

CABINET

Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held at 10.00 a.m. on Tuesday 22 May 2007 in Conference Room 1, County Hall, Ruthin.

PRESENT

Councillors S A Davies, Lead Member for Policy, Communications and Improvement; P A Dobb, Lead Member for Health, Social Care & Wellbeing; E C Edwards, Lead Member for Customer Care and Citizen Engagement; M A German, Lead Member for Children, Young People and Families, R W Hughes, Leader and Lead Member for Economic Prosperity & European Programmes; D Owens, Lead Member for Schools and Lifelong Learning; G O Rowlands, Lead Member for Finance and Procurement; S Roberts, Lead Member for Promoting Denbighshire, J Thompson Hill, Lead Member for Property and Sustainable Development and E W Williams, Lead Member for Environment.

Observers: Councillors J R Bartley, R E Barton, M LI Davies, G C Evans, H H Evans, M M Jones and P J Marfleet.

ALSO PRESENT

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

ANNOUNCEMENT

Councillor R W Hughes welcomed Ewan McWilliams, Sustainability Project Co-ordinator to the meeting.

Councillor E W Williams referred to the Daily Post article on 21.05.2007 on refuse collection, the heading of which was inaccurate. However, he felt that although the headline was misleading the report had been positive.

45 URGENT MATTERS

There were no Urgent Matters.

46 MINUTES OF THE CABINET

The Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 24 April 2007 were submitted.

Item 4 Rhyl Town Centre Redevelopment: Councillor R W Hughes referred to discussion with a member of the public in the 1:1 session held on 24.04.2007 where a member of the public had said it was important to preserve as much of the building façade as possible.

Item 7 Routine Reporting on Personnel: Councillor S A Davies asked for the second paragraph to be amended to read "the workforce size was 'fit for purpose'".

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2007 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

47 DENBIGHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S DRAFT EFFICIENCY PLAN 2007-2010

Councillor G O Rowlands presented the report seeking Members' consideration of Denbighshire County Council's draft Efficiency Plan 2007-2010 (Appendix 1 to the report) and that subject to any amendment highlighted by Cabinet, Members recommend the draft Efficiency Strategy to Council for approval on the 27 June 2007.

Councillor E W Williams raised the proposals to centralise Finance and expressed his caution regarding such moves. The Deputy Chief Executive / Corporate Director: Resources would not be moving location. Councillor P A Dobb agreed and also expressed her concern about the lack of quantifiable targets in the report. This could cause distress to staff and Councillor Dobb felt it was important that staff knew what the Authority was trying to achieve. The Head of Strategic Policy agreed the Strategy did not have quantifiable cashable targets and Services needed to update the efficiency statement which was an appendix to the report to Council. The e-working business case would identify the cashable savings to be made but this would depend upon the extent the Council implemented e-working.

The Deputy Chief Executive / Corporate Director: Resources agreed that mobile working potentially increased costs initially but the true benefit would come if it was possible, for example, to close a building.

Councillor E C Edwards referred to the Customer Service Department which was also making the Authority more efficient. He stressed the need to ensure that targets did not take over from service delivery and said it was important to ensure that any collaboration with other Authorities was with those as efficient as Denbighshire. The Deputy Chief Executive / Corporate Director: Resources indicated that it was important for the initiatives in the efficiency plan to work, otherwise forced budget cuts might be needed later in the year.

Councillor E W Williams said collaborative working could sometimes be seen as counter-productive and it was important to ensure the staff were aware of the benefits and that the County had a future and would continue to evolve. The Chief Executive said he had outlined collaborative benefits and changes to staff, and the need for the Authority to be efficient. Both the recommendations in the Beecham Report and the Welsh Assembly Government were actively encouraging Local Authorities to collaborate and deliver better services. In some instances this would have a positive effect on career structures whilst in others could have a detrimental effect on jobs. Councillor R W Hughes agreed and said it was important that Denbighshire managed the changes and found a better way of providing services.

Cabinet Members were asked to discuss the draft Efficiency Plan with officers and identify efficiency gains for the Efficiency Statement before the report goes to Council.

RESOLVED that Members were asked to discuss the draft Efficiency Plan 2007-2010 with officers and identify efficiency gains for the Efficiency Statement before the report goes to Council for approval on 27 June 2007.

48 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Councillor J Thompson Hill presented the report seeking Members' consideration of the Sustainability Plan (Appendix 1 to the report) and recommend to Council for approval. Councillor Thompson Hill detailed the 5 key objectives and action plan and thanked the Sustainability Project Coordinator for his work on the report.

The Sustainability Project Coordinator said the report set out the first steps to address issues to take sustainability forward for the County and was tied in to both improvements and efficiencies.

