

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Tuesday, 24 June 2014 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Hugh Evans, Leader and Lead Member for Economic Development; Bobby Feeley, Lead Member for Social Care, Adult and Children's Services; Hugh Irving, Lead Member for Customers and Communities; Huw Jones, Lead Member for Leisure, Youth, Tourism and Rural Development; Barbara Smith, Lead Member for Modernising and Performance; David Smith, Lead Member for Public Realm; Julian Thompson-Hill, Lead Member for Finance and Assets and Eryl Williams, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Education

Observers: Councillors Joan Butterfield, Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones, Meirick Davies, Gwyneth Kensler, Arwel Roberts and David Simmons

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (MM); Corporate Director Economic and Community Ambition (RM); Director of Social Services (NS); Heads of Service: Legal and Democratic Services (GW), Finance and Assets (PMc), Children and Family Services (LR); Corporate Improvement Officer (NK), Section Manager: Network Management (TT) and Committee Administrator (KEJ).

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillor Eryl Williams who would be arriving late for the meeting.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declaration of personal or prejudicial interest had been raised.

3 URGENT MATTERS

No urgent matters had been raised.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 27 May 2014 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 May 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

5 REGIONAL AND LOCAL ARRANGEMENTS TO SAFEGUARD CHILDREN AND ADULTS

Councillor Bobby Feeley submitted a report informing members of regional developments in relation to safeguarding children and presenting the structure for the regional Safeguarding Children Board for approval.

Members were advised of the steps taken by the three North Wales sub-regional Local Safeguarding Children Boards to move towards a regional structure as required by the Social Services & Wellbeing Act. It was proposed that statutory functions would rest with the regional North Wales Safeguarding Children Board and that sub regional groups would ensure that local practice met local need.

Cabinet sought assurances that the tensions created in response to the two tier structure had been resolved and that Denbighshire would not be adversely affected by the proposals. Assurances were also sought that adequate resources were in place to move forward. The Head of Children and Family Services (HCFS) advised that any transition had elements of tension and that the structural change would provide greater flexibility and deliver more benefits. He elaborated upon the distinctions between the current and proposed structure in order to provide greater clarity of purpose between the two tiers, ensuring localism was maintained whilst also delivering gains at regional level. He also confirmed there was agreed commitment of resources from partner agencies to progress the proposals which were thought to be adequate at this stage in its development. In response to further questions the HCFS reported upon the timescale to progress the arrangements confirming there was no particular reluctance to take on the role of host authority. Copies of Sheffield University's research report into the evaluation of the models were available on request to the HCFS or the Safeguarding Project Manager.

RESOLVED that Cabinet agree the structure for the regional Safeguarding Children Board (to be known as the North Wales Safeguarding Children Board) as detailed in Diagram 2 of Appendix 1 to the report, to take effect as soon as possible.

6 CORPORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT (QUARTER 4 2013/14)

Councillor Barbara Smith presented the report updating Cabinet on delivery of the Corporate Plan 2012 - 17 at the end of quarter 4 of 2013/14. The second year of the five year plan had just been completed and overall acceptable progress had been made.

Members' attention was drawn to the key performance summary detailed within the report and the 13 key issues which had been scrutinised by the Performance Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Smith highlighted some of those issues and provided an explanation and update on progress with those particular indicators. As a point of accuracy the Leader drew attention to page 44, outcome 5 – Rhyl Going Forward projects, advising that this indicator had not been withdrawn.

