

CABINET

Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held at 10.00 a.m. on Tuesday 5 February 2008 in Conference Room 1, County Hall, Ruthin.

PRESENT

Councillors P A Dobb, Lead Member for Social Services; E C Edwards, Lead Member for Customer Care and Community Safety; H H Evans, Leader and Lead Member for Education; M A German, Lead Member for Environment; G M Kensler; Lead Member for Promoting Denbighshire; P J Marfleet, Lead Member for Modernisation and Improvement; G O Rowlands, Lead Member for Regeneration and Housing; J A Smith, Lead Member for Business Management, Communications & Personnel and J Thompson Hill, Lead Member for Finance.

Observers: Councillors M LI Davies; G C Evans; K N Hawkins and Mr C Halliday, Chair of DCC Standards Committee.

The meeting was chaired by Councillor J A Smith.

ALSO PRESENT

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

APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Councillor J A Smith welcomed Mr C Halliday, Chair of the Authority's Standards Committee.

723 URGENT MATTERS

There were no Urgent Matters.

724 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 29 January 2008 were submitted.

Councillor J Thompson Hill – Gating Orders Item 6 page 3 third paragraph – there were 2 locations to be amended – Location 4 and Location 12.

Councillor G M Kensler – Draft HSCWB Strategy 2008-2011 Item 5 page 6 second paragraph – amend to read “improve quality and enjoyment of life ...”

Councillor E C Edwards – Housing Revenue Account Item 7 page 4 second paragraph - was the 12 months to resolve the backlog of work accurate? Councillor G O Rowlands said the 12 months to bring the backlog of work to an acceptable level was accurate but it was hoped this would take less than 12 months' time.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Deputy Leader.

725 BUDGET PROPOSALS 2008 - 2009

Councillor J Thompson Hill presented the report seeking Members' agreement to the amended budget proposals for 2008/2009 and recommend accordingly to Full Council.

Councillor Thompson Hill updated Members on the current position and said Resources Scrutiny Committee had met on 31.01.2007 and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee members had also attended. It had been accepted that the Lifelong Learning Directorate would need to find the revised target savings of £400k. He asked Members to note that the 2 items in the Library Service section should have read £0.6k and £0.7k and not £6k and £7k. The £110k target in Partnership and Inclusion in Appendix 3b, page 1 had now been allocated. The item on closure of public toilets on page 3 of Appendix 3B had been deleted whilst the reduction of opening hours of leisure centres had been reduced to £3k. Following discussion on Tourism, Heritage and Culture on page 4 of Appendix 3b, it had been agreed that the final savings target for the Pavilion Theatre, Rhyl would be £40k. The proposal regarding the Mobile Library Service was deleted.

To achieve a Council Tax increase of 3%, it would be necessary to consider increasing Car Park charges and reduce the £600k allocated to Reserves by £30k.

Referring to paragraph 2.2.1, the Chief Executive said the 2 bids for Tourism, Heritage and Culture would be finalised in time for the Council meeting on 12.02.2008.

Resources Scrutiny and Chair, Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Members and officers were thanked for all their hard work over the last few days by Councillor H H Evans. The process had been difficult but the comprehensive information provided would help Members in coming to an informed decision.

In regard to the Mobile Library, Councillor H H Evans informed Members that external funding from the Rural Development Plan would only be available for capital expenditure and therefore was not available. However, he suggested in future years consideration be given to the Mobile Library Service working in different ways. The budget needed to be less pressurised and all Members needed time for debate. Work on the budgets should start at the beginning of the financial year.

Councillor H H Evans had suggested a Council Tax increase in the region of '3 point'. He felt this gave the Authority more flexibility. Further consideration should be given to car parking charges for the future, not only charges for public use but also whether the Authority should charge its own officers for car parking. He suggested a 3.4% increase in Council Tax, with no increase in car parking charges.

In earlier years the Authority had worked at a 2% Council Tax increase in good faith but Councillor P J Marfleet said the abysmal level of settlement received from the Welsh Assembly Government said this level, although preferable, was not viable. He was unhappy with the prospect of a 3.4% Council Tax increase as this was likely to be higher than in neighbouring Authorities. Was Denbighshire widening or narrowing the gap on Council Tax with its neighbours? Regarding the Section B proposals, the £30k reduction in contribution to reserves would reduce the proposed 3.4% increase to about 3.3%. He wondered whether a lack of car parking spaces hindered tourism and said he felt that many residents were perhaps not as concerned about the charges in comparison as rising fuel costs. He would support 3% Council Tax increase or less. Councillor G M Kensler said aiming to close the gap between Council Tax in neighbouring Authorities required a timescale. She also cited the differences in Denbighshire's extensive portfolio, from Clwyd Leisure, Libraries, Rhyl Pavilion Theatre to Corwen Pavilion to name a few. By having offices in 4 of the County's major towns, this also increased travel expenditure. She stressed the need to keep Council Tax as low as possible whilst ensuring service delivery.

Councillor G M Kensler said there was still confusion over the third year settlements where additional funding could become available from the Comprehensive Spending Review and other work, but this information would not be available to the Authority for some time. She expressed concern regarding possible cuts in Library hours and said Libraries offered much more than the lending of books - Bookstart, Second Chance, cash offices, galleries, community room hire, painting classes were a few services

being offered in Denbighshire's Libraries. The reduction in Performance Incentive Grant could have an effect on GP referrals or Active 8 for example, impacting on the healthier lifestyles which Denbighshire promoted.