In regard to paragraph 4.4, Councillor P A Dobb asked that "investigation" be replaced with "prepare" as this would link into the Corporate Health Standard. She was pleased to see the interactive work with schools in the Plan but was concerned that Planning was not included.

Councillor P J Marfleet (Observer) said it was important the Authority implemented the report's Action Plan. He urged Members and officers to discuss the high energy use in County Hall with the building's owners and said that the requirements and standards had changed since the building had first been built. He went on to suggest the heating systems for the new school at Prestatyn and the Craft Centre should be revisited as they could be considered for alternative heating systems. In some instances, ground source heat pumps could be used, which in Ireland had received external funding. He informed Members that WAG were installing a biomass wood pellet boiler in their new building at Llandudno. The Corporate

Director: Environment thanked Councillor Marfleet for his timely comments and agreed to evaluate such systems if this did not disrupt project timetable, within the constraints available.

Councillor G C Evans (Observer) referred to the Authority's Welsh Language Policy and said reference to the policy should be made to ensure sustainability of the Welsh culture and language. He also suggested that savings could be made in joint Member and staff training. However, Councillor S A Davies said the Authority had a more stringent Welsh Language Policy than was expected by the Welsh Language Board and assured Councillor Evans the Welsh Language was taken seriously. He said Denbighshire was perceived as being more Welsh than some neighbouring Authorities and less Welsh than others. Councillor R W Hughes agreed and said it was important to highlight the sustainability of the Welsh culture in the plan. Training could be shared but in some instances officer training was more technical. Councillor E W Williams said it was important that Denbighshire ensured the Language did not deteriorate and worked to gain any lost ground.

Referring to the new school to be built in Prestatyn, Councillor M A German said consideration of whether a different heating system was required should be pursued. In response, Councillor J Thompson Hill reminded Members the contract for the new build had been let and contractors were working on the site. However, he agreed changes to the heating system design specification would be considered. The Corporate Director: Environment reminded Members that sustainability of build for the new school had been a feature since day one and a balance between sustainability and cost had to be maintained. Councillor Hughes agreed and said all capital projects had a threshold.

An introduction and foreword by the Member and lead officers was required and Councillor Hughes also wanted Members' names to be included on the Plan. Any future reports to Cabinet which had previously been considered by a Scrutiny Committee should contain a brief précis of the comments / recommendations of that Committee.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, Cabinet recommend the Corporate Sustainability Plan to Council for approval.

At this juncture (11.20 a.m) the meeting adjourned for 15 minutes to allow Members to participate in refreshments.

49 INCREASING THE SUPPLY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Councillor P A Dobb presented the report to update Members on affordable housing initiatives within the County and to propose further new affordable housing options for Members to consider. Members were also asked to agree the development of further close working relationships with appropriate Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to deliver affordable housing schemes with and without Social Housing Grant (SHG) support.

Councillor Dobb said the report highlighted the ongoing work being carried out to produce affordable housing within the County and also many of the hindrances encountered in order to produce more – from the high cost of land to the availability of grants and capital. The report detailed the serious financial penalties that would be incurred if more Council housing was built. As the Housing Strategy was currently at consultation she asked Members to debate what more Denbighshire could do and what collaborative work was required on affordable housing. The WLGA had already set up regional networks and used these to lobby the Welsh Assembly Government. Councillor Dobb asked whether Members felt this was an opportune time for Denbighshire to set its own agenda for an intensive lobbying campaign of AMs and MPs. She, together with the Leader and Corporate Director: Social Services and Housing had met a financial institution with charitable status to discuss the County's needs and hurdles being faced in providing affordable housing. Written ideas and specimen models were now awaited.

Councillor Dobb asked Members whether the Authority should be considering a review of its Corporate Asset Management Strategy with a view to seeking best value rather than best price for the sale of land or perhaps ringfencing the Council Tax collected on second homes. She also suggested setting aside

capital funds in order to facilitate an empty homes fund where grants would be offered to house owners in order that houses could be brought back to an habitable standard and leased back to the Council for a number of years. Consideration could also be given to amend planning policies, particularly in the rural communities or buying back some rural Council houses.

Referring to the Local Development Plan meeting held on 21.05.2007, Councillor E W Williams said affordable housing had been discussed as some targets were not being achieved. Following discussion the LDP meeting agreed a consensus that the lower end of the range at 4,500 and not 6,000 houses should be provided, across the County and supported natural growth rather than a huge influx into the County at the same time. This would be discussed at Council in due course. Councillor S A Davies referred to the definition of "local" which had not been included and said agreement on what was "local" was essential.

