

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin on Tuesday, 19 November 2019 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Hugh Evans, Leader and Lead Member for the Economy and Corporate Governance; Bobby Feeley, Lead Member for Well-being and Independence; Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Lead Member for Education, Children's Services and Public Engagement; Brian Jones, Lead Member for Waste, Transport and the Environment; Richard Mainon, Lead Member for Corporate Services and Strategic Direction; Tony Thomas, Lead Member for Housing and Communities; Julian Thompson-Hill, Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets, and Mark Young, Lead Member for Planning, Public Protection and Safer Communities

Observers: Councillors Meirick Davies, Alan James, Peter Scott, Graham Timms, Huw Williams and Emrys Wynne

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (JG); Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm (GB) and Communities (NS); Heads of Service: Legal, HR and Democratic Services (GW) and Communities and Customers (LG); Strategic Planning and Performance Team Leader (IM) and Committee Administrator (KEJ)

POINT OF NOTICE

The Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services drew attention to guidance provided to elected members in relation to conduct during the pre-election period and responsibilities in that regard to ensure that the Council remained impartial.

1 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies from members.
Steve Gadd, Chief Accountant and S.151 Officer

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declaration of interest had been raised.

3 URGENT MATTERS

No urgent matters had been raised.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 22 October 2019 were submitted.

Accuracy – Page 8, Item 6 Cabinet Forward Work Programme – whilst the information provided in the minutes had been correct at the time, Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts advised that the item on 21st Century Schools Programme: Band B Proposals had since been rescheduled from November to December in accordance with pre-election guidance.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2019 be received and confirmed as a correct record.

5 LIBRARY STRATEGY 2019 - 22

Councillor Tony Thomas introduced the report and presented the Library Strategy 2019 – 22 for Cabinet endorsement. The Strategy outlined the vision for the public library service in Denbighshire and what it aimed to achieve in the next three years.

Councillor Thomas highlighted the importance of the library service and provided a number of key performance statistics to demonstrate how well the service was performing with Denbighshire ranked in the top 10 authorities in Wales for a range of measures. The Chief Executive highlighted the value of the digital assistance sessions, particularly given the issues around digital connectivity in the county.

The Head of Customers and Communities explained the reasoning for the Strategy in order to highlight the importance of the service within communities and how it contributed to the Council's strategic priorities. She also reported upon the investment over recent years in library buildings and staff and further development of partnerships to maximise benefits, emphasising the importance of the service in terms wellbeing, learning and prosperity, and also the key role for communities to take ownership and become actively involved. The cost of the library service was just under £3 per library visit and a national study from 2013 showed library user local spend was around £8, which was being put back into the local economy.

Cabinet acknowledged the importance of the library service to local communities and people's health and wellbeing and commended the range of activities and initiatives provided. In considering the Strategy discussion focused on the following

–

- in response to questions from Councillor Mark Young it was confirmed that opening hours were under constant review with a view to best meeting the needs of communities within the finite resources available and assurances given that Wi-Fi was available in all libraries which could be accessed by the public
- Councillor Richard Mainon was keen to see greater commercialisation and income generation together with more use of volunteers and extended opening hours to maximise the benefits of the service; he also felt there would be merit in developing SMART targets to measure progress. The key role of volunteers within the action plan to take particular initiatives and projects forward was explained. The promotion of the use of libraries as community hubs and for community activities outside of traditional opening hours was also highlighted and particular reference was made to the successful partnership work with Rhuddlan Town Council and St. Asaph City Council in that regard

- the difficulties in comparing service costs with other authorities was explained given that Denbighshire was the only library service integrated with its customer services, however Denbighshire did appear more expensive when compared to other local authorities and further analysis was being undertaken to ascertain the reasons for that and the potential for any further efficiencies to be made
- Councillor Bobby Feeley highlighted the social value of the service and referred to the range of activities to engage with communities and more vulnerable sectors of society but she understood the need to make libraries more commercialised and cost effective and looked for opportunities in that respect.

In response to further questions from non-Cabinet members the Head of Customers and Communities elaborated upon the various services offered including the well valued housebound service. It was clarified that the £2.94 cost per library visit did not include the housebound service. Councillor Meirick Davies queried the impact of not providing hard copies of planning applications within libraries and the Head of Customers and Communities agreed to look into the matter and report back to him outside of the meeting. Councillor Peter Scott took the opportunity to thank the Council for the investment in St. Asaph Library and reported upon its success as a community hub and he also encouraged other communities to do likewise and engage and involve libraries in community activities.

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

- (a) endorse the Library Strategy 2019 - 22, and
- (b) confirms that it has read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment (Appendix 2 to the report) as part of its consideration.

