

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held by video conference on Tuesday, 23 March 2021 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 Joan Butterfield, Meirick Davies, Hugh Irving, Alan James, Gwyneth Kensler, Barry Mellor, Peter Scott, Rhys Thomas and Emrys Wynne

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Directors: Communities (NS) and Economy and Public Realm (GB); Heads of Service: Legal, HR and Democratic Services (GW), Finance and Property (SG), Business Improvement and Modernisation (AS), Communities and Customers (LG), Community Support Services (PG), and Children's Services (RM); Strategic Planning Team Manager (NK); Organisation Development Specialist (FC); Strategic Planning and Performance Team Leader (IM); Service Manager Client Services (KN), and Committee Administrators (KEJ & SJ)

WELCOME / POINTS OF NOTICE

- (i) the Leader welcomed to the meeting Julia Hughes, a member of the Standards Committee who was in attendance to observe proceedings. He also congratulated newly elected Councillor Alan Hughes (Corwen) and welcomed him to the council
- (ii) to mark the National Day of Reflection the Leader advised that a minute's silence would be observed at 12 noon to reflect on the impact of the pandemic
- (iii) at the Leader's invitation the Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services drew attention to the guidance provided to elected members in relation to council business conducted during the pre-election period and responsibilities in that regard to ensure that the council remained impartial.

1 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Emrys Wynne declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 – Volunteering Policy because his wife was a volunteer in a primary school.

Councillor Gwyneth Kensler declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 – Finance Report because she had claimed small business grant funding on behalf of Theatr Twm O'r Nant.

3 URGENT MATTERS

No urgent matters had been raised.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 16 February 2021 were submitted.

Matters Arising – Page 11, Item 6 Street Naming and Numbering Policy Review – Councillor Meirick Davies advised that he had pointed out that the first two lines in paragraph 6.1 of the policy were exactly the same and the officer had agreed to correct it. The Leader asked that the Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services look into the point raised and respond directly outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED *that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 February 2021 be received and confirmed as a correct record.*

5 VOLUNTEERING POLICY

Councillor Richard Mainon presented the report seeking Cabinet's formal ratification of the new Volunteering Policy, updated processes and associated documentation for managing volunteering activity within the council.

Cabinet was advised that the documentation included a new approach to promote volunteering opportunities within the council and clear guidance on how to manage, recruit and support volunteers together with clarity on the position of management and employees wishing to participate in volunteering activities. The new policy provided a consistent approach across the council whilst also supporting the differing needs of service areas, offering a “one stop shop” for all volunteer opportunities online based on an in-house system. Reference was made to the consultations carried out, including trade unions, and whilst not quorate the Joint Consultative Committee Health and Safety Employees Relations spoke favourably about the policy and recommended it for approval. Councillor Mainon commended the suite of documents and thanked officers for all their hard work in that regard.

Cabinet welcomed the new policy documentation which provided a clear and consistent best practice approach to volunteering activities and also paid tribute to the invaluable contributions of volunteers which had been particularly highlighted during the pandemic. The Leader referred to the promotion of volunteer opportunities as key to ensuring people understood the process and could become volunteers in a simple way. It was noted that some services such as Countryside Services and Community Support Services relied heavily on volunteers and as Lead Members for those service areas Councillors Tony Thomas and Bobby Feeley commended those contributions which were much appreciated. Whilst welcoming the policy they hoped that volunteers would not be lost as a result of the extra

administration involved in formalising the recruitment process. Councillor Mark Young also welcomed the policy and was keen for it to be an inclusive as possible; he raised questions regarding the shift to online opportunities, reimbursement of expenses and support for managers.