In response to questions posed by members during the ensuing debate the following responses were received –

- there was a discrepancy in the way the figures for fly tipping were collected and reported to the Welsh Government which was being further examined

- the indicator for delivering dropped kerbs had not provided an accurate reflection of progress and was now being measured against a revised deadline
- a significant increase in the installation and use of ICT equipment in primary schools had been attributed to the high electricity consumption but there may also be an issue with equipment being left on standby overnight which was being looked into
- the electrification of rail services was being progressed through the Economic Community Ambition Board with an economic growth case to support investment being developed
- the activity to “further exploit the potential of OpTIC and promote St. Asaph Business Park” had been discussed by the Economic Community Ambition Board and officers were working with the Welsh Assembly in that regard
- indicators relating to the number of mobile classrooms and levels of sickness denoted an improving trend
- figures relating to education had been brought forward from quarter 2 and would not change until the July data was published this September which would provide a clearer picture of progress
- it was acknowledged that two performance measures had been identified as “unknown” for (1) % of damaged roads and pavements made safe within target time, and (2) % of road condition defects resolved within timescale – the service was working to improve information retrieved from their software system and would be asked to expedite that process – Councillor David Smith also agreed to look into the matter
- a joint project was being developed by Property & Economic Development to identify strategic development/employment sites for inward investment.

The Leader asked officers to consider the questions raised by members when producing the next progress report.

RESOLVED that Cabinet notes progress made in delivering the Corporate Plan.

7 FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT 2013/14

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill presented the report detailing the final revenue outturn position for 2013/14 and proposed treatment of reserves and balances. The final Revenue Outturn figures (Appendix 1); Service Outturn Details (Appendix 2); School Balances (Appendix 3), and Transfers from/to Earmarked Reserves (Appendix 4) had been attached to the report.

Councillor Thompson-Hill guided members through the detail of the report and appendices. In brief the overall outturn position showed an underspend against the approved budget which, together with an increase in the council tax yield, strengthened the Council’s financial position. Consequently it was possible to make recommendations for the transfer of funds to specific reserves that would assist the Council in addressing the severe financial pressures of the next few years and meet the cash commitments required to deliver the Corporate Plan. The final position resulted in £1.1m cash funding and it was proposed that £885k be used to contribute to the cash reserve element in the Corporate Plan and £250k be set aside as a capital spend to save reserve to explore the possibility of investing in foster care accommodation.

During consideration of the report discussion focused on the following areas –

- schools expenditure was £1.023m below the delegated budget and members discussed possible reasons for the underspend. Individual schools were responsible for their own delegated budgets and clarification was provided on the role of the Schools Budget Forum and officers in their financial management. Discussions were taking place with schools who had particularly healthy balances and support provided to schools in deficit. The good progress made by the two Rhyl Secondary Schools in reducing negative balances was acknowledged and it was noted that a financial recovery plan was in place for Ysgol Pendref and a new head teacher would be taking up position shortly
- the Corporate Plan required approximately £25m cash and £52m borrowing to deliver the council's ambitions. It was clarified that the total funding allocated to the Corporate Plan reserve within the year was £4.3m with a further £855k proposed as part of the final position. With expenditure of £797k against the reserve during the year, the final position at year end was £14.7m and delivery of the Corporate Plan was generally on track
- Councillor David Smith was pleased that the Highways and Environmental Services budget had broken even but expressed concern that the balance had only been achieved by using funds from other sections to cover shortfalls in areas the service had no control over, such as school transport – he referred to a forthcoming Freedoms and Flexibilities meeting to address this particular issue
- Councillor Bobby Feeley referred to the way social services was transforming with people being encouraged to be more responsible for their own health, wellbeing and independence. She stressed the importance of non-statutory services such as leisure, libraries and countryside services in that regard
- the Leader raised concern about the likelihood of a worse financial settlement for 2015/16 than had been previously indicated. In view of the impact on the future provision of services he asked councillors linked to political parties to start lobbying on behalf of residents to influence that debate at a national level. The Chief Executive advised that the council had a robust financial planning strategy in place but raised serious concerns over the planning and delivery of the significant cuts which had been suggested at such a late stage in the financial year. Councillor Thompson-Hill added that a clear statement was needed from the Welsh Government as to what reductions in budget would be required.

RESOLVED that Cabinet agrees to recommend to full Council –

- (a) *the final revenue outturn position for 2013/14, and*
- (b) *the treatment of reserves and balances as detailed in the report.*

At this juncture (11.30 a.m.) the meeting adjourned for a refreshment break.