With regard to the Corporate Asset Management Strategy, Councillor J Thompson Hill said Asset Management Committee had considered the issue 2 years earlier and had agreed not to use the Authority's own land if this meant a loss of capital receipt.

Councillor E C Edwards reminded Members of the recent Council decision where no affordable housing had to be provided when the Ocean Beach development had been agreed. He also agreed with Councillor Thompson Hill the importance of not affecting the viability of developments. Councillor Edwards suggested an Affordable Housing Task Group be formed, with both rural and urban membership, from the Area Elected Members Groups. Local need for affordable housing and other issues was known by the local members. He supported the review of garage sites and hoped this would identify potentially surplus land which could be used for affordable housing provision. Councillor P A Dobb said she was willing to form a Task Group with Members and key officers. Councillor E W Williams agreed and said the Group's remit should consider whether 30% affordable housing provision in the County was sufficient.

Councillor R W Hughes suggested the initial discussion should also include various societies and developers as provision of affordable housing was not solely on land owned by the County and was an issue which concerned the whole of Wales.

Members were reminded by Councillor S A Davies that MPs and AMs had been lobbied. He suggested that suspending the Right to Buy scheme would have an effect and supported Councillor Edwards' request for a well defined Task Group. However, Councillor P A Dobb said it was important the lobbying was maintained and that a monthly programme be developed.

Councillor R E Barton (Observer) referred to the rural enabler project and suggested this should be extended. He totally endorsed the formation of a Task Group. The Housing Strategy Officer said the WAG funding for the rural enabler would cease in November 2007 but WAG could provide funding for this in the next financial year. It was important that Denbighshire not only increase the number of affordable houses but also bring in more rented accommodation.

Councillor H H Evans (Observer) felt there was a role for the Local Partnership Board to challenge the Welsh Assembly Government on affordable housing issues and although the Right to Buy scheme had been a good policy, WAG had not brought another scheme to follow it. He felt the rural areas did not have an affordable housing policy and it was paramount to build outside the development boundaries. He suggested derelict houses could be brought back into a habitable state to provide a supply of affordable housing. He felt the only way to have sustainable rural areas was to ensure affordable housing was available.

Councillor G C Evans (Observer) referred to the various committees e.g. the Central Group or the Rural Forum and said Denbighshire should consider changing its own property into housing units. The difficulties young people faced was not in 5, 10 or 15 years' time but with the lack of affordable housing available now.

Councillor S A Davies seconded Councillor E C Edwards' motion to form a Rural / Urban Task Group and suggested the Task Group recommendations be made available before any further decisions were made. Councillor E W Williams suggested the procedures currently in place should be expanded and that the rural enabler project was continued.

The Chief Executive felt time was being lost whilst recommendations from the Task Group were awaited. With regard to Councillor H H Evans' suggestion re lobbying, he said the Authority should lobby WAG regarding any Council's ability to refurbish or build properties to provide housing and those authorities should not be penalised. He suggested the Right to Buy scheme should be suspended in the County. Consideration could also be given to any percentage above 30% for affordable housing provision on land owned by the Authority but this could lead to loss of capital receipts.

Members agreed to the formulation of the Task Group, who would also explore ways of bringing derelict buildings in rural areas into use. Members also agreed ways be considered for funding the rural enabler project.

RESOLVED that Members accept the report detailing ongoing affordable housing initiatives within the County and consider making further capital and revenue funding available through the budget setting and capital projects review processes to deliver new affordable housing initiatives. Members agree the development of further close working relationships with appropriate Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to deliver affordable housing schemes with and without Social Housing Grant (SHG) support.

Members also agree Councillor Dobb form a Rural / Urban Affordable Housing Task Group with Members and officers, to explore and move forward affordable housing issues.

50 DENBIGHSHIRE'S RECYCLING PARK STRATEGY

Councillor E W Williams presented the report seeking Members' approval of the recommended course of action in relation to the development of the Council's recycling parks. He said the opportunity for Members to visit the Greenfield site at Flintshire had been extremely useful.

Councillor S A Davies felt the public would complain if the existing facilities were moved and it would then mean a drive of 5 or 10 miles to a site, particularly from the more rural areas.

Councillor J Thompson Hill said logically a new site centralised at Rhuddlan was the best way forward but the vast majority of waste in the County was accrued from the coastal towns. He also felt many people would complain regarding the location of the new site and this could lead to fly tipping.

Councillor P A Dobb suggested that both the Ruthin and Denbigh recycling sites should be revamped. She felt unable to support a new site at Rhuddlan as this could have an adverse effect on older people having to travel further and asked whether the Rhyl and Prestatyn Members had been consulted on the proposed new site. In response, the Head of Environmental Services said the Rhuddlan Members had been consulted and Environment Scrutiny supported the proposal. Environment Scrutiny had been provided with detailed figures and the County needed to meet the challenging targets. The new sites was for recycling of large items, for example kitchen units or carpets.