Councillor Richard Mainon and officers responded to the issues raised as follows –

- volunteering opportunities would be advertised online and front line staff would be able to look for those opportunities on behalf of others and Town/Community Councils could also help raise awareness. Work within communities may also identify useful avenues to help people access volunteering opportunities
- assurances were provided that an alternative method of payment would be made to reimburse expenses incurred by volunteers without bank accounts
- it was agreed that management capacity was required to support volunteers and much had been learned in that regard during the course of the pandemic in terms of organising both staff and volunteers to support communities and services. The importance of ensuring sufficient management capacity to properly support volunteers had been identified as an issue to be considered in greater detail going forward to ensure it was addressed appropriately
- the policy documentation was intended to be fluid so any learning or policy updates following implementation could be applied and shared as best practice
- a measured and tailored approach had been taken when developing the policy in terms of bureaucracy with differing levels of checks required depending on risk, including safeguarding, associated with different volunteer positions. There was also a risk if appropriate processes were not in place. However members' concerns regarding the potential loss of volunteers as a result of formalising the process was acknowledged and it was agreed that engagement with the process be carefully monitored to check it did not pose a barrier to recruitment.

Councillor Mainon and officers also responded to further questions from non-Cabinet members as follows –

- the suite of documents relating to volunteering opportunities would be open to all outside organisations, including schools and Town/Community Councils, to use and adapt as necessary for themselves and share in that good practice
- it was unlikely that the council would have responsibility for informal volunteers undertaking work on their own initiative but the new simplified process would make it easier to formalise that type of volunteer work and benefit from the safeguards that would provide whilst further building community resilience
- the policy related to volunteering opportunities with the council and it was noted that there was many other volunteering activities across the county which would usually be advertised through Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council (DVSC) who provided support to volunteers, community groups and other organisations. The council worked closely with DVSC and they had worked in partnership during the first lockdown to facilitate the volunteering process
- in response to questions from Councillor Joan Butterfield it was agreed to report back on the number of managers supporting volunteers and given other issues raised, including reservations regarding the additional bureaucracy, there may be merit in reporting back to scrutiny at a future date on progress after a period of operation and monitoring of the policy. With regard to supporting managers

there were corporate systems in place and guidance produced. The importance of community volunteers was also acknowledged as a great strength within communities and it was hoped that the new processes would help better support those individuals without taking over and letting people do things for themselves.

Councillor Mainon proposed the recommendations confirming a minor amendment to 3.2 to replace 'comments on' with 'approves' the amended Time Off Work policy.

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

- (a) *ratifies the new policy, processes and associated documents for managing volunteering activity within the council as detailed within the report;*
- (b) *approves the proposed amendment to the Time Off Work policy for employees wishing to participate in volunteering activities (Appendix 7 to the report), and*
- (c) *confirms that it has read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment (Appendix 1 to the report) as part of its consideration.*

6 SUB REGIONAL CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL ASSESSMENT CENTRE - PROJECT UPDATE

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Lead Member for Education, Children's Services and Public Engagement presented the report seeking Cabinet approval to sign off the Partnership Financial Deed to allow the contract for the construction of the Children's Residential Assessment Unit (CRAU) to be awarded.

The CRAU had been developed in partnership with Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC) and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCU) to be located in Conwy with CCBC as Lead Partner. The project would provide 3 purpose built buildings including an assessment unit and residential accommodation for up to 6 children and young people for a maximum length of 12 weeks. The build was to be fully funded at a cost of £2,687,524 with Welsh Government ICF (Integrated Care Fund) and ICF grant was available for financial years 2020/21 and 2021/22. Details of the tender had been provided and the contract would be awarded subject to sign off of the Funding Deed by CCBC and DCC. It was envisaged that construction would commence in spring 2021 with completion expected in spring 2022.

The Interim Head of Children's Services reported on the careful development of the model based on good practice to meet the needs of vulnerable children; it would also meet the council's and Welsh Government priorities, including keeping children local which was proven to improve outcomes and in the long term reduce costs. The centre would enable children to be rehabilitated quicker by working directly with families and the children, providing respite, and also having a psychological formulation. The team had already been established, making a difference and diverting children away from long term care. There had been excellent support from all partner agencies and also from members who formed part of the project board and would continue to provide direction and oversight. A separate discussion

was required around ongoing costs and shared responsibilities for the centre going forward but there was a real strength of partnership and commitment in that regard.

