

## **CABINET**

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin and by video conference on Tuesday, 30 July 2024 at 10.00 am.

### **PRESENT**

Councillors Jason McLellan, Leader and Lead Member for Economic Growth and Tackling Deprivation; Gwyneth Ellis, Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets; Elen Heaton, Lead Member for Health and Social Care; Diane King, Lead Member for Education Children and Families; Alan James, Lead Member for Local Development and Planning; Julie Matthews, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Corporate Strategy, Policy and Equalities; Barry Mellor, Lead Member for the Environment and Transport; Rhys Thomas, Lead Member for Housing and Communities, and Emrys Wynne, Lead Member for Welsh Language, Culture and Heritage

**Observers:** Joan Butterfield, Ellie Chard, Chris Evans, Justine Evans, Bobby Feeley, Brian Jones, Terry Mendies and Andrea Tomlin

### **ALSO PRESENT**

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) and Adult Social Care and Homelessness (AL); Traffic and Transportation Manager (MJ); Service Manager – Homelessness Service (NJ); Business Partners ICT and Digital Services (MJ & DB); Public Protection, Regeneration and Economic Development Manager (GR); Project Manager Corporate Programme Office (SLP); Strategic Planning and Performance Officer (HBP), and Committee Administrators (KEJ, ED & NPH [Webcaster])

Joseph Lewis – Welsh Local Government Association attended for Agenda Item 12

### **POINT OF NOTICE**

The Leader welcomed Councillor Diane King to her first Cabinet meeting as Lead Member for Education, Children and Families. Councillor King responded that she was passionate about education and would look to make a positive impact.

#### **1 APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies.

#### **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 25 June 2024 were submitted.

Matters Arising – Page 11: Item 6 Long Term Plan for Towns: Rhyl – in response to a question from Councillor Brian Jones, the Leader provided an update on the item confirming that the inaugural meeting of the Rhyl Town Board had been held the previous day which had been extremely positive, and work would be ongoing to undertake the required actions by the 1 November deadline. There may be greater flexibility over the deadline given the change in the UK Government.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2024 be received and confirmed as a correct record.

## 5 REPLACEMENT OF THE SOCIAL CARE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Councillor Elen Heaton presented the joint report with Councillors Julie Matthews and Diane King seeking approval of the Business Case and participation in the national procurement programme, Connecting Care, with a view to replacing the incumbent Social Care information management system which was reaching its conclusion. The report included a confidential appendix containing financial information and Cabinet was asked to move into private session if they wished to discuss that appendix.

Some background was provided regarding the national programme to enable integrated health and social care service delivery in Wales via a single digital solution and the reasoning behind the proposed move away from the original contract with PARIS to participate in the new national programme for a social care and health shared care record system. Details were provided on the procurement approach and timescales involved, including the urgent decision taken with the support of Lead Members to commence the procurement process, with the request for retrospective ratification by Cabinet. Following conclusion of the procurement process a further report would be submitted to Cabinet to consider the contract award.

The Corporate Director: Social Services and Education was in attendance for the item together with the Business Partners ICT and Digital Services to answer any technical questions. The officers responded to questions raised as follows –

- justified the substantial cost of the proposal in the difficult financial climate given that the current system was coming to its end of life and would not be supported going forward. Having considered options for its replacement the preferred option to be part of the national process would enable cost benefits, supported regional working, and access to as yet undetermined Welsh Government funding
- with regard to the Risk Register RCC5: Risk of non-Welsh Language compliance, assurances were provided that the specification for the national programme would require web portals to meet Welsh Language requirements
- all options considered had been detailed in the business case and there was a clear need to procure a new IT system to replace PARIS either in the current year or in the near future. It was emphasised that no commitment had been made at

this stage and once the procurement process had been completed it was proposed to submit a further report to Cabinet to consider the actual costs and any contract award which was likely to be in December/January

- the software provider for PARIS would not be providing developmental and technological support for the social services element of the system going forward and as a consequence the current system was coming to the end of its useful life.