Councillor R W Hughes supported the new sites and their benefits, although the current sites were located closest to the majority of the population and asked whether some of the old sites could be retained for some recycling.

The Chief Executive reminded Members of the Council's earlier agreement of the Strategy presented to Council as part of the Capital Plan to only have 3 centres in the County. Some of the current sites were not large enough to be converted. There was a need for change in the County to meet recycling targets and this was the best way forward.

Councillor S A Davies referred to earlier Cabinet discussions on provision of mini recycling sites for rural areas, where blue box provision was unsuitable. He suggested more funding was required to provide recycling systems for rural areas.

The Rhuddlan site was supported by Councillor E W Williams who said the new site would be more central and much more efficient, whilst provision of mini recycling centres in rural areas was a separate issue. Funding for the other 2 new sites was not as yet available. The Corporate Director: Environment reminded Members that failure to meet the set targets would lead to huge fines in future years and this was the best approach for the County. He gave an assurance the Department would work with Members to move this forward.

Councillor R W Hughes referred to the success of the X2 system which had been supported by Members and the public. The current proposal needed Cabinet agreement and a public information exercise to follow. However, she felt that both the Rhyl and Prestatyn Member Group should be consulted on the proposal. Councillor M A German supported the proposal and felt the public would support a proposal where they could dispose of large items.

Referring to the smaller sites, Councillor P A Dobb said these should be emptied on a regular basis with more provision for compostable materials provided.

Councillor D Owens said a marketing exercise was required once the new site was ready for use, followed by phasing out of the old sites. The new site provision would add to the carbon footprint but would be balanced by recycling targets being met.

Councillor R W Hughes suggested further discussion should take place with the Members' Groups although she felt Members supported the provision of the Rhuddlan site. However, the Chief Executive reminded Members they were the decision making body and Scrutiny Committee had supported the new site provision. Rhyl and Prestatyn Members had not complained and the information had been in the public domain.

Referring to the fact that Scrutiny Committee had already considered the report, Councillor R W Hughes said the Cabinet as the decision making body had not been made aware of their recommendations. Councillor S A Davies agreed and said Scrutiny Committees should be scrutinising Cabinet decisions.

In regard to the Recommendation, Councillor G O Rowlands proposed and was seconded by Councillor J Thompson Hill that Cabinet accept the report. However, Councillor P A Dobb proposed and was seconded by Councillor E C Edwards that the report be forwarded to the Area Members' Groups for consultation before the final decision was taken.

RESOLVED that Cabinet agreed to defer the report. It was agreed the report be discussed at the 4 Area Members' Groups with a further report to Cabinet when the results of the consultations were available.

51 ROUTINE REPORTING ON PERSONNEL

Councillor S A Davies presented the report for Members to note the report on the staff headcount. The following month's report would contain more graphs and less tables, making the headcount trends easier to read.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the information in the report.

52 CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor S A Davies presented the Cabinet Forward Work Programme. Councillor J Thompson Hill said a report on the Asset Challenge Process would be presented within the next two months. Councillor P A Dobb said the report on the Local Housing Strategy may not be available until July.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the Cabinet Forward Work Programme.

53 URGENT ITEMS:

There were no 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 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

PART II

54 BLESSED EDWARD JONES CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL, RHYL

[Councillor S Roberts declared an interest in the item and left the room]

[Councillor D Owens declared an interest but by virtue of being an LEA appointed governor was entitled to speak but not vote]

Councillor D Owens presented the report seeking Members' agreement to provide Blessed Edward Jones High School, Rhyl with arrangements for/and additional funding to address the funding position to ensure that it provided a legal curriculum and met the requirements of the Special Measures Action Plan and to provide financial support as necessary.

The Corporate Director: Lifelong Learning outlined the current situation in detail and the need to ensure the Authority met its statutory obligation to the education of the pupils.

Members agreed a business plan was required, which would take account of the extra funding being provided. There were stringent financial monitoring procedures in place.

Councillor H H Evans (Observer) suggested a Schools Monitoring Panel be formed to monitor schools, highlight any issues as they arise and to raise standards. The Panel meetings would not be public meetings.

RESOLVED that Members note the latest position at Blessed Edward Jones High School, Rhyl and agree to address the funding position to ensure that it provides a legal curriculum and meets the requirements of the Special Measures Action Plan and to provide financial support as necessary.

The meeting concluded at 2.00 p.m.
