

RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Resources Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1A, County hall, Ruthin on Thursday, 30th July 2009 at 10.00a.m.

PRESENT

Councillors G.C. Evans (Chair), J. Cahill, W.L. Cowie, H.LI. Jones and G.M. Kensler.

Observers: Councillors M.LI. Davies, R.L. Feeley and M.M. Jones.

ALSO PRESENT

Financial Controller, Head of Children's Services, Head of Personnel, Systems Administrator (R. Marsh), Scrutiny Support Officer (R. Evans) and Administration Officer (W.J. Roberts).

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE WERE RECEIVED FROM

Councillors D.W. Lee, D. Owens and G. Williams together with Councillor J. Thompson-Hill (Lead Member for Finance)

242 URGENT MATTERS

In accordance with Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chairman declared that he intended to include for discussion the following matters which required urgent attention:-

- (a) Chief Executive's proposed Senior Management Re-structure
- (b) Commencement time for meetings of the Resources Scrutiny Committee

Councillor H.LI. Jones referred to the fact that, apart from the Resources Scrutiny Committee, all other Scrutiny Committees commenced their meetings at 9.30a.m. He proposed that, with a view to assisting Committee meetings to conclude by lunchtime, the Resources Scrutiny Committee should also commence its meetings at 9.30a.m. in future. Members unanimously –

RESOLVED that, in future, meetings of the Resources Scrutiny Committee should commence at 9.30a.m.

243 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd July 2009 (previously circulated) were submitted.

Update on Actions –

Pages 3 – 6 – Item 3 – Draft Corporate Plan 2009 – 12 (Part II) – the Committee's recommendations and observations had been communicated to Cabinet for consideration on 14th July and to full Council on 28th July. Annex 2 to the report to Council on 28th July had listed the Committee's comments/recommendations and Cabinet's subsequent response.

Page 6 – Information on Staff suspensions and Dismissals per Directorate for the last 3 years – the requested information was in the process of being collated.

Page 7 – Item No 6 – Scrutiny Work Programme – 'Monitoring the Wales Audit Office Recommendations in relation to Information Security' – whilst presentation of this report and the Council's Action Plan in response thereto had been delayed due to the ill health absence of the County Clerk, work on the draft action plan was now progressing and officers anticipated being in a position to present the report and draft action plan to the Committee at its September meeting.

Page 8 – Scrutiny Work Programme – 'Energy Procurement' – an information report had been circulated to Members with their briefing notes. In addition, a copy of the report on the Council's high

level risks, which had been discussed by the Corporate Governance Committee, had been circulated to Members by e-mail earlier in the week.

Page 8 – Scala Cinema, Prestatyn – Councillor Cahill’s concerns had been relayed to the Corporate Director: Environment who had agreed to contact her to discuss the matters she had raised.

Matters Arising –

Page 2 – Item No.2 – Minutes – Undertaking of road works during night time hours – it was agreed to forward a copy of the information report prepared by the Joint Head of Highways and Infrastructure for the Environment and Regeneration Committee to Councillor W.L. Cowie, who had not been able to attend recent meetings of the Committee due to ill health.

Page 2 – Value for Money in Construction Procurement – Integrated working on the Council House Refurbishment Programme – In response to a question from Councillor W.L. Cowie, the Scrutiny Support Officer advised that the proposed procedure to involve Local Members had been discussed with officers who felt that the suggestion was impractical. A further report was expected in September.

Page 7 –Item No.6 – Scrutiny Work Programme – Promoting Health and Well-Being – Councillor J. Cahill advised Members that she had attended the session held on the 29th July 2009, and had found it to be interesting and informative.

***RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Resources Scrutiny Committee held on 2nd July 2009 be received and approved as a correct record.*

244 THE ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES TO CHILD PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING

The Head of Children and Family Services submitted a report (previously circulated) that outlined the allocation of resources made to the Children and Family Service who had primary operational responsibility for protecting and safeguarding children and young people and explained how those resources were utilized in the provision of services to children/young people and their families. The report set out the processes followed, levels of activity and resources spent on the following three key aspects of child protection and safeguarding –

- Managing referrals and assessing risk
- Working with children/young people and their families where there were child protection concerns
- Reviewing and monitoring practice

In conclusion, the Head of Children and Family Services informed members that the Children’s Services would make every effort to continue to balance the demands for service against the available resources, taking account of both external and internal factors that impacted on the way in which work was managed. The Service had a proven track record of good financial management. Over recent years, service development had been predominately resourced by generating internal efficiency savings: pressures funding had been minimal. The Head of Children and Family Services added that going forward, given the demands for service and the workflow set out in the report, there were extremely limited opportunities to generate further efficiency savings without reducing staffing and direct service provision to vulnerable children. Children’s Services would continue to seek external funding opportunities such as the recent joint bid with Conwy for an integrated family support team – total value of £1.2m over three years for both counties if successful.

During consideration of the report Members took the opportunity to raise a number of questions with the Head of Children and Family Services who advised that –

- The cost to take court proceedings in respect of child care had last year increased to £5,000 per application.