**RESOLVED** that Cabinet –

- (a) *approves the Business Case attached at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 (Part 2) to the report;*
- (b) *gives retrospective ratification to:*
  - *Denbighshire's participation in the national Connecting Care programme as set out in paragraph 4.2 of the report, and*
  - *Denbighshire commencing the procurement phase on a non-binding basis as set out in paragraph 4.4 of the report;*
- (c) *requires officers to bring a further report at the conclusion of the procurement process to consider contract award. It was anticipated this would be December/January.*

## **6 CLWYD WEST LEVELLING UP FUND (LUF) PROJECTS: ST. PETER'S SQUARE AND CAE DDOL PARK**

Councillor Barry Mellor presented the report seeking Cabinet approval of the next phase of the two Clwyd West Levelling Up Fund projects in Ruthin – public realm improvements to St. Peter's Square and Cae Ddol Park.

The projects had been approved within the Council's application for funding under round two of the UK Government Levelling Up Fund (LUF). Details of the contracted outputs and what each scheme was projected to deliver had been detailed in the report together with progress to date. The Traffic and Transportation Manager provided an overview of the report content including work to date on projects and details of the comprehensive consultation and engagement undertaken, including Ruthin Town Council and Ruthin Member Area Group, and the responses and findings of the wider public consultation. Whilst there was broad support for both projects, Cabinet's attention was drawn to the concerns identified for each scheme and proposed action to allay those concerns. In terms of governance, a Stakeholder Group had been established together with a Project Board.

Main areas of debate focused on the following –

- Cabinet welcomed the investment in Ruthin, recognising the improvements the projects would bring and benefits to the local area. Whilst there was general local support for the projects, there was a need to respond to concerns raised and minimise the impact on businesses and residents during the improvement works, and the importance of continual, timely communication was further discussed

- St. Peter's Square – whilst the majority of consultation responses were in favour of the proposals steps would be taken to mitigate and address the concerns raised which included sharing the feedback from the consultation and continuing the engagement process with businesses and residents; concerns regarding parking could be addressed at the Traffic Order consultation stage with the opportunity to make amendments to parking restrictions, and concerns regarding loss of trade would be addressed with similar arrangements to the recent public realm improvement project in Llangollen and business liaison role undertaken by the contractor to work closely with local businesses to ensure disruption was minimised and issues were identified and addressed as soon as possible
- Cae Ddol Play Park – Councillor Emrys Wynne advised that questions had been raised over the timing of the work to install the new accessible play park over the summer and explained that the Shared Prosperity Funding for the project had to be spent by the end of the year and it would have been unwise to delay that work. He highlighted the excellent facilities being installed which would fit in with the overall masterplan for Cae Ddol and benefit children and their families in the area
- Cae Ddol Toilet Block – early discussions were ongoing with Ruthin Town Council regarding the possibility of them taking over management of the toilet facilities if they were refurbished through LUF funding; local members would be kept informed of progress via the Stakeholder Group and Project Board. Councillor Gwyneth Ellis reported on a similar arrangement with Corwen Town Council and advocated a meeting between the Town Councils to discuss the arrangement which worked well in Corwen. Councillor Brian Jones was concerned about the public perception of investment in toilet facilities when their future was in doubt. Officers confirmed there would be no investment without assurance of future provision and a pragmatic approach needed to be taken to link the review of public conveniences and discussions on LUF funding and investment in facilities
- officers agreed to respond to questions raised by Councillor Bobby Feeley outside of the meeting once the position was known as to who would replace former MP David Jones as Chair of the Project Board and if any changes in the LUF arrangements were made following the recent change in the UK Government. Updates on proposals for Ruthin Town Council to take over management of the toilet facilities would be via the Stakeholder Group and Project Board
- St. Peter's Square Concept Designs – Councillor Rhys Thomas drew attention to the illustrative image of the square which he did not consider to be in keeping with the surrounding area and detracted from the environmental and architectural value of the square. Whilst acknowledging that the project had to have regard to services below the road, he requested that further consideration be given to provide some greenery to break the large hard surface. It was noted that much work had been carried out on the design, including input from a Landscape Architect, but officers agreed to further consider the comments and request.