Cabinet welcomed the positive report and hard work undertaken to bring the project to fruition for the benefit of vulnerable children and their families locally.

The following issues were raised during the ensuing debate –

- Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill reiterated that the report referred to the construction phase which was fully funded but there would be future pressures in terms of the revenue element for delivering the facility as highlighted in the report. However in the medium to long term it would be a ‘spend to save’ initiative which would help to reduce the overspend in the service going forward and he was fully supportive of the project. He added that the capital element had been reviewed by the Strategic Investment Group and recommended to Cabinet
- Councillor Brian Jones referred to the risk identified at section 10.4 of the report and cautioned that the acquisition of a badger license from NRW may take some time and should be kept under close review. Councillor Meirick Davies suggested a time extension be sought from Welsh Government if necessary to guard against any delay incurred as a result. Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts was confident in the processes followed by the council in relation to building projects with everyone working together for the best possible outcomes on site. The intention was to build the centre and for it to be operational as soon as possible whilst following the necessary requirements and acting within the law
- the Interim Head of Service responded to questions raised by Councillor Bobby Feeley confirming that whilst there would be some flexibility in terms of the 12 week limit the intention was to use the centre as part of a toolkit for working therapeutically with families to enable a feasible and safe return home as quickly as possible. Not all children would need a 12 week stay and there may be a mix of home and respite at the centre but exceeding 12 weeks would reduce the capacity for other children. So whilst there was some flexibility the ultimate goal was for the child to return home as quickly as possible. The team at the centre may continue to work with families after the child had returned home as part of the overall process
- Councillor Mark Young referred to section 10.3 of the report and need to secure revenue funding for ongoing costs and how that would be progressed. The Interim Head of Service advised that no definite funding arrangements had been confirmed and consideration would be given to both the potential for financial contributions from partners and Welsh Government grant funding
- Councillor Rhys Thomas sat on the Fostering Panel and was very supportive of the scheme. He encouraged members to attend the Corporate Parenting Forum to learn more about the excellent work undertaken by Children’s Services.

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

- (a) *approve the sign off of the Partnership Financial Deed to allow the contract for the construction of the Children’s Residential Assessment Unit development to be awarded, and*

- (b) confirms that it has read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment (Appendix 1 to the report) as part of its consideration.

7 CORPORATE PLAN UPDATE, QUARTER 3, 2020 TO 2021

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill presented the report updating Cabinet on progress in delivery of the Corporate Plan in 2020 to 2021 as at the end of quarter 3 (October to December 2020).

The Corporate Plan 2017 – 2022 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 3 together with data tables outlining the current position. The reporting timetable had been affected by Covid-19 but would soon revert back to normal and the impact on service delivery and the continuing response to dealing with the pandemic had been referenced within the report. Overall performance was good with two measures assessed as priority for improvement according to their measures. Performance Scrutiny Committee had considered the report and raised questions regarding specific projects primarily focusing on housing and extra care amongst others.

The Strategic Planning and Performance Team Leader further explained the changes to the reporting arrangements which would be back on schedule in the summer. He guided members through the report explaining the improvement overall from the last report with most projects largely on track and just a few still delayed. The report had been well received by Performance Scrutiny Committee with much discussion on housing because it had been identified as a priority for improvement. It was explained that there would be a rapid increase in new housing developments which would be reflected in the data resulting in a quick improvement over the coming year. The other priority for improvement focused on young people and measures relating to attainment and attendance; unfortunately there was no data available for either of those measures and unlikely to be quality data for some time which was a challenge for the authority. In closing, reference was made to the two main challenges facing the authority in relation to barriers to learning faced by young people and how to keep them on track, and also how to protect vulnerable citizens within communities, particularly from digital exclusion, and ensure their voices were heard and they were still able to access the services they needed.