- On occasion some parents are prosecuted for the way in which they had cared for their children. In many cases, these were young, chaotic parents who needed more help as opposed to chastisement
- Conwy and Denbighshire Adult Mental Health and Social Care Partnership – a considerable amount of work had been done with the Partnership in order to establish good practice. A joint Adult and Children's Services training programme was currently being run. It was important that the local authority worked with agencies that dealt with parents and adults
- Both national and international research suggest that child abuse could occur across all socio/economic and religious groups
- The local authority had no statutory powers of entry. Only the police possessed those powers. Families suspected of not providing adequate care for their children do not have to work with the Social Services Department. If parents were not willing to co-operate with the Department, any action the Department wished to take against a family had to be undertaken through the Courts
- Through effective management arrangements and the Lead Member's assistance, the Head of Children and Family Services felt that the funding currently provided to deliver the service was adequate. She said that there were good mechanisms within the Directorate to request additional funding if problems arose although noted there was a need for constant vigilance
- Joint working with the Health Authority in respect of continuing health care -Government funding was available for a one to three year period and officers were currently in the process of finalizing bids for those grants for the Children Services.
- Supporting children at transition - Officers did have a responsibility to attend the Statement Review meetings and had recently tried to improve the transition of disabled young people into adulthood

In conclusion, the Chair thanked the Head of Children and Family Services for her report and asked that the Committee's thanks be extended to the staff within the Children's Services Department.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted together with the demand and levels of accountability placed on Children's Services.

With the Committee's consent the Chair varied the order of business on the agenda at this juncture.

245 EMPLOYEE STATISTICS – 1ST APRIL 2008 – 31ST MARCH 2009

The Head of Personnel submitted a report (previously circulated) that provided various employee statistics for 2008/09 that included – Employee Numbers; Age Profile; Length of Service; Gender; Reasons for Leaving; Equal Opportunities Monitoring; Absence; Absence Reasons and Counselling together with information in respect of Teachers' Sickness Absence, 100% Attendance at work by staff and Performance Appraisals.

During consideration of the report Members took the opportunity to raise questions with the Head of Personnel. In particular, the following points were made –

- That enquiries should be made with the Environment Directorate on the feasibility of apprenticeships being offered e.g. in Council workshops. All current apprenticeships were office based. Manual apprenticeships would assist with the Council workforce's age profile
- In order to reduce costs, that information passed to Members in respect of members of staff who had been suspended should be e-mailed as opposed to being posted
- As the County's primary schools appeared not to be acknowledging and complying with the Authority's Absence Policy, that the matter be passed to the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee for consideration

- So that Members could view the various staff appraisal forms used by Denbighshire that a copy of each form be sent to all members of the Committee
- As an incentive for those staff who had already attained 100% attendance record to continue to attempt to achieve that record, and to encourage those staff who currently had attended work for 95%+ of the time to strive for 100% attendance, that the feasibility of a 'valuable' prize draw be researched. The cost of any prize would be far outweighed by the benefits realized by the Council in improving staff attendance and reducing sickness absence rates
- The feasibility of undertaking exit interviews with County Councillors when leaving the Authority to be researched
- That the figures in the appendices to the report be checked for consistency and accuracy as Councillor H.LI. Jones was of the view that a number of the statistics included the Council's 47 Councillors when perhaps they shouldn't e.g. age profile, gender profile
- That the Resources Scrutiny Committee continues to receive the twice yearly reports on Employee Statistics with the other scrutiny committees receiving quarterly information reports on their Directorate's employee numbers (including full-time; part-time; starters; leavers); Attendance figures (including short-term and long term sick); Performance appraisals (Lifelong Learning to be broken down into Directorate and schools). The quarterly reports also to indicate any identifiable developing trends.

RESOLVED that the report and the information contained therein be accepted.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 12 and 13 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

PART II

246 PRESENTATION ON THE I-TRENT HUMAN RESOURCES SYSTEM

In response to a request from the Committee, the Systems Administrator provided Members with a demonstration of the i-Trent Human Resources System advising them that the system had also been adopted by Flintshire, Conwy and Powys County Councils together with 6 local authorities in South Wales. Elements of the system were also used by the North Wales Police.

At the conclusion of the demonstration Members briefly discussed the Single Status Agreement that had recently been accepted by the Unions. In view of the fact that the NNEB posts had been downgraded during the exercise, Councillor G.M. Kensler asked that the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee be requested to monitor how many of those employees subsequently left the Authority.

RESOLVED that –

- the demonstration be accepted; and*
- the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee be requested to monitor how many NNEBs, whose posts had been downgraded during the Single Status exercise, subsequently left the employment of the Authority.*

The meeting continued in Open Session.

247 BUDGET 2010/11 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2009 TO 2012

The Financial Controller submitted a report (previously circulated) that updated Members on the progress to date with the development of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan 2009 to 2012,

with particular reference to the impact on the 2010/11 financial year, and to give the Committee an opportunity to comment on the potential budgetary position going forward. He reminded Members that the Plan was still a draft document and would remain so until the end of January 2010.