**RESOLVED** that Cabinet –

- (a) *notes the position of the approved Clwyd West Levelling Up projects in Ruthin;*
- (b) *approves the next phase of the project, commencement of the detailed design, and*

(c) *confirms that it has read, understood and taken account of the Wellbeing Impact Assessment as set out in Appendix 1 to the report as part of its consideration.*

## **7 UK GOVERNMENT LEVELLING UP FUNDING AWARD (ROUND 3) - VALE OF CLWYD CONSTITUENCY**

Councillor Jason McLellan presented the report informing Cabinet of the urgent decision taken by the Corporate Director Environment and Economy in consultation with the Leader/Lead Member and Deputy Leader to accept the Grant award offer from UK Government of £19,973,282 under Round 3 of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF).

Some background was provided to the LUF including the outcome of LUF bidding Rounds 1 and 2, and the offer from UK Government of a provisional LUF award under Round 3 of just under £20m in November 2023 based on previous appraisal of applications submitted under Round 2. Following a review of the application, the Council had made three amendments to reflect the changes in circumstances since its submission in August 2022 which related to the removal of projects which had since secured alternative funding, replacement of the council's match funding contribution of £1.9m with secured Growth Deal funding, and adjustment of projects to reflect the impact of inflation. The value of LUF for the area remained the same.

Cabinet accepted the reasoning behind the urgent decision taken and noted the changes made to the funding application following the recent review. Councillor Julie Matthews reiterated the importance of communication and engagement with the public on the projects and benefits as a result and queried future plans in that regard. The Corporate Director Economy and the Environment explained the lack of detail in particular projects at the time of submission with some more advanced than others and work was ongoing to make those aspirations fit the budget available. He provided assurances regarding communication and engagement going forward, particularly given the funding had now been secured. Councillor Emrys Wynne referred to the reference to the Welsh Language in the Wellbeing Impact Assessment and sought a change to the wording to strengthen that reference to read as follows "Bi-lingual interpretation boards shall be used to provide information...". The Corporate Director agreed to change the wording to provide that clarity.

Councillor Brian Jones raised a number of questions and concerns regarding the timescale for completing the projects listed in the report, the lack of project detail and costing, the merits of individual projects, the timeliness of public consultation at an appropriate stage in the process, and any potential impact on the funding award as a result of the change in the UK Government.

The Leader and Corporate Director responded to the issues raised as follows –

- there had been a name change of the government department from Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to Housing, Communities and Local Government and some general guidance on the way levelling up would work in future was awaited. However, there had been no indication that the funding award would be withdrawn, and work was progressing on delivering the projects

- reference was made to the inaugural meeting of the Rhyl Town Board with the long term plan for Rhyl very much part of the levelling up agenda and indications were that there would be an extension to the current timescale for completing projects with no substantial changes going forward; the importance of communication and engagement with the public and business community had also been discussed and was considered vitally important by all concerned
- the Leader had met with Gill German, MP and Becky Gittins, MP on a number of issues and had outlined concerns in terms of the timescales of the LU agenda
- the report related to the process of accepting the funding award and therefore did not include the individual project detail. However, it would be possible to bring forward another report specifically on the project detail or hold a workshop with members to further discuss the projects. That said, the reasoning behind the Gateway project was provided and there had already been much engagement with adjoining businesses, local members, and Rhyl Town Council
- the importance of communication and engagement across the levelling up programme had been repeatedly highlighted and accepted and assurances provided that it would continue to remain a key priority going forward.

**RESOLVED** that Cabinet –

- endorse the urgent decision taken by the Corporate Director: Environment and Economy in consultation with the Leader/Lead Member and Deputy Leader to accept the Grant award offer from UK Government of £19,973,282 under Round 3 of the Levelling Up Fund;*
- confirms it has understood the report and the changes that have been made to the Vale of Clwyd Levelling Up Fund application as a part of the UK Government's Round 3 funding award process and accepts the Round 3 Grant Award for the Vale of Clwyd constituency, and*
- confirms that it has read, understood and taken account of the Wellbeing Impact Assessment as set out in Appendix 2 to the report as part of its consideration.*

At this point (11.20 am) the meeting adjourned for a refreshment break.

## **8 UPDATE TO MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND PLAN FOR 2025/26 - 2027/28**

Councillor Gwyneth Ellis presented the report seeking Cabinet approval of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTPS) and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2025/26 – 2027/28, including the use of reserves.

