

## **CABINET**

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held by video conference on Tuesday, 29 June, 2021 at 10.00 am.

### **PRESENT**

Councillors Hugh Evans, Leader and Lead Member for the Economy and Corporate Governance; Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Lead Member for Education, Children's Services and Public Engagement; Brian Jones, Lead Member for Waste, Transport and the Environment; 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, Gwyneth Kensler and Paul Penlington

### **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), and Business Improvement and Modernisation (AS); HR Services Manager (LD); Lead Business Partner – Organisation Development (AM); Strategic Planning Team Manager (NK); Strategic Planning and Performance Team Leader (IM) and Committee Administrators (KEJ & SLW [Webcaster])

#### **1 APOLOGIES**

Councillor Bobby Feeley had been unable to join the meeting (which was being held via video conference) due to technical difficulties.

#### **2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

No declarations of interest had been raised.

#### **3 URGENT MATTERS**

The Corporate Director: Communities provided an overview of the current situation with regard to Covid-19 in Denbighshire. As of mid-June Wales had seen an increase in cases and positivity rates. England had already seen several weeks of rapid growth and as with previous waves of coronavirus Wales was some two weeks behind. The increase had been highest in young people who had not yet been vaccinated and typically had more social interaction. It was uncertain how much the vaccination programme had broken the link between infection, hospitalisation and death and it would be 2/3 weeks before the trajectory of the virus became known. Denbighshire's rolling weekly case rate was 104.5 per 100,000 population (an increase of 27% on the previous week) and above the Welsh average of 53.1, with five of the six North Wales local authorities above the Welsh average. Denbighshire had started to see increases of positive cases in care homes and schools which was expected to continue and due to a data lag the recent figures were expected to be an underestimation of the current position. Members would be kept informed on the continuing situation.

#### 4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 25 May 2021 were submitted.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2021 be received and confirmed as a correct record.

#### 5 MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill presented the report providing an overview of the Council's proposed approach to supporting Mental Health in the workplace and recommending adoption of the Mental Health Policy and associated documentation.

The importance of supporting mental health in the workplace was highlighted together with key objectives to improve mental health awareness, tackle the causes of work related mental ill health, create a workplace culture to talk about mental health, and support employees experiencing mental ill health. In order to achieve those objectives the Council had formally signed up to the Time to Change Pledge with an action plan to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination and support mental health. A draft Supporting Mental Health in the Workplace Policy had been developed together with Mental Health Guidance for Managers. Further guidance to managers had been provided on how to hold a sensitive conversation with staff who may be experiencing mental ill health. Together those actions could help reduce the severity, duration and quantity of mental health in the workplace. The draft policy and associated documentation had been agreed by the Senior Leadership Team and Trade Unions and recommended to Cabinet for adoption by the Joint Consultative Committee for Health and Safety and Employee Relations.

Cabinet welcomed the report and proactive approach taken to tackling mental health in the workplace, particularly given the impact of the pandemic and changes to work patterns. Members were keen to ensure managers were also being supported to undertake their role and questions were raised in that regard together with the challenges of supporting staff working remotely and monitoring outcomes.

Officers responded to members' comments and questions as follows –

- the training programme to enable managers to better support employees had commenced and some of that training had already been put into practice
- support provision for managers had been detailed in the report and included training and guidance, with HR specialists and business partners working closely with managers on mental health issues and stress in the workplace
- work was ongoing to identify Wellbeing Champions in services and some Mental Health First Aiders had already been trained and had put their skills into use
- steps taken by services to enable managers to keep in touch with staff and check on wellbeing had been discussed at a recent Middle Managers Conference in order to share and promote good practice across the authority
- a Mental Health Wellbeing Survey would be undertaken in September to ascertain the current position in terms of mental health which would be followed

by regular surveys every 1 – 2 years to measure progress and ensure actions were being effective in improving mental health wellbeing.

**RESOLVED** that the *Mental Health Policy, Mental Health Guidance for Managers and Guidance on Holding a Sensitive Conversation about Mental Health* be adopted for the Council.

## **6 ACT TO REDUCE DOMESTIC ABUSE**

Councillor Mark Young presented the report providing an update on the Act to Reduce Domestic Abuse Corporate Priority and recommending adoption of the Domestic Abuse Policy for employees.

The final business case for the Act of Reduce Domestic Abuse priority had been agreed in October 2019 and although work was initially delayed on the project due to Covid-19, since September 2020 considerable progress had been made. The project comprised of 13 work streams and in the last six months progress had been concentrated on 9 of those work streams (a summary of each had been provided) with the remaining work streams to be progressed in the next financial year.

The Council condemned all forms of abuse and violence and was committed to developing a workplace culture of zero tolerance for domestic abuse and/or violence. A draft Domestic Abuse Policy had been developed to support employees who were experiencing domestic abuse or had experienced it in the past and included guidance to managers on how to recognise signs of domestic abuse and what support was available to staff. The draft policy had been agreed by the Senior Leadership Team and Trade Unions and recommended to Cabinet for adoption by the Joint Consultative Committee for Health and Safety and Employee Relations.

