

Report To: County Council

Date of Meeting: 9th April 2013

Lead Member / Officer: Councillor David Smith

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Title: Update on proposals for a new prison

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 The report summarises the recent announcement of the Ministry of Justice with regard to prison policy, and aims to inform Members of the actions agreed by the North Wales Regional Leadership Board to re-affirm its commitment to seek a prison in North Wales.

2 What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the actions agreed by the North Wales Regional Leadership Board to re-affirm its commitment to seek a prison in North Wales and to seek Members' support for this.

3. What are the Recommendations?

1. That Members agree to support the North Wales Regional Leadership Board in its commitment to seek a prison in North Wales and endorse the proposals set out in paragraph 4.12.

4. Report details.

Background

- 4.1 The Justice Secretary, Chris Grayling, made a ministerial statement on 10th January 2013 regarding the Management of Prisons.
- 4.2 The Minister stated that modern prisons could deliver better custody and rehabilitation services more efficiently than older prison accommodation, citing savings from HMP Oakwood, a new prison that provides places and better services at less than half the average cost of existing prison places. The Minister therefore announced plans to close 6 prisons, including Shrewsbury and the partial closure of a further 3 prisons.
- 4.3 The significant reduction in costs that the new developments have, and will produce in comparison to older parts of the prison estate, has led to the Minister making a commitment to examine the feasibility of building a new prison with a capacity of 2000 places or more in the North West, London or North Wales. This would be the largest prison in the UK.

- 4.4 The North Wales Regional Leadership Board has lobbied for a prison in North Wales since 2007. The reasons for this include:
- Economic benefits, which are substantial in terms of stable employment and a supply chain covering a range of services from education, health, catering and building maintenance.
 - North Wales is the only area in the UK not to have a prison in the region.
 - To secure a prison subject to the provision of the Welsh Language Act, where prisoners from North Wales are held in facilities where they can use their first language.
 - Efficiency for the public services (prisoner transport and transport costs and travelling time to court/prison for legal/offender management services)
 - Improving rehabilitation and reduction of re-offending rates through enabling closer contact between families and support professions by improving access to the prison. Keeping families together also avoids cost to public services and is correlated with prisons that are accessible to families.
- 4.5 A prison in the region will also boost the Criminal Justice system in the area (probation, courts etc.) creating jobs in the legal and court system.
- 4.6 The economic benefits could be considerable. In work to assess the impact of a 1500 bed prison it was estimated that 1,165 jobs could be created through direct employment in the prison and indirectly through the supply chain. The expenditure going through a 1,500 bed prison into the wider community would be in the region of £47m. Over half of new jobs would be in the immediate area of location.
- 4.7 Denbighshire previously put forward a proposal for a new prison for North Wales to be sited at Greengates Farm, adjacent to St Asaph Business Park back in 2008. However, at this time the search was for a suitable site for a smaller facility with capacity for about 800 prisoners, not 2000 as is currently being proposed. The Ministry of Justice has not yet published details of site requirements. However, it is unlikely that land available at Greengates Farm would be sufficiently large enough to accommodate a larger prison. It is also considered that the former Denbigh Hospital site would not be an appropriate site for the size and type of prison being considered. The former hospital is a grade 2* listed building, and there is insufficient land on the remainder of the site to accommodate a prison of this size. A prison would require the total demolition of all buildings on the site and the construction of a very large building which will have little aesthetic quality thereby detrimentally affecting the setting of Denbigh Castle. There would also be issues of overlooking from the castle which would compromise security.
- 4.8 The Secretary of State for the Wales Office has advertised the opportunity to all the Local Authorities in the region and has offered to help Councils in North Wales work with the Ministry of Justice. Decisions on the location of prisons are non-devolved. Welsh Government has also expressed an interest in supporting North Wales' Councils to seek a prison in North Wales.
- 4.9 The primary objective of the Ministry of Justice is to reduce the cost of the prison estate. Scale plays a part in the reduction of costs. A prison designed to

meet the needs of North Wales alone would not be large enough to meet the criteria of the Ministry of Justice and would not have the scale to reduce costs to the level required by the Ministry of Justice. Therefore if located in North Wales, it would be shared with neighbouring English regions.

- 4.10 Securing a prison is a competitive process where both politics and a strong business case play a part in the decision. The success of the region will depend on securing strong political support from across the region and making an attractive “business proposition” that meets the economic and policy goals of the Ministry of Justice.
- 4.11 In order to secure the maximum economic benefits, the aim will be to develop a prison which will:
- Radically reduce costs compared to the current estate. Land values and the quality and competitiveness of the local workforce will play a part in this
 - Modernise internal services to reduce re-offending
 - Have excellent links to the transport system of the NW and West Midlands
 - Have excellent links to the criminal justice system in the NW and West Midlands
 - Take capacity from Shrewsbury which includes Welsh prisoners from Mid Wales and enables the release of capacity from other prisons

Next Steps

- 4.12 The North Wales Regional Leadership Board has identified the following priorities:
- Demonstrate political commitment to pursue a prison for North Wales
 - Reporting the opportunity for a prison in North Wales to each local authority
 - Demonstrate sensitivity to meeting the policy objectives of the Ministry of Justice (largely cost reduction and modernisation of facilities which enable better services to reduce re-offending)
 - Officers from each Council will meet Ministry of Justice officials to secure details of the site criteria required to conduct a feasibility study and assess potential sites including timelines and to secure information on prison populations and the categories that they are planning to accommodate in a potential North Wales site.
 - Authorise officers to identify potential sites based on the criteria provided by Ministry of Justice officials. Officers from each council will meet together to identify potential sites and discuss the political will to promote sites, enabling the region to offer the Ministry of Justice a shortlist of sites that meet their criteria
 - The North Wales Police will construct a business case that identifies the benefits to the communities of North Wales of being able to accommodate offenders from North Wales in a prison located in North Wales. This will require liaison with the Ministry of Justice to be facilitated by Council officers.

4.13 The North Wales Regional Leadership Board will regularly review progress at each Board meeting. The Board has requested each Council in North Wales to endorse its proposals and support the Board by:

* Issuing a press release welcoming the opportunity to compete for a prison to be located in North Wales

* Corresponding with the Wales Office, the Prisons Minister and the Welsh Government to welcome the announcement and offer support for a prison to be located in North Wales.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

5.1. If located in North Wales, a new prison could contribute positively to the following corporate priority:

- *Developing the Local Economy* – through the direct creation of jobs and related supporting employment

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1. At this stage there are no additional costs.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

7.1 The recommendation to support the North Wales Leadership Board in seeking the location of a new prison in North Wales has been screened and it is not considered that a full equality impact assessment is required as it would not lead to unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010. The completed screening template is attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

8. What consultations have been carried out?

8.1 The update has been discussed at Cabinet Briefing and Denbigh Member Area Group.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 Any costs at this stage should be contained within existing budgets and therefore there are no obvious financial implications contained in the report.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1 If the Council does not agree to support the North Wales Leadership Board, there is a risk that the opportunity to locate a prison in North Wales, with its potential economic benefits, would be lost.

11. Power to make the Decision

11.1 Local Government Act 2000