

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin and by video conference on Tuesday, 21 May 2024 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Jason McLellan, Leader and Lead Member for Economic Growth and Tackling Deprivation; Gill German, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Education, Children and Families; Gwyneth Ellis, Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets; Elen Heaton, Lead Member for Health and Social Care; Julie Matthews, Lead Member for Corporate Strategy, Policy and Equalities; Barry Mellor, Lead Member for the Environment and Transport, and Emrys Wynne, Lead Member for Welsh Language, Culture and Heritage

Observers: Councillors Pauline Edwards, Jon Harland, Hugh Irving, Alan James, Brian Jones, and Terry Mendies

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (GB); Corporate Directors: Social Services and Education (NS), Governance and Business/Monitoring Officer (GW), and Environment and Economy TW; Heads of Service: Finance and Audit (LT), Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services (EJ), Strategic Planning and Housing Manager (AL), Senior Officer – Strategic Planning and Housing (SL), and Committee Administrators (KEJ & NPH [Webcaster])

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor Rhys Thomas, Lead Member for Housing and Communities

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest had been made.

3 URGENT MATTERS

No urgent matters had been raised.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 23 April 2024 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 April 2024 be received and confirmed as a correct record.

5 OUTCOME OF PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S REVIEW OF CABINET'S DECISION RELATING TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR LEARNING - ROLLING PROGRAMME

The Corporate Director: Governance and Business advised that the decision taken by Cabinet on 23 April 2024 relating to the Sustainable Communities for Learning – Rolling Programme had been subject of a call in and considered by Partnerships Scrutiny Committee on 16 May 2024.

The outcome of the review of the Cabinet's decision had been not to refer the matter back to Cabinet meaning the decision would stand and be implemented.

RESOLVED that the outcome of the review of Cabinet's decision relating to the Sustainable Communities for Learning – Rolling Programme be noted.

6 DRAFT LOCAL HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT (LHMA)

In the absence of Councillor Rhys Thomas, the Leader Councillor Jason McLellan presented the report and draft Local Housing Market Assessment for Denbighshire (LHMA) and sought Cabinet approval to submit the LHMA to Welsh Government.

The LHMA examined the current and future housing need/demand in Denbighshire and formed a key part of the evidence supporting policies including the Local Development Plan and Housing & Homelessness Strategy. It was a statutory requirement for the Council to periodically review housing needs and the LHMA had been developed based on Welsh Government guidance and toolkit methodology to ensure a consistent approach across all Welsh local authorities.

The Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services, Strategic Planning and Housing Manager and Senior Officer – Strategic Planning and Housing were in attendance. Cabinet was advised that the LHMA covered a period of 15 years with a full review every 5 years and a refresh between years 2 and 3. The LHMA provided key evidence for many areas of the Council's work and was data based, providing evidence to support policy making going forward. It included 10 defined housing market areas and there had been wide ranging engagement with stakeholders in its development. Cabinet was advised of the findings, in brief –

- the majority of housing need was due to a backlog of existing need with only a small part from population growth
- the majority of need was for social rented housing and smaller 1 or 2 bed properties due to 1 or 2 person households making up about 70% of Denbighshire's population
- there were affordability issues across most housing tenures and lack of housing availability was a key issue identified, particularly those available for rent
- there was a need for 400 affordable homes per year for the first 5 years of the LHMA, the premise being that existing need should be met within the first 5 years although there was a question over whether or not that was achievable
- there was a need for 153 affordable homes per year for the 15 year period covered by the LHMA and therefore much work was ongoing in terms of delivering affordable housing on development sites, bringing empty properties back into use, and various other ways of increasing the supply
- the LHMA did not set the affordable housing target for the Local Development Plan (LDP) but was part of the overall evidence based used for the LDP.

Cabinet considered the comprehensive report, noting the prescribed process, key findings, and outputs from the assessment. Questions were raised regarding the confidence in the figures produced, future market housing mix, meeting the need of 400 affordable homes, and bringing empty properties back into use.