6 CORPORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 2, 2019 TO 2020

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill presented the report updating members on progress in delivery of the Corporate Plan 2017 – 2022 as at the end of quarter 2.

The Corporate Plan set the strategic direction for the council and its priorities for the five year period. A summary of data and project updates had been provided for quarter 2 together with data tables outlining the current position. The report also outlined how projects identified in support of each priority were developing. Performance was as expected for the midway stage of the Corporate Plan and whilst there were fluctuations in individual priority areas, the overall performance summary for both measures and projects showed that all bar one priority had been assessed as ‘acceptable’ and one had been assessed as ‘excellent’.

The Strategic Planning and Performance Team Leader explained the different style of reporting following adoption of the accessibility template. He guided members through the report and provided an update on progress made against each of the corporate priorities, highlighting key issues and project developments. There were fifteen items of new data in the quarter 2 update – seven of which had declined and six of which had improved. Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill added that performance measures were monitored through the Council’s usual reporting

mechanisms and all individual projects continued to be monitored by the Programme Boards.

During consideration of the report Cabinet raised the following issues –

- Councillor Bobby Feeley referred to the amalgamation of the housing and homelessness strategies into one strategy document and officers agreed to reflect that change in the language of future performance reports and consider the potential inclusion of homelessness performance measures as appropriate
- Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts referred to the comparison tables and queried why so many of the measures did not apply and also highlighted a number of examples where performance had declined or improved which had not resulted in a change in the categorisation status. Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill responded that the infrequency of some reporting mechanisms meant that there was no comparable data during a particular time period to apply; in terms of the categorisation status a range was set for each measure against each status and therefore performance could decline or improve within the range and result in no change to the categorisation status. It was also highlighted that the measure for A and B roads was benchmarked against All Wales data and measured within that context. For clarity it was agreed that future performance reports contain some narrative as to how particular measures had been assessed and their frequency to better reflect their performance within the relevant context together with an explanation of the categorisation status.

The Lead Members and officers also responded to questions from non-Cabinet members as follows –

- Superfast Broadband and Mobile Networks – Councillor Meirick Davies raised a question regarding broadband coverage and given that there was a political angle to the response Councillor Richard Mainon agreed to provide an answer outside of the meeting in order to comply with pre-election guidance
- School Nutrition Project – reference was made to the scrutiny of the school meal arrears which had reduced significantly and in response to recent news reports assurances were provided that every child in Denbighshire was always provided with a meal if they had no packed lunch or were in school meal arrears
- Modernising Education Programme – the position with regard to the Welsh Language Development Centre was elaborated upon together with the separation of the building work to adapt the existing building and the car parking elements of the scheme for which planning permission was required
- Percentage of the population aged 18 to 24 claiming Job Seekers Allowance – it was explained that the increase equated to 130 more young people but it was too early to tell whether the measure reflected the introduction of universal credit or was due to a downturn in the economy – a more definitive answer was expected by the next quarter.

RESOLVED that Cabinet notes the progress in delivering the Corporate Plan as at the end of quarter 2 of 2019/20 and confirms the content of the draft 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 as follows –

- the net revenue budget for 2019/20 was £198.538m (£194.418m in 2018/19)
- an overspend of £2.111m was forecast for service and corporate budgets
- highlighted current risks and assumptions relating to individual service areas
- detailed required savings and efficiencies of £5.672m including corporate savings identified in 2018/19 (£0.5m), schools savings of 2% (£1.32m) and service efficiencies and savings (£3.852m) with an approved allocation of £616k from the Savings Achievement Contingency to offset non-achievement savings
- provided a general update on the Capital Plan, Housing Revenue Account and Housing Capital Plan.

With regard to the projected overspend of £2.111m it was explained that in the absence of any mitigation by the end of the financial year it was likely that resources would need to be utilised from base reserves.

In response to a question from Councillor Meirick Davies regarding the Queens Market Redevelopment, the Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm reported upon dialogue with stallholders and confirmed that officers were providing business advice and supporting tenants with relocation as required. It was the responsibility of business owners to advise customers of their relocation. Councillor Brian Jones added that the process of vacating the site had been handled well.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the budgets set for 2019/20 and progress against the agreed budget strategy.

8 CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet forward work programme was presented for consideration and members noted the addition of an item on Budget Proposals 2020/21 for January.

Cabinet was also advised that although the next meeting was scheduled after the election, the agenda would need to be published earlier within the pre-election period. Consequently if an item was considered politically sensitive it would remain on the agenda but the accompanying report would not be published until after the election had taken place, but still in time for it to be considered at the meeting.

RESOLVED that Cabinet's forward work programme be noted.

The meeting concluded at 11.20 hrs.