The Head of Finance and Audit took members through the report which included –

- feedback from the Governance and Audit Committee and Performance Scrutiny Committee on the first iteration of the MTFs and MTFP (Appendix 1 to the report)
- the high-level MTFP which included broad estimates of known pressures along with the impact of estimated increases in Council Tax and funding from Welsh

Government with a range of assumptions to provide a low, medium, and high estimate of each cost pressure (Appendix 2 to the report), and

- the second iteration of the MTFS compiled with data as at early July setting out the scale of financial challenge facing the council outlining financial issues (Appendix 3 to the report), with key points highlighted in the cover report along with updates made to the MTFS highlighted in yellow and the use of reserves.

Councillor Ellis thanked the Governance and Audit Committee and Performance Scrutiny Committee for their valuable feedback on the MTFS and MTFP which had been given full consideration. The second iteration of the savings tracker had been submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee the previous week and had been generally well received with no further feedback. The Leader highlighted the importance of all members keeping abreast of financial developments.

**RESOLVED** that Cabinet –

- (a) *notes the feedback from Governance and Audit Committee and Performance Scrutiny Committee included in Appendix 1 to the report, and*
- (b) *approves the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan included at Appendices 2 and 3 to the report, including the use of reserves as outlined in paragraph 4.6 of the report.*

## **9 FINANCE REPORT**

Councillor Gwyneth Ellis presented the monthly report detailing the latest financial position and progress against the agreed budget strategy.

A summary of the Council's financial position was provided as follows –

- the net revenue budget for 2024/25 was £271.021m (£250.793m in 2023/24)
- detailed service savings and efficiencies for the 2024/25 budget (£10.384m) and progress in delivering savings approved with ongoing tracking/monitoring
- the current position relating to corporate budgets and individual service areas together with schools, the Housing Revenue Account and Treasury Management.

Councillor Ellis drew particular attention to the savings tracker developed to monitor savings being delivered which remained a work in progress. The Head of Finance and Audit added that the savings tracker would be submitted to Cabinet on a quarterly basis going forward in order to keep abreast of progress throughout the year.

Councillor Rhys Thomas raised a number of questions regarding the savings tracker and also asked whether it would be possible to obtain the current budgetary position directly from individual services on a monthly basis. The Lead Member and Head of Service responded to the issues raised, confirming the Governance and Audit Committee feedback under the previous item had requested the savings tracker which had already been in development and gave confidence in the process. The savings tracker was still in early development and further work would be carried out to develop the system and provide more detail as the year progressed. The Head of Finance explained that each Head of Service had a finance link, and she would look

into the possibility of them also working with Lead Members with a view to obtaining the monthly budget position for their individual portfolio areas.

Councillors Bobby Feeley and Terry Mendies queried the cost implications arising from the implementation of the new recycling and waste collection service and the financial position going forward. Officers advised that an update on the financial implications surrounding the roll out of the new waste model was currently being prepared and would be circulated to members in the next few days. The additional resources deployed in the implementation phase were viewed as 'one off' costs that would not reoccur which would be followed by a transitional phase to business as usual during which there would be a gradual reduction in the additional resource. The long term position was as yet unknown and any recurring revenue costs to ensure a sustainable service going forward and subsequent implications on the service budget would need to be considered at the appropriate time. It was clarified that the new service had not been about delivering a saving but reducing the existing pressure and overspend being incurred by the previous service with rising costs each year. The Lead Member for Finance provided assurances that she was challenging officers about the financial position, and it was now possible to track costs on a regular basis. The impact on the assumed £500k service cost reduction as a result of the new model was unknown at this stage; that figure had not been included in the savings tracker as it related to new savings identified since the previous budget.

**RESOLVED** that Cabinet note the budgets set for 2024/25 and progress against the agreed strategy.

## **10 CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Cabinet forward work programme was presented for consideration.

The Corporate Director Governance and Business advised that the item on Corporate Joint Committee Governance Arrangements scheduled for September may be delayed pending receipt of the report detail from Gwynedd County Council as lead authority for dissemination to all local authorities in North Wales.

**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 paragraphs 12 and 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

## **11 HOUSING SUPPORT GRANT (HSG) SUPPORT SERVICES**

Councillor Rhys Thomas presented the confidential report which provided information relating to a number of Housing Support Grant Services and recommended actions.

