

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Tuesday, 28 March 2017 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Hugh Evans, Leader and Lead Member for the Economy; Bobby Feeley, Lead Member for Social Care, Adult and Children's Services; Hugh Irving, Lead Member for Customers and Libraries; Huw Jones, Lead Member for Community Development; Barbara Smith, Lead Member for Modernisation and Housing; David Smith, Lead Member for Public Realm; Julian Thompson-Hill, Lead Member for Finance, Corporate Plan and Performance and Eryl Williams, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Education

Observer: Councillor Meirick Davies

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (MM); Corporate Directors: Economy and Public Realm (RM) and Communities (NS); Heads of Service: Legal, HR and Democratic Services (GW), Finance/S.151 Officer (RW), Facilities, Assets and Housing (JG), Business Improvement and Modernisation (AS); Strategic Planning Team Manager (NK) and Committee Administrator (KEJ)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Leader highlighted that the last Cabinet meeting of the current Council term was a time to celebrate achievements during that period, including delivery of the Corporate Plan, and the difference made to the county and its residents. He thanked officers and members for their valuable support and hard work and advised that it had been a privilege and an honour to lead the Council during the current administration. Councillor David Smith paid tribute to the Leader's dedication and commitment and thanked him for his support and hard work undertaken on behalf of the Council.

1 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest had been raised.

3 URGENT MATTERS

No urgent matters had been raised.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 28 February 2017 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

5 CORPORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 3 - 2016/17

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill presented the report updating members on the delivery of the Corporate Plan 2012 – 17 as at the end of quarter 3 of 2016/17.

The report included two main elements –

- Executive Summary – detailed achievements and key exceptions with good performance overall. Only one outcome had been assessed as Red: Priority for Improvement – Outcome 7 Students achieve their potential, which was an annual indicator as previously reported and discussed. All other outcomes had been evaluated as acceptable or better, and
- Full quarterly report – provided an evidence based assessment of the current position focusing on key exceptions.

An explanation behind the status of particular indicators had been included within the report with key issues highlighted at the meeting. Most of the areas were annual indicators and there had been little movement since the last quarter.

During consideration of the report members discussed the following –

- Developing the Local Economy – Cabinet was pleased to note the success of the new cross service approach to dealing with businesses looking to invest in the county as evidenced by the £6m investment secured from The Real Petfood Company in Bodelwyddan. It was also noted that the initiative March for Business had been very well attended. The Leader highlighted the future challenge of aligning the Council's priorities with the North Wales Growth Plan to ensure Denbighshire was well placed to benefit from future investment, particularly in terms of transport infrastructure. The Corporate Director Economy and Public Realm referred to the points raised during debate at the previous Cabinet meeting when considering the Growth Vision Strategy and confirmed that those points, including the importance of the transport infrastructure, would be taken forward
- Students achieve their potential – it was clarified that the performance data for the year included all EOTAS (Education Other Than At School) for the first time which referred to a very small cohort of children and young people, including those who were home taught and in educational and custodial placements. Councillor Eryl Williams drew attention to indicator EDU017 (% of pupils achieving the level 2 threshold) and advised that GwE was developing a more effective model and programme to further improve standards. He also referred to past disparities between Welsh Government funding allocations and advised that recent changes would result in additional funding for North Wales which should have a positive effect on outcomes
- Improving our roads – Councillor David Smith reiterated the need for additional highway funding in order to continue to maintain roads to the current standard.

RESOLVED that Cabinet receives the report and notes the progress in delivering the Corporate Plan as at the end of quarter 3 of 2016/17.

6 FINANCE REPORT

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill presented the report detailing the latest financial position and service budgets for 2016/17. He provided a summary of the Council's financial position as follows –

- a net underspend of £0.213m was forecast for service and corporate budgets
- 68% of savings had been achieved to date (target £5.2m) with a further 2% making good progress; 25% would be deferred and achieved in 2017/18 with only 5% of savings not being achieved within the timeframe
- highlighted current risks and assumptions relating to individual service areas
- a general update on the Housing Revenue Account, Housing Capital Plan and the Capital Plan (including the Corporate Plan element).

Cabinet was also asked to note the proposed use of service underspends. Formal approval would be sought when exact figures were known as part of the Final Outturn report.

