

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Tuesday, 29 April 2014 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Hugh Evans, Leader and Lead Member for Economic Development; Bobby Feeley, Lead Member for Social Care, Adult and Children's Services; Huw Jones, Lead Member for Leisure, Youth, Tourism and Rural Development; Barbara Smith, Lead Member for Modernising and Performance, David Smith, Lead Member for Public Realm, Julian Thompson-Hill, Lead Member for Finance and Assets and Eryl Williams, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Education

Observers: Councillors Raymond Bartley, Meirick Davies, Martyn Holland, Gwyneth Kensler, Jason McLellan, Gareth Sandilands

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (MM); Corporate Director Economic and Community Ambition (RM); Director of Social Services (NS); Heads of Service: Legal and Democratic Services (GW), Finance and Assets (PMc), Revenues and Benefits (RU); Older People's Strategy Development Officer (SJ); Lead Officer, Destination, Marketing and Communication (SO) and Committee Administrator (KEJ).

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor Hugh Irving.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declaration of personal or prejudicial interest had been raised.

3 URGENT MATTERS

No urgent matters had been raised.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 25 March 2014 were submitted.

Matters Arising – Page 12 – Finance Report – Councillor Eryl Williams referred to his comments on the Welsh Housing Quality Standard and officers provided assurances that discussions were ongoing and Denbighshire would be providing a robust response to the forthcoming Welsh Government consultation document. A members briefing could be provided on the work undertaken to put forward Denbighshire's case. Councillor Williams highlighted the importance of discussions between officers and the Welsh Government at an early stage in the process.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

5 DUBLIN DECLARATION

Councillor Bobby Feeley was pleased to present the report seeking Cabinet's agreement to sign up to the Dublin Declaration with other local authorities in Wales, the UK and regions within Europe to collaborate on developing policy and practice to create age friendly places by 2020. She highlighted the impact of demographic change and on-going pressures and advocated the signing as a positive way forward, showing Denbighshire's commitment to the needs and rights of older people, and highlighted the positive contribution older people made to society. She also took the opportunity to thank the Older People's Strategy Development Officer and the Service Manager: Strategic Development for all their hard work.

Cabinet fully supported the principles and commitment proposed within the Dublin Declaration but queried whether the Council would be in a position to deliver on the pledge in light of current financial constraints. Questions were also raised about how the pledge would be delivered in practice and ensuring both members and officers were aware and supportive of the declaration. It was explained that –

- the Council was not committing to any additional initiatives and the principles could be implemented through current practices
- the signing would allow the Council to operate at a European level, giving an international platform to showcase work already carried out
- there was no direct cost implication from signing the declaration but it would enable the Council to gain access to future funding opportunities as and when they became available
- once the declaration had been signed it would be promoted throughout the authority and it was recommended that the Welsh Local Government Association's offer of free support or development training on demographic change and/or creating age friendly communities be accepted.

The Leader highlighted the need for the authority to create a different culture and approach to older people and adapting to the needs of an aging population. Councillor Barbara Smith suggested reference to the declaration could be included within service business plans. Councillor Meirick Davies welcomed the report but referred to political pressure to withdraw from the European Union and consequently cautioned against relying on European Funding.

Councillor Eryl Williams was eager for the matter to be taken to Full Council. Some discussion took place on the appropriate mechanism for decision making and it was noted that, as a Cabinet decision, it had been through the executive committees in other local authorities. Despite that fact and in order to raise awareness of the pledge to take forward this work, Cabinet agreed the matter be put on the agenda for County Council to note Cabinet's agreement to the signing and the Chairman also be asked to endorse and sign the declaration.

RESOLVED that Cabinet agree to –

- (a) *support Denbighshire County Council signing up to the Dublin Declaration, and*
- (b) *request WLGA support or training on demographic change and/or creating age friendly communities.*

6 DENBIGHSHIRE'S EVENT STRATEGY 2014 - 2020

Councillors Hugh Evans and Huw Jones jointly presented the report and Denbighshire's Event Strategy 2014 – 2020 for adoption.

Councillor Evans endorsed the proactive and planned approach in the promotion and marketing of events which would benefit the economy and enhance the visitor experience. Councillor Jones highlighted the number of high profile events in recent years and plans for the future and welcomed the evaluation of corporate events to assess the local economy impact. He also drew members' attention to the section of the Council's website detailing events within the county. Finally reference was made to a number of amendments to the strategy document in terms of accuracy of content.

The Lead Officer, Destination, Marketing and Communication (LO) explained the key benefits of the strategy to ensure that events made a meaningful contribution to the local economy, provided the highest quality events possible for residents and visitors, and enhanced the county's reputation for hosting and attracting new events to the county. She highlighted the importance of measuring and monitoring the impact of events, ensuring the best value from investment in events and the provision of an Events Toolkit to help event organisers.

Cabinet welcomed the document and recognised the importance of an effective and coherent strategy in order to maximise opportunities and create a positive impact on the local economy through additional visitors and job creation. Members referred to a number of planned events within their towns and communities and asked that they be included within the Events Section on the Council's website together with details of Denbighshire's Open Doors Events. Questions were raised regarding the involvement of members within the process, the means of engagement with event organisers for both large scale and smaller/community events, and the type of event Denbighshire aimed to attract. Whilst much emphasis had been placed on the economic impact it was highlighted that although smaller events could not compete in monetary terms, they played an important part in social cohesion and bringing the community together.

