

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held by video conference on Tuesday, 16 February 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, Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones, Meirick Davies, Hugh Irving, Alan James, Tina Jones, Barry Mellor, Arwel Roberts, Peter Scott, Glenn Swingler, Rhys Thomas and Graham Timms

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); Climate Change Programme Manager (HVE); Public Protection, Regeneration & Economic Development Manager (GR); Lead Officer: Inward Investment and High Growth (JE); Performance and Systems Administrator (EJ); Democratic Services Manager (SP); Scrutiny Coordinator (RE), and Committee Administrators (KEJ & RTJ)

1 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest had been raised.

3 URGENT MATTERS

No urgent matters had been raised.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 19 January 2021 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2021 be received and confirmed as a correct record.

5 DENBIGHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL CHANGE STRATEGY (2021 - 2029)

Councillors Brian Jones, Lead Member for Waste, Transport and the Environment and Tony Thomas, Lead Member for Housing and Communities presented the final DCC Climate and Ecological Change Strategy to Cabinet for consideration and recommendation to Council for adoption.

Councillor Brian Jones referred to the significant amount of work carried out since the Council's Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Declaration in 2019 which had culminated in the Strategy document detailing how the Council's aims of becoming net carbon zero and ecologically positive would be achieved. If the Strategy was approved the Council would need to commit in the region of £9m over the next three years, with more needed in future years, and he had absolute confidence that it was the right thing to do and would stand the authority in good stead going forward. As Lead Member for Biodiversity Councillor Tony Thomas reported on the tree planting programme and tree nursery project together and work undertaken in supporting many eco systems.

The Climate Change Programme Manager (CCPM) referred to the Welsh Government's target for Wales to be carbon zero by 2050 and the Climate Change Committee's advice on carbon reduction and absorption to cap global warming temperatures and limit the impact on climate change and biodiversity. The Strategy represented the Council's contribution in tackling the climate and nature crisis and help Wales meet its carbon zero ambitions and deliver on biodiversity duties. It had been produced collaboratively across the Council and with members of the public, and provided the Council's vision for 2030 together with a route map of how it would be achieved, banking benefit of reduced carbon, increased carbon absorption and improved species together with co-benefits in economy, health and wellbeing.

Cabinet welcomed the Strategy and acknowledged the significant amount of work in its development which had been carried out at pace since the Council's Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Declaration. In fully endorsing the Strategy Cabinet paid tribute to all those involved across the Council and political parties together with members of the public for their contribution, recognising the enthusiasm and widespread support. Whilst acknowledging the substantial funding required to deliver the Strategy and likely difficult financial climate going forward Cabinet highlighted the importance of the Strategy and its delivery for future generations and were unanimous in their view that it was the right course of action.

During debate Councillor Mark Young raised a number of questions regarding the Strategy and as Lead Member for the Local Development Plan (LDP) he was also keen for the LDP to be as green as possible. In response the CCPM advised that –

- affordability had been recognised as a key risk for the Council being able to deliver the Strategy but many of the measures to be implemented would save money in both the short and long term and also generate income; grant funding opportunities from both UK and Welsh Governments would also be maximised
- work was ongoing with the Planning Policy Department and learning from Conwy County Borough Council in terms of their developing LDP to take into

account the green agenda and the continued support of Councillor Young in that regard was much appreciated; there was already developer engagement through the pre-application planning process and further planned actions through planning policy in terms of development sites within the LDP and through development control

- council buildings accounted for the largest amount of carbon emissions and the target was to halve those emissions over the next nine years from energy and water; the Strategy would be reviewed every three years to align with current circumstances and technologies. Councillors Mark Young and Bobby Feeley both referred to the future potential to rationalise council buildings given the changing working patterns and shift to remote working which could have a major impact on maximising ambitions to further reduce the council's carbon footprint
- regional working was a developing feature and discussions were ongoing with counterparts in other local authorities; the intention was to engender a regional approach through the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB) and the Smart Local Energy project and national links to the Local Government Decarbonisation Strategy Panel. It was recognised within the Strategy that collaboration would deliver better benefits and greater success in securing grant funding. The Leader advised that he had written to the NWEAB asking for greater consideration for the climate change agenda in the future economic growth of the region and highlighted the importance of a regional approach.