The following matters were raised during debate –

- details of the Leisure Services Revenue Budget 2016/17 had been appended to the report as requested at the last Cabinet meeting. Cost comparisons between 2013/14 (the last year of trading before leisure provision was undertaken in-house) and 2016/17 showed a saving of approximately £80k. Councillor Huw Jones highlighted that providing existing leisure facilities at the current cost (£560k) was a remarkable achievement and compared more than favourably with other local authorities. Cabinet was pleased to note the success of the approach taken by the authority to invest in its leisure facilities and paid tribute to the Head of Facilities, Assets and Housing and his team in the management and operation of leisure services within the county
- reference was made to Ruthin Craft Centre and whilst noting the success of the exhibitions and displays together with the café, questions were raised as to whether the studio units were operated to capacity with maximum effectiveness. It was noted that previous grant conditions had restricted use of the units but work was ongoing to secure a greater degree of flexibility to allow for the space to be used more commercially which would also result in a reduction of the subsidies from the council and the Arts Council. A recent presentation had been made to Ruthin Town Council in that regard. Councillor Bobby Feeley was pleased to report upon the renowned success of the Centre but felt that it would also benefit from more local publicity. Reference was also made to the publicity generated after the Director of Ruthin Craft Centre, Philip Hughes was awarded the MBE for his contributions to art and craft and to the success of the centre
- the pressures faced by Community Support Services as highlighted in the report were noted but it was unclear at this point how much of the additional funding for Wales recently announced by the UK Government as a result of the extra

investment in the social care sector in England would be passported to Welsh local authorities to help meet cost pressures in social care services

- reference to 'Community Services' in the report should read 'Community Support Services' and Councillor Bobby Feeley highlighted the hard work in reviewing the future provision of in-house care services in order to deliver a better service for the benefit of residents and paid tribute to all those involved within that process. She was also pleased to note the success of the amalgamation of Education and Children's Services which would lead to further service improvements.

The Leader felt the regular finance report was a valuable way of keeping Cabinet well informed of the latest financial position and current pressures. The report showed that services were well managed and performed well and also ensured that pressures were highlighted at the earliest opportunity in order to plan effectively for them. Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill recorded his thanks to the Head of Finance/S.151 Officer and his team, and the former Head of Service, for their hard work over the last five years, adding that it had been a privilege to work with them.

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

- (a) notes the budgets set for 2016/17 and progress against the agreed budget strategy, and
- (b) notes the proposed use of service underspends where indicated and that formal approval will be requested when exact figures are known as part of the Final Outturn Report.

7 CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Forward Work Programme was presented for consideration and it was noted that the next Cabinet meeting would be held on 6 June 2017.

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 Paragraphs 12 and 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

8 BUSINESS RATES WRITE OFFS

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill presented the confidential report seeking Cabinet approval to write off irrecoverable Business Rates for four companies/individuals where recovery action could not continue because they had either been subject to insolvency action or had absconded.

In response to questions Cabinet was advised of the robust debt recovery process to ensure the best chance of a favourable outcome but there was little the authority

could do over and above that process in terms of preventing recurrent bad debts from the same individual traders/businesses. Some discussion focused on the recent revaluation of business rates and effect on smaller businesses and officers provided assurances that the relevant information and support was being made available to businesses in terms of the transitional changes, rate relief and appeals processes. The Leader also confirmed that he had written to the Welsh Government directly expressing concern regarding the impact on local businesses arising from changes to businesses rateable value and proposals on rate relief.

Cabinet noted there was no prospect of recovering any of the business rates debts as detailed within the report. It was also noted that there would be no direct cost to the council for the debts written off which were met by the National Pool.

RESOLVED that Cabinet agrees to write off the irrecoverable Business Rates as shown in Table 1 of the report.

Prior to the close of the meeting the Leader conveyed his best wishes to those members standing for re-election. Councillor David Smith would not be standing for re-election and the Leader paid tribute to his work and valuable contribution during his term of office and wished him well in his retirement. The Chief Executive also took the opportunity to thank Cabinet on behalf of officers for their support and collective commitment in order to deliver the best for Denbighshire.

The meeting concluded at 11.00 a.m.