Officers responded to the questions raised as follows –

- referred to the wealth of data and complexity of the model and reported on the four different household forecast scenarios used, with the Welsh Government principal projection having been used to inform the LHMA housing need figure. The principal projection figure of 3165 homes was comparable to the LDP requirement for 3275 homes so there was confidence in those figures given the consistency between the two and the robust process and detailed information upon which the LHMA had been based
- in terms of the suggested market mix there was a difference between need and aspiration, but the aim was to provide flexibility in the housing market given the aspiration for a spare room or study space and given the difficulties at present to move between different tenures and properties due to the lack of availability. Combining the 1 and 2 bed properties offered that flexibility and recognised the limited appetite for 1 bed market properties
- confirmed that delivering the 400 affordable homes identified would be carried out in a variety of ways, including new build, bringing empty properties back into use and the acquisition of existing properties. Denbighshire had a good track record of delivering affordable housing, the highest in North Wales over the last two years, and in 2023/24 £10m Welsh Government funding had been allocated for Denbighshire to provide affordable housing with a similar amount (£9m) for the next two years. Given that good track record Denbighshire had also been awarded funding towards year end (underspends from other local authorities) with an extra £800k awarded in 2023/24 for delivering affordable housing
- 70% of households were 1 or 2 persons which was one reason why there was such a demand for smaller 1 and 2 bed properties. The LHMA provided a breakdown of need by local housing market area and size so whilst needs were spread across the county, the highest need for 1 and 2 bed properties was the Rhuddlan/Dyserth housing market area with no immediate need in Rhyl, Ruthin, Denbigh, and Llangollen. However, that reflected the existing housing supply in those areas including smaller properties for social rent and the model assumed a level of turnover and therefore supply of those properties in those areas
- the 1 and 2 bed figures included properties in extra care housing schemes and there was a good level of demand for extra care housing which was very popular, another advantage was the potential that it freed up other housing
- mortgage rescue (to prevent the loss of properties wherever feasible to do so) had been listed as one of the thirteen key strategic priorities for affordable housing and whilst not many had come through the system there was scope through registered social landlords to help support people in difficulty with their mortgages funded by the Welsh Government
- there was some debate on the challenges in bringing empty homes back into use with an empty home delivery plan to capture the various different actions/activities to tackle the issue and a dedicated empty homes officer. Whilst the Council had performed reasonably well in bringing empty properties back into use there were issues with long standing empty properties and the

figures remained consistent over time, but proactive action and a holistic approach was being undertaken which was recognised by the Cabinet together with the hard work involved

- it was assumed the backlog of existing need would be met within 5 years which was unlikely given all housing build equated to around 250 homes per year.

In response to a question from Councillor Brian Jones, officers confirmed that work continued on the replacement LDP through the Strategic Planning Group (SPG) who were reviewing the evidence base and undertaking the research and revision of policies. Key flood guidance was still awaited from the Welsh Government which had an impact on the delivery timescale and caused some delay. Further details were provided of the SPG with an open invitation for all members to attend and significant involvement of the Member Area Groups in that process.

Cabinet recognised the hard work and complexities in developing the LHMA and thanked officers for the hard work carried out.

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

- approves Denbighshire's draft Local Housing Market Assessment for submission to the Welsh Government, and*
- delegates authority to the Lead Member for Housing and Communities to agree any minor editorial changes required to the draft Local Housing Market Assessment, prior to submission to the Welsh Government.*

7 LONG TERM PLAN FOR TOWNS: RHYL

Councillor Jason McLellan presented the report regarding the recently announced c.£20m fund for Rhyl, provided some background to the report, and sought Cabinet support for the proposed response to the required actions.

The report set out the headline terms and conditions for the £20m funding announced for Rhyl as part of the UK Government's Long Term Plan for Towns initiative and levelling up programme. Funding would be awarded to the Council who remained accountable for the funding and delivery of the plan. Certain actions were required by 3 June 2024 (revised deadline date from 1 June as referenced in the report) such as appointing a Chair of the Town Board together with submission of the Chair Biography, Board Structure, Terms of Reference, Conflict of Interest Policy, and Town Boundaries. Whilst the funding was welcomed the timescale for delivery was challenging and Cabinet approval was sought to delegate those tasks to the Lead Officer and Leader/Lead Member to meet the funding deadline. Details of subsequent actions the Board must do prior to 1 November were also provided.

The Corporate Director: Economy and Environment elaborated on progress and work undertaken to date in meeting the required actions by 3 June and secure the funding which related mainly to administrative arrangements and tasks, including interviews to appoint a Chair of the Board later that week, and representation and membership of the Board. Work to the second deadline of 1 November related to the long term (10 year) vision for the town and 3 year delivery plan based on the

priorities of local people and investment and regeneration aligned to three key themes. That task would involve much engagement work and additional monies had been made available by UK Government for that purpose (separate to the £20m fund). The Leader added that much work had been carried out in a short space of time and expressed his gratitude to all involved in that process.

Cabinet welcomed the additional funding for Rhyl and discussed various aspects of the report with the Corporate Director: Economy and Environment.

