded Members that the service was demand led and the Authority would not always be able to provide the service within the budget set.

Councillor R W Hughes said Economic Prosperity would now be renamed Economic Growth Strategy. She said the target not achieved for any ward in the County being included in the top 20 most deprived wards in Wales by 2007 was more of an aspiration than an achievable target. She felt the target should be re-examined.

The Chief Executive referred to the good work carried out to achieve targets in the Environment Directorate.

Councillor M A German said progress was being made on the Children and Young People targets. Social Worker pay was currently going through the Job Evaluation process.

Councillor P J Marfleet said the Organisational Development Programme was progressing well. Efficiency savings would continue to be monitored and identified. Although the procurement target had been exceeded it was important that the target did not become unrealistic as service delivery had to be balanced alongside.

In response to a query from Councillor R E Barton regarding the reporting of targets to Informal Cabinet, Councillor R W Hughes said reporting would be carried out through Informal Cabinet, Scrutiny and Cabinet.

The Deputy Chief Executive / Corporate Director: Resources, in reply to a question from Councillor R E Barton, said financial reserves had to be balanced with service delivery and the Authority's reserves were gradually being built up.

RESOLVED that Members note progress against the key targets in their portfolio in the Improvement Plan's Work Programme as attached at Appendix I to the report.

5 WORKING TOGETHER AS THE WELSH PUBLIC SERVICE

Councillor R W Hughes presented the report seeking Members' consideration of the progress the Authority was making to meet the collaboration strand of the 'Making the Connections' agenda and request further information and/or action where required. Members were also asked to note the minutes of the first Regional Partnership Board meeting held in Wrexham on the 3 February 2006. Members were asked to agree in principle to support a partnership initiative between North Wales Authorities and North Wales Police in establishing a joint Single Non Emergency Number Call Centre. She said North Wales Authorities were prepared to work together and the first meeting had been very productive and augured well for the future.

Councillor Hughes said a Local Strategic Partnership would be set up following agreement of the Vision for the Authority. Referring to the Single Non Emergency Number, she said she hoped that this would become a reality for North Wales.

Councillor P J Marfleet said he supported collaboration work on a regional basis and hoped for continuity amongst the Authorities.

The Chief Executive reported on his attendance at the Central Wales Plus Partnership Board meeting and said Denbighshire would also be part of this collaboration.

Councillor E C Edwards, referring to the proposed Single Non Emergency Number project, said he recognised the importance of the project and had attended meetings where the project had been discussed but said caution should be exercised as the venture could be expensive for the Authority. He said if the Home Office / Office of the Deputy Prime Minister wanted to introduce such initiatives they should provide the funding.

Councillor M A German said the public should be reminded, via County Voice, to contact their local Members to deal with some of the issues such as graffiti or street lighting and this could relieve pressure on the Authority's own Contact Centre.

Councillor P J Marfleet said the public should be encouraged to make as much use as possible of the web site as this was the most cost effective way of contacting the Authority.

RESOLVED that Members note the progress the Authority is making to meet the collaboration strand of the 'Making the Connections' agenda and note the minutes of the first Regional Partnership Board meeting held on the 3 February 2006 in Wrexham.

Members agree in principle to the Single Non Emergency Number initiative subject to receiving further information relating to the practical and financial implications to the Council

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) (revenue and capital) for 2005-2006, which showed a potential net underspend of £156k at the year end against the revised budget. This is a reduction of £111k in the projected under spend to that reported at the end of February with the main reason for the change being an increase in repairs and maintenance expenditure which had occurred because of a general increase in repairs reporting and particularly because of a greater than expected number of void properties recently presented requiring significant refurbishment or maintenance.

In response to a query, the Head of Housing Services said the new Housing Revenue Account Subsidy arrangement for private sector leasing scheme for the homeless was very complex and further guidance was required. The subsidy was being funded by H M Treasury and not the Welsh Assembly Government. The Authority's claim limit was £374k but some negative elements had to be taken into account. The subsidy would be used, where possible, to provide additional accommodation for the homeless as an alternative to using bed and breakfast accommodation.

The Head of Housing, responding to a further query from Councillor Marfleet, said a full review of garages in the Authority's ownership was to be carried out later in the year and maintenance requirements would form part of the review. Councillor E C Edwards suggested that the review should include the use the tenants made of the garages as some tenants were causing a nuisance in some areas.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the latest financial forecast position [revenue and capital] of the Housing Revenue Account for 2005-2006 and the rolling forward of the capital plan to the next financial year.

7 REVENUE BUDGET 2005-2006

Councillor P J Marfleet presented the report asking Members to note the budget performance figures for the current financial year.

The potential underspend currently totalled £806k, excluding the schools' delegated budget. The Lifelong Learning forecast overspend had been reduced by £65k due mainly to £30k additional income from the Health Board

for speech and language therapy. The forecast for capital financing charges showed a further £190k underspend, due in part to improved investment income but mainly as a result of accounting changes caused by the audit of the 2004/05 accounts. A good outcome had been achieved and officers in all Directorates were to be congratulated for their hard work.

In response to a query, the Financial Controller said the new fully staffed Joint Emergency Planning Department, would not cost the Authority any more.

RESOLVED that Members note the budget performance figures for the current financial year as detailed in the appendices to the report.

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 ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN DESIGNATED PUBLIC PLACES

Item withdrawn.

10 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 paragraph 20 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

PART II

11 CAPITAL PLAN

Councillor P J Marfleet presented the report for Members to note the latest projected position on the 2005/06 and 2006/07 element of the Capital Plan.

Councillor Marfleet expressed his concern that there was currently a funding shortfall on some major projects, which had arisen as a result of a reduction in the SBIG grant, increases in costs and the fact that reliance had been placed on European grant applications that had not been successful. Discussions had taken place in the Corporate Executive Team about ways of addressing the shortfall. He suggested that some plans might need to be revised or some projects should slip to the following year. Support would be required from both officers and Council Members to address the situation.

Councillor S Roberts echoed Councillor Marfleet's comments and said she was disappointed with the status of the projects.

Members discussed the way forward and agreed with Councillor P A Dobb that the report resolution should be amended, with a view to ensuring the projects were delivered, even if they were delayed.

Members agreed the Corporate Executive Team should consider the projects carefully. The Chief Executive said it could be possible to make adjustments to timings within the capital programme which would help address the situation.

Councillor P A Dobb expressed her concern should individual businesses be affected if there were delays in starting any projects, and asked that she, Councillor E C Edwards and Councillor E W Williams be advised of any difficulties with projects in their area as soon as possible. Councillor M M Jones asked that local Members be also kept informed.

Following further discussion, it was

RESOLVED that Members:

- [i] note the position of the 2005-2006 and 2006-07 element of the Council's agreed 3 year Capital Plan*
- [ii] agree that the Corporate Executive Team seek clarification of the external funding position for major projects*
- [iii] agree that officers provide all Cabinet Members and relevant Local Members with a report on the current situation regarding key project progress as soon as possible.*

The meeting concluded at 11.50 a.m.