Cabinet was provided with information in relation to –



- the revised proposal for a new holistic, housing related support project 'Keep My Home' designed to support people living in Denbighshire to sustain their accommodation and prevent homelessness
- proposals for the future of the Supported Housing (Refuge and Floating Support) contract, which offered a needs led, person-centred support to domestic abuse survivors and their households, and
- proposals to streamline available provision regarding the Housing Support Grant (HSG) Mental Health Floating Support Provision.

The Head of Adult Social Care and Homelessness and Service Manager – Homelessness Service also attended for this item. All three projects would be wholly funded from the Denbighshire Housing Support Grant, provided by the Welsh Government. Further details of each support service were provided together with the reasoning behind the report recommendations. In respect of the decision relating to the Mental Health Floating Support Service, approval was sought for the call-in facility to be waived given the tight timescales involved in progressing the recommendation.

Cabinet discussed the contents of the report and its recommendations and raised a number of questions with the Lead Member and officers in that regard. Officers explained the reasoning behind the decision for an external contract in respect of the Keep My Home project given the amount of HSG funding and specialisms/flexibility required with a number of organisations working together which would also reduce management costs and ensure better value with that approach. The Mental Health Support Service was a smaller service with less risk in bringing the service in-house given the value of the contract was much lower and the intention was to enhance the existing in-house provision.

**RESOLVED** that Cabinet –

- (a) *approves the procurement of the “Keep My Home” Contract with an increased value of £185k totaling £685k per annum, and to agree to extend the current three contracts to September 2025 whilst the procurement takes place and ensure that provision of service is maintained. In addition, Cabinet also agrees to a variation of the current Wallich contract to provide a pilot mediation service during the extension period to September 2025. The proposal was for a 3-year contract with the option to extend for an additional 2 years, Commissioning Form (Appendix 1 to the report);*
- (b) *approve the issuing of an open tender for the “Refuge and Floating Support Service” Contract currently provided by Domestic Abuse Safety Unit North Wales. The proposal was for a recommissioned service for 5 years plus the option to extend for an additional 2 years;*
- (c) *agree to combine the current 3 externally delivered “Mental Health Floating Support Service” projects which were currently contracted to 31 October 2024 into one central project and incorporate the service into the existing mental health and well-being team (as detailed in Appendix 5 to the report), and to waive the call-in facility to avoid the risk of not being able to give the required 3 months’ notice on 31 July to the current contract providers, and*

- (d) *confirms that it has read, understood, and taken account of the Wellbeing Impact Assessments as set out in Appendices 2 and 4 to the report as part of its consideration.*

## **12 PANEL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (PPA) ARRANGEMENTS - APPOINTMENT OF PANEL**

Councillor Gwyneth Ellis presented the confidential report seeking Cabinet's approval of the selected Peers in order to establish the Performance Assessment Panel.

The Strategic Planning and Performance Officer and Joseph Lewis, Improvement Officer from the Welsh Local Government Association were also in attendance.

The Council was required to make arrangements to appoint a Panel to assess the extent to which it was meeting its performance requirements. Following a scoping exercise which had been through the relevant democratic processes, the report included four candidates who had been selected for specific roles based on the agreed scope and balance of geographies and diversity. Following publication of the report a fifth candidate had also been put forward for consideration and thanks were conveyed to the Improvement Officer on his work overall and in that regard and also to the Strategic Planning and Performance Officer for her support.

Having considered the views of Councillor Emrys Wynne, Councillor Gwyneth Ellis had been pleased to include a fifth candidate for consideration who was a Welsh speaker from North Wales who understood the complexity of the system. Consequently, she proposed an amendment to the recommendation to include the fifth candidate for the wider public, private, or voluntary sector for approval.

Cabinet considered the Peers for the Panel Performance Assessment and fully supported the recommendations. Councillor Emrys Wynne had been particularly pleased to note the submission of an additional Peer as circulated to members.

***RESOLVED that Cabinet –***

- (a) *considered the Peers for the Panel Performance Assessment: namely for the Senior Officer Peer, the Senior Elected Member Peer, and Independent Chair and the two Peers from the wider public, private or voluntary sectors, and*
- (b) *approves the selected Peers in order for the Panel to be established.*

The meeting concluded at 12.20 pm.