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill reiterated the financial considerations given the significant funding required over the period of the Strategy. As part of the budget setting process members agreed to allocate £389k of revenue funding to support prudential borrowing which would enable the Council to help fund the programme of works required for 2021/22. However significant additional funding would also be required over the length of the programme. Councillor Bobby Feeley queried the amount of external funding sources available and Councillor Brian Jones confirmed that the wider climate change agenda was moving at pace and generating more opportunities both in terms of available technologies and funding streams, and both officers and members needed to be alert in order to maximise opportunities as they became available with greater regional collaboration going forward.

The Leader thanked all those involved in progressing the Strategy and considered the collaborative approach and commitment shown would ensure the Council was in a strong position to deliver it. At the Leader's invitation, Councillor Graham Timms, Chair of the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Working Group reported on the excellent work in developing the Strategy with widespread support across the county. He felt key officers such as the Biodiversity Officer and recently appointed Tree Officer and Moorland Officer stood the Council in good stead, and took the opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the Climate Change Programme Manager and Climate Change Project Officer in coordinating the project.

In response to questions raised from non-Cabinet members –

- Councillor Tony Thomas confirmed that increasing tree planting on all scales would be required to meet carbon absorption targets including tree planting in urban settings where appropriate. Planting schemes would be developed and delivered over the years of the Strategy and grant funding sought where

possible and Countryside Services had a proven track record of securing available funding. A full time Tree Officer was employed with two Tree Officers appointed on a temporary basis which may develop into permanent positions

- the CCPM confirmed that the UK Government had recently announced £60m for tree planting but it was unclear at this stage as to how Wales would benefit and she agreed to investigate the matter further with a view to reporting back to the next full Council meeting thereon. Welsh Government had already pledged funding for tree planting which was administered by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and assurances were provided that any available funding for planting schemes would be actively sought to maximise funding opportunities
- the CCPM also agreed to provide Councillor Glenn Swingle with an update on the tree planting schemes in West Rhyl and Upper Denbigh.

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

- (a) *recommends to Council adoption of the Denbighshire County Council's Climate and Ecological Change Strategy (2021/22 – 2029/30), and*
- (b) *confirms that it has read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment (Appendix A to the report) as part of its consideration.*

6 STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING POLICY REVIEW

Councillor Richard Mainon, Lead Member for Corporate Services presented the report seeking Cabinet approval of proposed changes to the Council's Street Naming and Numbering Policy together with the reasoning behind those changes.

A review of the policy had been carried out at the request of Performance Scrutiny Committee, with particular emphasis on ensuring it properly reflected the Council's Welsh Language Policy and the Welsh Language Steering Committee had agreed to that approach. Following consultation with the Council's Welsh Language Officer and Welsh Language Commissioners Office it was recommended that all new streets be named in Welsh only. Performance Scrutiny Committee had also raised the issue of the ability to name streets after people in light of recent examples of street names having to be changed. In Denbighshire's case there was more of an issue naming streets after individuals which had an emotive element and having also taken into account the views of the Armed Forces Covenant it was also recommended that the option to name streets after individuals be removed.

The following issues were raised during the ensuing discussion –

- there was some debate about completely removing the option to name streets after individuals and whilst accepting the reasoning behind that recommendation Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill was reluctant to preclude the honouring of an exceptional individual citing Captain Sir Tom Moore as an example if he had been local to the area. The current difficulties faced by officers in dealing with requests for naming streets after individuals and wider discussions on an individual's relative worth was highlighted which was a highly emotive and sensitive issue. The overall view was that the normalising of naming streets after individuals should be removed and a presumption in the policy not to

include that option. However it was accepted that the Council had the option to vary the policy for exceptional cases to allow the honouring of an extraordinary individual which was considered the best way forward

- in response to a question from Councillor Tony Thomas regarding the traditional approach of naming streets after particular organisations or sponsors, Councillor Mainon stated his personal preference that streets be named with a view to describing the locality and reflecting its cultural and historical significance in line with the general principles of the policy
- Councillor Graham Timms highlighted initial problems caused in translation of the English policy into Welsh and in response to questions the Performance and Systems Administrator: (1) confirmed that a suggested list of street names had been included in the policy but the list was not definitive and 'Heol' would definitely be considered, (2) agreed to ask the Welsh Language Officer to revisit Section 1.12 on development block names to ensure the most appropriate prefixes were used in the Welsh language translations, and (3) advised that use of the word "flat" and "apartment" had been based on an historic definition
- Councillor Arwel Roberts had initially requested the policy be considered by scrutiny and he congratulated the Lead Member and officers on the work undertaken. He reiterated the importance of Welsh place names which were part of the heritage and culture of the area and needed to be kept in perpetuity
- the Leader highlighted the importance of ensuring that developers were made aware of the new policy at an early stage in the planning process in order to provide a clear understanding of the policy requirements at the outset.