In response to members' questions and comments the LO responded that –

- the strategy would be reviewed regularly by the Economic and Community Ambition Board and the Destination, Marketing and Communication team as part of the business planning process
- a more focused approach to marketing events was required and the Events Section of the website needed to be redesigned to reflect the current events list showing what was on for visitors and what to do to stage an event

- the strategy was aimed at event organisers and event managers in the Council and she agreed to include reference to the website's Events Section
- the intention was to engage with councillors through Member Area Groups and a series of presentations were planned in order to build a comprehensive list of events within the county; relationships would also be developed with town/city/community councils and other event organisers
- event organisers already interacted with the Council through various departments when planning events and a database of event organisers would be built – the event planning process would also be streamlined with one application form and toolkit
- there was an Events Officer for both the North and South of the county who would be the key interface for event organisers
- connections were being made externally with event organisers and the Welsh Government Major Events Unit – it was important to decide first which events the Council wanted to attract
- it was important to measure and monitor success and the LO detailed how the success of big events could be measured through ticketing, an aerial view of the event and questionnaires.

Councillor Bobby Feeley suggested a link on the Council's website to town/city/community councils regarding events being held. Councillor Meirick Davies commended the photographs included in the strategy document but highlighted that no reference had been made to the events they depicted.

RESOLVED that –

- (a) *the Events Strategy (as appended to the report) be adopted;*
- (b) *Member Area Groups are involved in validating and contributing to the events programme;*
- (c) *all corporate events are evaluated in accordance with the strategy, and*
- (d) *the outcomes of the strategy are monitored through the Economic and Community Ambition Board.*

7 BAILIFF REFORM

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill presented the report detailing recent changes to the legislation governing the use of bailiffs and the fees charged and the impact of those changes on the Council and its customers.

Councillor Thompson-Hill elaborated upon the financial implications associated with the changes and new processes to be introduced together with suggested options for the minimum value of debt to be passed through to the enforcement stage. He was keen to highlight the need for a fair and transparent process which included the adoption of a vulnerability policy to protect vulnerable customers. Greater opportunities had been provided for the debtor to reach an agreement with the authority at an earlier stage in the process and a telephone debt strategy had been initiated in December 2013 which had proved successful.

Cabinet sought assurances regarding the application of safeguarding policies, particularly when using outside agencies for debt recovery, and raised further questions regarding various stages within the process. The Lead Member and officers responded as follows to the issues raised –

- it was a requirement for both in-house staff and external agencies to abide by the Council's safeguarding policies and measures were detailed to ensure compliance and familiarity with those policies
- the need for a robust council tax collection process was highlighted, particularly in view of the impact of non-collection on council services
- council tax bills had been issued to approximately 40,000 households and feedback was carefully monitored with very few formal complaints made
- as part of the reforms and general enforcement body worn cameras would be used to provide an element of safety and ensure due process was followed
- the processes mirrored those of other successful authorities and the timing of earlier intervention was clarified, with telephone calls made to ascertain circumstances and signpost individuals in order to maximise income.

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve the minimum debt value to be issued to the enforcement agent, as set out in paragraph 4.13 of the report, and note the new processes as shown in Appendix C to the report.

8 BUSINESS RATES WRITE OFFS

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill presented the report seeking Cabinet approval to write off irrecoverable Business Rates for three companies where recovery action could not continue because they had either been wound up or dissolved. A detailed history relating to each company had been included within the report.

Members noted there was no cost to the Council as a result of the write offs because Business Rates income was passed over to the National Pool and any bad debts were met by the pool.

Councillor Barbara Smith felt it would be useful to include some context in the report to the amounts to be written off. The Head of Finance and Assets explained some of the legalities around business insolvency and potential delays in the administration process. He was also explained the processes followed to try and recoup as much of the debt as possible during the period preceding administration. It was noted that large debts could be swiftly accumulated for bigger sites.

RESOLVED that Cabinet agrees to write off the irrecoverable Business Rates as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.

9 FINANCE REPORT

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill presented the report detailing the latest financial position and progress against the agreed budget strategy. He provided a summary of the Council's financial position as follows –

- an under spend of £1.578m was forecast across service and corporate budgets
- 94% of agreed savings had been achieved to date (target £3.061m)
- highlighted key variances from budgets or savings targets relating to individual service areas
- a positive movement of £535k on school balances brought forward from 2012/13
- a general update on the Capital Plan and Housing Revenue Account.

Councillor Thompson-Hill elaborated upon some of the variances as detailed within the individual service areas in response to members' questions thereon. He also elaborated upon the definition of the reserves as detailed in Appendix 5 to the report. With regard to housing regeneration, Councillor Meirick Davies queried whether funding was available to respond to works identified by councillors. He also asked for further information on new building regulations. The Head of Finance and Assets confirmed he would ask the Head of Housing and Community Development to respond directly to Councillor Davies regarding those issues.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the progress against the agreed budget strategy.

10 CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Hugh Evans presented the Cabinet Forward Work Programme for consideration.

Councillor Meirick Davies noted that Cabinet would be considering the Street Naming Policy at their May meeting. He raised concerns that the policy was not being produced by the service responsible for street naming and that two streets in Trefnant had still not been named. The Chief Executive advised that the policy would be submitted to members' for consideration but its origination was an operational matter. The Leader added that any concerns regarding the service could be called into scrutiny.

Councillor Bobby Feeley noted that the standing item on the work programme for items from scrutiny committees was rarely used. She asked that the Chairs and Vice Chairs Group be reminded of this mechanism to submit items to Cabinet.

RESOLVED that Cabinet's Forward Work Programme be noted.

The meeting concluded at 12.10 p.m.