During debate Councillor Brian Jones questioned the initial delay in progressing the project (which had been cited as due to Covid-19) despite concerns there would be an increase in domestic abuse cases/incidents during the coronavirus pandemic. Further questions were raised regarding the increase in the number of cases dealt with over the last twelve months together with the proposed main policy changes.

The Lead Member and officers responded to questions as follows –

- the initial delay on some of the work to progress the Act to Reduce Domestic Abuse priority had been due to the need to work with partners etc.
- a domestic abuse policy had already been in place but it had been reviewed taking into account the increase in remote/agile working and the learning from dealing with issues arising during Covid-19; the work in progressing the Act to Reduce Domestic Abuse priority had also informed the revised draft policy
- the revised policy was more thorough and provided greater clarity, offering further guidance to support both managers and employees, and contained all necessary information in one document. A key change included the introduction of five days domestic abuse leave to further support employees
- reports of domestic abuse had increased but assurances were provided that any initial delay in progressing the project had not impacted negatively on the

reaction and responses required. Reports were dealt with promptly and professionally and that process continued throughout the pandemic

- the Lead Member referred to his quarterly update to members which detailed the figures and increase in domestic violence and rationale behind those figures – he agreed to resend that information to members. [The next agenda item on the Annual Performance Review also included data on domestic violence.]

The Lead Member highlighted the importance of an open discussion on domestic violence and to encourage incidents being reported. He was satisfied with the work being carried out and believed the partnerships and internal skills were in place to better deal with the issue moving forward.

**RESOLVED** that the Domestic Abuse Policy for employees be adopted for the Council.

## **7 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2020 TO 2021**

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill presented the report together with the draft Annual Performance Review (APR) for 2020 to 2021 prior to its submission to Council.

Cabinet was guided through the APR which had expanded to combine a number of previously separate reports into one document, meeting the Council's requirements under a number of pieces of legislation including the new Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The report provided a retrospective evaluation of the Council's success in delivering against its plans during 2020 to 2021 and looked ahead to what could be delivered in 2021 to 2022. It included narrative on progress in delivering corporate priorities, including the current status and programme success. The Project Register and Corporate Risk Register had also been included. The APR had been considered by Performance Scrutiny Committee who had requested details of individual scheme costing in the funding section of the report relating to Highways and Education spend which was currently being collated.

The Strategic Planning Team Manager provided a summary of progress against priorities and the Strategic Planning and Performance Team Leader provided an overview of the new corporate health section of the report in order to satisfy the need to self-assess under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

Cabinet considered the APR and main areas of debate focused on the following –

- the Leader highlighted that the Council had deliberately set an ambitious Corporate Plan and was pleased to note the progress made, whilst acknowledging that some priorities, such as digital connectivity, were outside of the Council's control. With regard to the new corporate health section in the report he stressed the need to appropriately balance that element against delivery of those priorities which had been based on engagement with residents and their expectations. Officers agreed confirming that the performance objectives had been deliberately placed at the forefront of the document
- Councillor Mark Young referred to the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme and Cabinet's endorsement to continue supporting refugees through the Global Resettlement Programme – given the concerns raised regarding

access to healthcare and quality housing he asked that those issues be included in the APR in order to capture the response to those concerns. Officers agreed to review the wording as requested but highlighted that some of the issues were beyond the Council's control although the Council would look to encourage and pursue other organisations to fulfil those responsibilities

- whilst Ruthin extra care housing had experienced some obstacles with challenges in securing a contractor, overall there was confidence that the project would progress within the timescale of the current Corporate Plan
- in responding to questions from Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts attention was drawn to domestic violence figures showing an increase in the cumulative number of repeat victims of domestic violence in Denbighshire, from 517 to 515 in Quarter 4 (an increase of 7.6% on the previous year). The amount of work undertaken in this area was highlighted in terms of increasing awareness etc. and therefore a change in the figures was expected and the Covid-19 restrictions would likely have had an effect on domestic crime. Although he did not have the details of the domestic abuse figures to hand, Councillor Mark Young reiterated that his quarterly report to members provided a breakdown and analysis of those figures which he would re-circulate to members
- the Council worked regionally with regard to social care funding and fees were market based and had increased over time and above inflation. It was an area which was being actively considered but was very much dependent on the work being done with Welsh Government around funding for social care
- child obesity was very much an issue of concern and whilst the regional event planned to examine the issues affecting children had been paused due to Covid-19, the intention was to resume that work at a future point
- the Use of Plastics Task and Finish Group had completed its work and whilst the reduction of plastic was still an issue, it no longer had its own work stream and had been subsumed into the Climate Change and Ecological Change Strategy
- obstacles experienced in progressing biodiversity projects had largely been due to the planned aspects of the project which required the use of volunteers which had not been possible due to social distancing restrictions, however as those restrictions eased progress would resume and there was no risk to the project
- a new volunteering policy for the Council had been approved followed by a relaunch of the volunteering web pages to support the process. Assurances were provided that the Council worked closely with DVSC and the distinction between Council volunteering and DVSC supporting county wide volunteering had been highlighted with the policy and recognised.