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve the following changes to the Street Naming and Numbering Policy –

- (i) all new streets are named in Welsh only, and
- (ii) the option to name streets after individuals be removed from the policy.

7 WELSH GOVERNMENT TRANSFORMING TOWNS PROGRAMME

Councillor Hugh Evans, Leader and Lead Member for the Economy and Corporate Governance presented the report seeking Cabinet approval to progress the Welsh Government Transforming Towns Programme, previously known as the Targeted Regeneration Investment Programme, and delegate authority for the purposes of securing regeneration investment.

Cabinet had supported the progression of the Targeted Regeneration Investment Programme in 2018. The regional programme had a budget of around £16m and Denbighshire had successfully benefitted from over £4m investment in its towns. The report detailed the continuation of the programme over the next two years with some changes, including up to half of the funding being allocated for the new 'Transforming Towns Placemaking Thematic' scheme, but it was currently unclear as to the criteria and how much, and when, funding would be available. The Leader advised that, given the broader approach to the funding, it was hoped there would be greater flexibility for projects in the scheme and he provided assurances that all members would be consulted on the next phase once the criteria was better understood. In welcoming the support package from Welsh Government the

Leader also highlighted the need for a greater focus on towns going forward, recognising the immense challenges faced, and to create a conversation within the authority to understand the support and investment required to move forward.

Cabinet discussed the report in more detail as follows –

- in response to questions from Councillor Mark Young the Leader highlighted the importance of first creating those conversations to ascertain the investment required in towns and then tailoring projects to meet the criteria for funding support, which might mean working in partnership with others going forward
- in terms of how to mitigate the risk posed by insufficient staff time and expertise, officers advised there would be opportunity to charge revenue to projects which would enable buy-in of a specialist resource or help to offset some staffing costs which would ensure staff capacity and capability to deliver those projects. The programme covered a two year period and Welsh Government had indicated it would likely be further extended so given the finite staff resource there would need to be a prioritisation of projects together with a delivery strategy over the next few years; however the first stage was to understand the funding criteria
- Councillor Richard Mainon highlighted his frustration regarding the short term nature of the programme which did not provide sufficient opportunity to undertake a more strategic approach to investment within towns which would have a bigger impact and better shaping of innovative future changes required to deliver for both business and residents. The Leader agreed with the benefits of having a longer term strategic approach to investment and he reiterated the work of the Welsh Local Government Association in lobbying for a three year budget allocation from the Welsh Government. That said the Leader highlighted the significant investment which Denbighshire had benefitted from over the lifetime of the programme which had made an impact despite not being part of a longer term strategic approach and the Council had to work within the current financial environment and was well placed for future investment going forward.

RESOLVED that (following original Cabinet approval on 22 May 2018) Cabinet approve continued delegated authority for the Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm in consultation with the Lead Member for the Economy and Corporate Governance, Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services and Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer), for the funding years 2021 – 22 (Year 4) and 2022 – 23 (Year 5) to –

- (i) *make any project funding applications necessary to secure resources from the Transforming Towns programme for the period of its operation;*
- (ii) *accept and undertake expenditure on projects accessing Transforming Towns programme support, including award of grants to third parties;*
- (iii) *renegotiate and enter into any new agreements with other North Wales councils as necessary to bid for or receive Transforming Towns programme funds, and*
- (iv) *agree any changes/updates made to the North Wales Regional Regeneration Plan (RRP).*

8 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STRATEGIC INVESTMENT GROUP

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill presented the report seeking Cabinet's support of projects identified for inclusion in the 2021/22 Capital Plan as recommended by the Strategic Investment Group (SIG) and detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

Councillor Thompson-Hill guided members through the report and explained the funding available for block allocations for on-going programmes of work. Reference was made to the work of the SIG in reviewing the bids for allocations and a summary of their recommendations had been provided and elaborated upon further at the meeting, which included the recommended funding source for each project together with the reasoning for supporting those specific projects and allocations.