Cabinet members were familiar with the priorities and progress given that they were discussed with Heads of Service on a regular basis. The Leader was pleased to note the progress made despite Covid-19 and he thanked all services and officers for their commitment to supporting the Corporate Plan. He reminded members that the council had deliberately set an ambitious Corporate Plan and one of the biggest challenges had been around the expansion of digital provision and connectivity; he expressed his frustration regarding the pace of progress with the council dependent on UK and Welsh Governments to direct companies to invest in areas that were difficult to reach. However the commitment to that priority remained.

RESOLVED that Cabinet notes the progress in delivering the Corporate Plan as at the end of quarter 3 of 2020/21 and confirms the content of the draft report.

FINANCE REPORT

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill presented the report detailing the latest financial position and progress against the agreed budget strategy as outlined below –

- the net revenue budget for 2020/21 was £208.302m (£198.538m in 2019/20)
- an underspend of £0.718m was forecast for service and corporate budgets
- highlighted current risks and assumptions relating to individual service areas
- outlined the financial impact of coronavirus and position on claims to the Welsh Government (WG) to date together with other WG Covid related grant funding
- detailed required savings and efficiencies of £4.448m agreed including corporate savings relating to triennial actuarial review of Clwyd Pension Fund (£2m); 1% schools savings (£0.692m); service savings (£1.756m)
- provided a general update on the Capital Plan, Housing Revenue Account and Housing Capital Plan.

Councillor Thompson-Hill guided Cabinet through the various elements of the report and movements since the previous month. The movement on service and corporate budgets to a forecast underspend of £0.718m (overspend of £1.759m last month) largely reflected the Quarter 3 loss of income grant and additional Covid related grant funding received from Welsh Government (WG). The movement in corporate budgets showing an underspend of £1.867m reflected the forthcoming WG funding to offset the full year impact of Covid on the Council Tax Yield and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme but mainly related to a new allocation of WG funding (£1.663m) recognising the pressures of reacting to Covid on the council as a whole. It was recommended any overall underspend, taking into account service requests to carry forward specific service underspends, be placed in the Budget Mitigation Reserve to help the continued response to Covid and budget process for 2022/23.

The Head of Finance advised that the amount of grant funding from WG was likely to exceed £20m for the council directly which did not include financial support given to businesses. An overspend of £14m had been estimated at the start of the year and the positive impact on the financial position had been achieved by partnership working with WG and the financial strategy set out in response to Covid-19.

Councillor Thompson-Hill also took the opportunity to update members on the latest tranche of WG business grants announced on 12 March and administered by the council and again paid tribute to the tireless work of staff involved in the swift processing of claims to over 1300 businesses amounting to some £5.5m of support. Other members echoed those sentiments and the Lead Member agreed to pass on members' appreciation and positive comments received from businesses.

The Lead Member and Head of Finance responded to questions as follows –

- Councillor Hugh Irving queried the processes to safeguard against payment of fraudulent claims and was advised of the checks undertaken in that regard with further work ongoing with Internal Audit and National Fraud Initiative. Grants had been based on NNDR which guarded against bogus companies although there was a smaller discretionary element for micro business who did not pay NNDR. Given the element of self-certification involved in the process and quick

- release of funding it was possible that there could be incidents of payments issued when they should not have been which may result in reclaiming of grants
- it was clarified that whilst the year end position had not yet been reached and was subject to change the current projection was an underspend of just over £700k. Councillor Joan Butterfield highlighted the dire financial position and projected overspends earlier in the financial year and turnaround to a positive position due to the grant funding provided to the council by Welsh Government.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the budgets set for 2020/21 and progress against the agreed budget strategy.

9 CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The forward work programme was presented for consideration and members noted that the item on Contract Procedure Rules would be rescheduled from April.