Main discussion points focused on the following –

- it was noted that the town's vision and priorities for investment and regeneration must be aligned to the themes of (1) safety and security, (2) high streets, heritage, and regeneration, and (3) transport and connectivity which were fairly board themes and fitting for Rhyl – there was already a vision for Rhyl which would be revised in tandem with the development of the new long term vision in order to link into one cohesive document
- there was some debate as to the perception that Rhyl was prioritised ahead of other areas in the county for investment, which was also mirrored in Rhyl with some perceiving that more funding was spent in Ruthin, and it was accepted the Council needed to be clear in its communications to the public that whilst this funding award was specifically for Rhyl, investment was being made across the county with levelling up funding awards for Clwyd South and Clwyd West in addition to Vale of Clwyd and shared prosperity funding across the county. Rhyl attracted extra investment due to its socio economic challenges and having two of the most deprived wards in Wales and that investment also created positive benefits for the rest of the county. Officers were attending individual Member Area Groups with town plans detailing projects that had been delivered and those planned for the future with proportionate investment across the county. However, given the public perception it was felt the Communications Teams could undertake further work to address any misconceptions in that regard
- the work carried out by the Corporate Director: Economy and Environment on progressing the required actions was questioned given other priorities/demands on time including work on transformational and savings plans. The Corporate Director confirmed he had many priorities and there was a need to ensure that the work done on each of those priorities was proportionate to the task in hand which had been the approach taken. Some additional funding had been made available by the UK Government for the initial step of establishing the Board and consultants had been commissioned to undertake some of that work. It was unlikely that a funding claim could be made for the Corporate Director's time on the project, but the potential would be further explored
- the current focus had been on the first set of actions required to meet the funding deadline and the long term vision for the town and engagement with local people would be progressed in the next stage. It was felt that community focused work needed to be directed by the Board once it was established and the composition of the Board would include community representation
- the huge amount of work to be carried out and completion of the necessary tasks to meet the 3 June deadline and secure the funding was highlighted together with the additional work to be carried out by 1 November deadline. Much work had been carried out in tandem in order to appoint a Chair of the

Board and to source appropriate representation on the Board to deliver for Rhyl and ensure the requirements of the funding deadline were met.

The Leader opened the debate to non-Cabinet members and there was broad support for the investment in Rhyl and positive impact of that funding on the wider area. Questions were raised regarding the governance and operational arrangements of the Board and assurances were sought regarding buy in of the business community and appropriate representation in order to deliver commercial success together with community involvement and engagement at the outset.

The Leader and officers responded to questions/comments as follows –

- the funding would be awarded to the Council who would be responsible for the funding and delivery of the plan
- work was still being carried out on the governance arrangements and issues such as the terms of reference, structure, and composition of the Board – the Board would also need to take a view and input into its future operation/governance
- there may be potential to use funding to lever in additional monies from other funding streams, but it would be dependent on criteria and eligibility
- given it was not possible to answer all questions regarding the governance arrangements at this time it was suggested that a report could be brought back to Cabinet once those arrangements had been confirmed after 3 June
- the preference would have been to constitute the Board and governance arrangements prior to appointing a Chair of the Board but the requirements did not support that order of events and it was an extremely challenging timescale
- the implication in the current guidance, which may change, was that the Board would not have its own legal entity given the Council was the accountable body
- acknowledged the business community had a vital role to play in the process and provided assurances that sector would be represented on the Board
- confirmed conversations were ongoing with others in a similar position with regard to Town Boards to ensure best practice was shared, and lessons learned
- there was confidence that following the interview process an appointment to Chair of the Board would be made.

The Leader referred to the report recommendations and amendment to the deadline date from 1 June to 3 June 2024 in paragraph 3.1.

RESOLVED that Cabinet delegates authority to the Corporate Director: Environment and Economy and the Leader/Lead Member for Economic Growth and Tackling Deprivation for submitting the necessary information to UK Government in order to meet the requirements of the funding by the deadline of 3 June 2024.

8 CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet forward work programme was presented for consideration and members noted the following additions –

- Update on Medium Term Financial Strategy and Plan 2025/26 – 2027/28 – to be added to July, October, and January
- Revenue Budget Setting 2025/26 – to be added to January
- Capital Plan 2025/26 – 2027/28 – to be added to January
- Revenue Budget and Council Tax Setting 2025/26 – to be added to February

The Leader would liaise with the Corporate Director: Economy and Environment on the potential to bring an update report to Cabinet on the Long Term Plan for Towns: Rhyl as discussed earlier on the agenda.

RESOLVED that Cabinet's forward work programme be noted.

The meeting concluded at 11.30 pm.