Cabinet considered the recommendations detailed within the report. Councillor Tony Thomas drew attention to the need to take into account the Dark Sky Project (AONB – Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) as part of the Sustainable LED Lighting (Salix) works to replace existing street lighting. It was understood that the current street lighting model complied with those requirements and the Highways Department were aware of the technicalities in that regard. Councillor Mark Young sought clarity on the facilities provided for Private Sector Housing Assistance and it was confirmed the funding would mainly be used to provide larger scale adaptations to private accommodation to ensure its suitability for those with disabilities.

RESOLVED that the projects detailed in Appendix 1 to the report for inclusion in the 2021/22 Capital Plan be supported and recommended to full Council.

9 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 overspend of £1.759m 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 to date in terms of expenditure and income loss
- 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.

Cabinet was also asked to approve setting up a reserve to allow Working Denbighshire to manage their finances more effectively.

Councillor Thompson-Hill guided Cabinet through the various elements of the report and movements since the previous month. He also took the opportunity to update members on the Welsh Government grant scheme for local businesses administered by the council and paid tribute to the tireless work of those staff

involved in the swift processing of over 1300 claims amounting to approximately £4.5m in the latest funding tranche. Cabinet acknowledged the hard work of those staff in administering the schemes who had worked above and beyond to ensure swift payments to eligible claimants and conveyed their appreciation in that regard.

The Head of Finance advised that confirmation had now been received that the Quarter 3 income loss claim had been approved by Welsh Government (WG) and he was also pleased to report on other WG funding streams being made available late in the financial year which would impact positively on the Council's finances and be included in future monitoring reports to Cabinet. Finally, mention was made to the improved position in schools which was largely due to the ongoing impact of Covid-19 and confirmation of approved funding for particular items of expenditure.

Councillor Thompson-Hill and the Head of Finance responded to questions raised by Councillor Mark Young as follows –

- the disallowed payments for loss of income mainly related to Quarter 1 claims in respect of the Housing Revenue Account. Given that only half of local authorities managed their own housing stock with others operated by Registered Social Landlords, the WG had disallowed councils' claims in that regard to ensure parity
- most of the holding items on the expenditure claims related to technical queries around free school meals and on the income claims largely related to deferred income such as planning fees and council tax; it was now expected that WG would fund local authorities for that loss of income in year
- in terms of the wider issue of national funding and recent announcement that WG would receive an extra £650m from the UK Treasury for additional Covid-19 spending, it was noted that any of the extra funding not spent by April could be carried over to the next financial year, and there was an expectation that additional monies would be allocated to local authorities with the implications of the announcement being discussed in the coming days. Councillor Mark Young highlighted that WG also had a substantial amount of money which must be spent before April and he was keen for that funding to be committed as soon as possible given that councils and businesses were struggling financially.

Councillor Hugh Irving also paid tribute to the work of staff in administering the grant funding schemes and queried the processes in place to safeguard against payment of fraudulent claims. The Head of Finance confirmed that there had been investigations nationally and given the guiding principle had been to release funding as quickly as possible there was likely to be an element of fraud. However due to the procedures in place for processing claims in Denbighshire, and the necessary eligibility checks having been carried out individually prior to payment, he felt the scope for payments made for fraudulent claims would be limited if at all. Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts added that he was aware that some attempts for claims in Denbighshire had been disallowed thereby demonstrating assurance in the process. He welcomed the support and grant funding available for businesses but expressed concern that more recent start-up businesses had not been eligible for financial support and he was aware that WG were looking into that and hoped funding would be made available for those new businesses going forward.

RESOLVED that Cabinet –

- (a) *note the budgets set for 2020/21 and progress against the agreed budget strategy, and*
- (b) *approve the setting up of a reserve to allow Working Denbighshire to manage their finances more effectively.*

10 CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet forward work programme was presented for consideration.

RESOLVED that Cabinet's forward work programme be noted.

The meeting concluded at 11.35 hrs.