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 would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

[At this point (11.30 am) the meeting adjourned for a ten minute break]

10 GRAPHIC DESIGN AND PRINT FRAMEWORK

A confidential report by Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts was submitted seeking Cabinet approval of the new Dynamic Purchasing System Framework.

The Head of Communities and Customers provided some background to the current design and procurement function. Following a review it was generally accepted that, whilst the current framework was fit for purpose, it needed to have greater flexibility in terms of having more choice of providers, to ensure value for money, refreshed design concepts and more competitiveness. Consequently a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) had been proposed with criteria including quality of services, providing value for money and problem solving across five procurement 'lots' in order to address gaps in the current framework and the needs of council services. It was proposed that the new framework would be set up for a six year period. As the DPS would be a collaboration with Flintshire County Council the contract spend was estimated at over £4m and required Cabinet approval.

Cabinet noted the merits of the proposed DPS in providing value for money through increased competition and choice available for council services. In response to questions the Lead Member and Head of Service confirmed proactive work with schools to encourage use of the framework and share best practice; elaborated upon the potential to allow more local companies the opportunity to be involved within the framework and confirmed a weighting for local suppliers; provided

assurances regarding quality control checks on the correct use of English and Welsh on materials produced, and explained the work of specialist suppliers in printing street signs and vehicle livery on specialist material. Councillor Meirick Davies asked for a comparison of costs for products previously produced in-house and the Head of Service explained that the framework did not always deliver cheaper products with a quality weighting in some areas; one of the reasons for extending the number of 'lots' was to provide greater choice across the authority.

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve the new Dynamic Purchasing System Framework as detailed within the report.

NATIONAL DAY OF REFLECTION

At this point (12 midday) a minute's silence was observed to mark the National Day of Reflection and remember the lives lost due to the coronavirus pandemic and those affected by the events of the last twelve months.

11 PROCUREMENT OF CARE AND SUPPORT IN DENBIGH EXTRA CARE HOUSING SCHEME FOR OLDER PEOPLE AND COMPLEX DISABILITY

Councillor Bobby Feeley presented the confidential report seeking Cabinet approval to appoint two care agencies to provide care and support in Awel y Dyffryn following a successful procurement exercise as set out within the report.

Awel y Dyffryn Extra Care Housing Scheme had been developed by the council in partnership with Grwp Cynefin Housing Group and comprised 66 units of extra care housing (blocks A & B) and a separate block of 8 units for complex disabilities (block C). It had been anticipated the scheme would be ready for September 2020 but due to Covid restrictions had been delayed until July 2021. Details of the two separate procurement exercises and contract award recommendations had been provided in the report relating to the appointment of (1) a suitable domiciliary agency to deliver care and support to blocks A & b, and (2) a specialist provider to provide care and support to the 8 units for complex disabilities in Block C. To demonstrate value for money the report also detailed how much it would cost the council to provide a similar level of care and support to blocks A & B in house.

The Head of Community Support Services explained the need for two separate contracts given the specialist nature of provision for those with complex disabilities. Officers responded to questions regarding the financial checks and balances undertaken as part of the process and contingency plans in place, and also confirmed no additional costs incurred due to Covid-19 with costs calculated on the number of hours of care and support purchased. There were additional costs associated with the transition period but the delay of the scheme had provided an opportunity to work with the company on staff recruitment in readiness for opening. Councillor Gwyneth Kensler reported that Denbigh Member Area Group received a presentation on the scheme and virtual tour and she commended the project.

Cabinet welcomed the scheme and having considered the procurement exercise and outcome of that process together with the report recommendations it was –

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

- (a) approves the appointment of the named service provider as recommended within the report to provide care and support to individuals with complex disabilities who live in block C, and
- (b) approves the appointment of the named service provider as recommended within the report to provide care and support to Older People who will live in Blocks A & B Awel Y Dyffryn Extra Care Housing in Denbigh.

The meeting concluded at 12.10 hrs.