Councillor E C Edwards also expressed his concern regarding possible reductions in Library opening hours and said many residents in the Authority were elderly and Libraries were a wonderful resource for them. He also expressed concern regarding possible reductions in Leisure Centre opening hours – he felt that such reduction was not supporting Crime and Disorder prevention. Referring to the 10% reduction in travel costs, he said it would be interesting to see the travel and other costs for each meeting held in the Authority. He supported Councillor H H Evans comments on car parking and said in rural areas any increase in car park charges would have an effect on shop owners and traders. He felt there was room for more efficiencies across the Authority – this was being evidenced by information being produced by the Customer Care Centre. He said the possibility of having a 2% Council Tax increase had been taken away from Denbighshire by the Welsh Assembly Government and the coalition in operation. However, he still felt Denbighshire needed to work in a different way to ensure service delivery but reminded colleagues that Denbighshire was successful. He supported Councillor Evans' suggestion of a 3.4% Council Tax increase.

Disappointment was expressed by Councillor P A Dobb in the possibility of reduction in the opening hours of Leisure Centres, particularly following all the hard work on Health Challenge Denbighshire. Social Services risks remained a grave concern. Referring to Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn being budgeted as a loss, she said the Corporate Director: Lifelong Learning would have further information on this and the provision should not continue to be budgeted at a loss for years to come. She asked whether it was possible to capitalise any of the Education costs in the short term. She also suggested the amount being allocated to Reserves should be reconsidered. Members had worked alongside officers in putting the budget proposals together but there were still queries which needed to be addressed. She felt 3% Council Tax was reasonable but was unwilling to see car park charges increased. She suggested the next budget round should commence as soon as possible following the Council elections in May 2008.

Both the Chief Executive and Councillor J Thompson Hill informed members it was not possible to capitalise Education costs as the vast majority of the £410k Education costs were for staffing. The new Education funding would be used to strengthen the School Improvement section. Councillor Thompson Hill reiterated that proposals to reduce Leisure Centre opening hours had been deleted.

Following questions from Councillor E C Edwards and P J Marfleet regarding Reserves, Councillor Thompson Hill said that a reduction of £30k in contribution to Reserves would represent a 0.1% reduction in the increase in Council Tax. If £60k less was put into Reserves this could represent a 0.2% reduction in Council Tax which would make the increase 3.2%.

Members were reminded by the Deputy Chief Executive / Corporate Director: Resources that the Authority, both Members and officers, had worked exceedingly hard over the years to pull back to a position of financial stability from where it had found itself 7 years earlier. The Reserves should be 5% of the net revenue budget. Using Reserves appeared to be an easy answer but the level of ongoing expenditure was more than the Authority could afford in the current budgetary climate. He said there were risks in the budget which were not being covered, for example, whatever solution is suggested for either Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn or Blessed Edward Jones High School, the answer would not be cost free, and there could be further pressure for Social Services. He accepted Members' suggestion of a reduction of £30k to Reserves but stressed the importance of Reserves.

Councillor H H Evans agreed Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn and Blessed Edward Jones High School were currently a financial burden and it was hoped to find a way forward

to improve the situation. The Modernising Education Board was there to help improve education standards in the long term and not just because of the Estyn report. He had asked Lifelong Learning Scrutiny to find the efficiency savings included in the report which would help reduce further pressures on other Directorates, including Social Services and Housing. The work of the Modernising Education Board was not a short term fix but a long term plan of improvement. He noted the comments by Councillor P J Marfleet on the rising cost of fuel but he felt this had an effect on the viability of shops - supermarket car parks were free whilst residents would have to pay for car parking to support the shops in the towns. It was a difficult situation but he supported a 3.4% increase in Council Tax, removing the car park charges and also removing the £30k from the amount being put to Reserves which would mean an increase of about 3.3% in Council Tax. Councillor Marfleet noted the Deputy Chief Executive / Corporate Director: Resource's comments on Reserves. Councillor P A Dobb supported the funding which was being made available for Education in response to the Estyn report and noted that the posts in Education would be permanent posts.

The Financial Controller agreed to correct the Culture and Leisure figure on page 1 of Appendix 2 to read 272 and not 375. Councillor Kensler reminded colleagues that much of the gross expenditure in Culture and Leisure was funded by external grants. She agreed the importance of funding Education but expressed concern if this was also at the expense of other services. Councillor H H Evans confirmed that the underspend in music tuition was being addressed.

In summation, Councillor J Thompson Hill asked for Members agreement to £30k to be reduced from the £600k Reserves allocation, for the increase in car park charges to be removed and for the Council Tax increase to be set at 3.3%.

***RESOLVED** that Members agree the amended budget proposals for 2008/09 and recommend accordingly to Full Council, with £30k being reduced from the £600k Reserves allocation, for the increase in car park charges to be removed and for the Council Tax increase to be set at 3.3%. Councillor G M Kensler abstained from voting pending further information on the consequences of the cuts, especially regarding the Pavilion Theatre, Rhyl.*

726 URGENT ITEMS

There were no Urgent Items.

PART II

There were no Part II items.

The meeting concluded at 10.55 a.m.