8 FINANCE REPORT

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill presented the report detailing the latest financial position and progress against the agreed budget strategy. He provided a summary of the Council's financial position, particularly relating to –

- the council's net revenue budget – £188m for 2014/15 (£192m in 2013/14)
- individual service budgets and savings agreed for 2014/15
- there being no variances at this early stage but risks had been previously reported within the Environment and Highways Service and actions were being taken to try to contain the pressures within the service budget
- a general update on the Corporate Plan; Housing Revenue Account; Treasury Management and the Capital Plan.

Members discussed the following –

- West Rhyl Housing Improvement Project – Councillor Eryl Williams asked whether the Welsh only name 'Gerddi Heulwen' could be used for the new development. The Corporate Director Economic and Community Ambition understood that was the intention of the Project Board but agreed to confirm.
- Registration of Electors (Legal and Democratic Services) – Councillor Huw Jones queried the budget available to deal with the onset of individual electoral registration and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that grant funding had been provided for the necessary software and the process involved data matching as opposed to employing canvassers
- Councillor Gwyneth Kensler felt that where an income column had been produced within the appendices a further breakdown into grants and/or fees and payments would be useful for future reports
- Councillor Bobby Feeley reported upon the number of full time equivalent staff employed by the authority over the last five years which showed little change from 3958.99 in 2009/10 to 3949.89 in March 2014. Possible explanations for the figures were discussed and it was agreed that a report be produced providing a definitive explanation as to jobs lost and new ones created
- Councillor Eryl Williams highlighted the Council's success in progressing projects under the 21st Century Schools programme and heralded Ysgol Maes Hyfryd Site as the first school to be built as part of that programme.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the budgets set for 2014/15 and progress against the agreed budget strategy.

9 CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Hugh Evans presented the Cabinet Forward Work Programme for consideration and members noted the following two additions –

- West Rhyl Coastal Defence Works Phase 3 – 29 July
- Treasury Management Report – 30 September

RESOLVED that Cabinet's Forward Work Programme be noted.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100A 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 it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972

10 NORTH WALES REGIONAL ADVOCACY SERVICE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Councillor Bobby Feeley presented the confidential report seeking Cabinet approval for the commissioning of the advocacy service on a regional basis in partnership with the six North Wales local authorities.

Cabinet considered the business case for the regional advocacy project and sought clarification on the particulars of the collaborative agreement and commitment of all partners. The agreement would bind all six authorities for the period of the contract. The Chair of Partnerships Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones confirmed the business case had been debated at scrutiny and their recommendations had been included within the report.

RESOLVED *that Cabinet –*

- (a) approves the commissioning of the advocacy service on a regional basis in partnership with the six North Wales local authorities, and*
- (b) notes that the development of the new regional service would require the tendering process to commence in July 2014 in preparation for commissioning from April 2015 and that this option also provides an opportunity to make savings and to address some issues identified through the service specification.*

11 APPOINTMENT OF A CONTRACTOR FOR THE A548 FORYD (BLUE) BRIDGE - EAST ABUTMENT STRENGTHENING SCHEME 2014

Councillor David Smith presented the confidential report seeking Cabinet approval for the appointment of the preferred contractor.

Cabinet was advised of the works required to the Foryd Bridge to strengthen the East Reinforced Concrete Structure together with the timescale for the project. Details of the tendering process had been provided which included the result of the tender review and recommendation to award the contract.

Officers responded to questions regarding the complexities of the contract and confirmed that the local sustainability element had been included as part of the evaluation process. Assurances were also provided that sufficient notice would be given of traffic management arrangements including road closure. Officers were asked to consider the possibility of commuters leaving their vehicles in the vicinity overnight at the time of road closure and to plan accordingly.

RESOLVED *that Cabinet approves the appointment of the named contractor as recommended in the report.*

The meeting concluded at 12.20 p.m.