**RESOLVED** that, subject to any agreed changes, Cabinet confirms the content of the draft Annual Performance Review 2020 to 2021.

## **8 FINANCE REPORT (MAY 2021/22 - INCLUDING BUDGET SUMMARY REPORT 2021/22)**

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill presented the report detailing the latest financial position and service budgets for 2021/22 together with the Budget Summary Report for 2021/22. He provided a summary of the Council's financial position as follows –

- the net revenue budget for 2021/22 was £216.818m (£208.302m in 2020/21)
- an overspend of £0.708m was forecast for service and corporate budgets

- highlighted current risks and assumptions relating to corporate budgets and individual service areas together with the impact of coronavirus and position on claims to Welsh Government
- detailed agreed savings and efficiencies worth £4.448m with the assumption that operational savings and fees and charges increases had been achieved and schools' saving were delegated to the governing bodies to monitor and deliver; the savings of £0.781 would be monitored closely in year
- provided a general update on the Capital Plan, Housing Revenue Account and Housing Capital Plan.

Cabinet was also asked to approve the inclusion of £250k in the Capital Plan for 2022/23 to meet the balance of the 10% match funding requirement (£423,181) for the Levelling Up Fund – Clwyd South bid.

The following matters were raised during debate –

- confirmation received from the Welsh Government (WG) regarding continuation of the current system of expenditure and income loss claims for the next two quarters was welcomed together with indications that, subject to budget availability, WG funding would continue beyond that timeframe if required
- the Leader reported upon the good relationship with WG and significant financial support provided to mitigate the financial pressures as a result of Covid-19. However the local government financial settlement had still not been sufficient to address the continued pressures and financial challenges faced and the investment required to move the authority forward. There was also a concern that Denbighshire had slipped from the top quartile settlement. The Leader continued to lobby for a 3 year financial settlement in order to aid better financial planning which WG had indicated would be dependent upon the UK Government. The likelihood that the financial settlement would not be known until December posed further challenges in terms of budget planning. Notwithstanding those difficulties the Leader welcomed the clarity in the report and approach taken to budget setting and thanked the Lead Member and officers for the hard work undertaken
- the approach taken to seek Cabinet approval of the funding required for the Clwyd South bid for Levelling Up funding was explained given the tight timescale for submission of the bid in partnership with Wrexham County Borough Council. Future funding bids for the Vale of Clwyd and Clwyd West had been included in the Capital Strategy on the basis that 10% match funding would be required; it was hoped that some of that funding would be derived from projects already identified as part of the authority's forward planning process and further work would be undertaken in that regard over the next few months
- there was some debate regarding the risks identified in corporate budgets and the ongoing impact on Council Tax and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) together with the pay settlements for 2021/22. Whilst current projections showed that the contingency funding would cover those elements it was hoped that WG would continue to recognise those pressures and provide funding in line with the previous financial year for Council Tax and the CTRS. However it was highlighted that the budget for the CTRS had been largely underfunded since it became part of the Revenue Support Grant which remained a pressure

- Councillor Brian Jones raised concerns regarding the gathering pressures on homelessness, particularly given that the ban on tenant evictions would soon be lifted, and he sought assurances in that regard. Officers confirmed an additional £2.4m had been included in the base budget for Community Support Services to mitigate pressures, including homelessness, and the position would be closely monitored and had been identified as a risk. The current position showed an increase in costs as expected but it was dependent on movement during the year as to whether the actual pressures could be contained within the current provision. Reference was also made to the Senior Officer Working Group tasked with identifying and providing in-house provision to improve the level of service and reduce costs in the future and an update on that programme was provided
- in response to questions raised by Councillor Brian Jones regarding the figures in the budget summary relating to Harbour Empowerment (£7k) and Acquisition of Boat Crane, Rhyl Harbour (£170k) the Head of Finance agreed to report back directly to Councillor Jones on the detail behind those two items on the final figures given the budget book provided a snapshot at a particular point in time.

**RESOLVED** that Cabinet –

- note the budgets set for 2021/22 and progress against the agreed budget strategy, and*
- approve the inclusion of £250k in the Capital Plan for 2022/23 in order to reach the 10% match funding requirement for the Levelling Up Fund (as detailed in section 6.9 of the report).*

## **9 CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Cabinet forward work programme was presented for consideration.

Members noted the likely public interest in the Llangollen 2020 item scheduled for the next meeting and Councillor Brian Jones queried whether it would be possible to meet in the Council Chamber in order to better facilitate that particular item. It was confirmed that meetings were currently held remotely in line with Welsh Government guidance however the situation would be reviewed depending upon the circumstances at that time and the latest WG advice.

**RESOLVED** that Cabinet's forward work programme be noted.

The meeting concluded at 11.30 hrs.