The Financial Controller reminded Members that the UK Government had postponed its Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) until after the general election. Consequently the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) would not be able to produce a meaningful Assembly budget beyond 2010/11, which meant that local authorities would not be advised, in advance, of their likely funding beyond 2010/11. No indicative figures would be given until October 2009 when WAG would advise local authorities of their funding for 2010/11 and it was not thought that information would be provided in respect of 2011/12 and 2012/13 at that time. Denbighshire would receive its provisional settlement for 2010/11 in October 2009 when it was anticipated that there would be no increase in the level of revenue funding in 2010 and it was assumed that there would be for the following two years a similar position and that there would be a significant reduction in the level of capital funding.

The Financial Controller subsequently highlighted various sections of his report, in particular, those dealing with Denbighshire County Council's priorities of Modernising Education, Responding to Demographic Change, Regeneration and Roads and Flood Defences. He also referred to some of the other initiatives – Accommodation Review, Support Services Review and Council Tax Strategy.

Insofar as Supported Capital Expenditure/General Grant was concerned the Financial Controller advised that WAG included within its settlement to the Council an element to reflect the cost of borrowing. He said that over the past 4 years, the level of supported capital expenditure had risen by an average of 1% a year. With building inflation running in excess of 5% a year, the value of that support had dropped by 20% in that time. The increase from 2008/09 to 2009/2010 was zero. The Financial Controller added that the Medium Term Financial Plan would need to reflect the recently clarified Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) assumption that WAG capital support would reduce by at least 10% per annum.

The Financial Controller subsequently referred to Denbighshire's Revenue Plan explaining that there would always be insufficient resources to meet all of the Council's service delivery ambitions. Significant efficiency savings and cost reductions/cuts in future financial years would inevitably be required in light of the poor settlements expected from the Welsh Assembly Government. He reminded Members that throughout the year, monthly updates were provided to them on the latest projected revenue outturn figures for the current financial year together with progress on the delivery of agreed efficiency improvements.

During consideration of the report, the Financial Controller responded to Members' specific questions as follows –

- Whilst the Work Smart project being undertaken at Caledfryn, Denbigh was beginning to produce results, with worsening funding and changing circumstances, there was a need for changes to take place more quickly
- Denbighshire had the sixth highest level of Council Tax in Wales, and the highest in North Wales, although progress had been made in recent years to close this gap
- The Authority now had in its balances and reserves at a level close to that expected by External Auditors
- In terms of school buildings, Denbighshire had one of the highest capital spend levels in Wales
- Some of the excess provision allowed for pay awards had been allocated to the future costs of single status. However, a sum of £120,000 had also been added to the base budget for Environment Services that could be utilized for street cleaning, weed spraying, grass cutting etc
- It was currently unclear as to how convergence funding and any funding from Europe would be affected by the reduced level of public expenditure

- The Corporate Plan reflected the priority areas that Members had identified – therefore as the youth service had not been singled out in either of these it had not been highlighted for immediate direct investment. However, this did not mean that it would not receive funding indirectly by way of its contribution to the delivery of the priorities and/or the Corporate Plan

Members commented on the make up of the Joint Scrutiny established to discuss service proposals following the Budget Challenge Group's scrutiny of them, suggesting that it should be opened up to all Scrutiny Committee members and that the Chair should take that suggestion up with appropriate officers and with the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group.

In conclusion, Councillor H.L.I. Jones expressed his concern that there was a potential for two different projects to be running at the same time in virtually the same part of Corwen – the Flood Alleviation Scheme and work to extend the steam railway from Llangollen to Corwen. He asked that officers ensure that the organizers for each scheme were aware of the other and that, where appropriate, had discussions with each other.

RESOLVED that –

- (a) *the potential Revenue funding and budget scenario for the Council for the next 3 years be noted; and*
- (b) *that the progressively worsening position on Capital funding from the Welsh Assembly Government, the inevitable need for a review of the Council's stock of assets and the need to consider every opportunity to increase Capital resources by other means, e.g. capital receipts, also be noted.*

248 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Support Officer submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting Members to review the Committee's future work programme and providing an update on relevant issues. A draft forward work programme for the Committee (Appendix 1); Cabinet Forward Work Programme (Appendix 2) and a summary of the discussion between the Chairs of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and Resources Scrutiny Committee regarding asset management matters had been attached to the report.

Monitoring the Wales Audit Office (WAO) Recommendations in relation to Information Security – the Scrutiny Support Officer advised Members that following a delay in producing this report and the Council's Action Plan, due to the ill health absence of the County Clerk, the work on the draft action plan was now progressing and officers anticipated being in a position to present the report and draft plan to the Committee at its September 2009 meeting.

Insofar as the agenda for the 24th September 2009 meeting was concerned, Members agreed that the allocation of resources to Leisure Services should be withdrawn and submitted to the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

Councillor G.M. Kensler asked that an information report be prepared to inform Members (a) of the financial costs of the support provided by the Council's Legal Department to the Social Services and Housing and Lifelong Learning Directorates over the last three financial years; and (b) the number of staff at different levels in the Legal Department who specialized in supporting the two Directorates.

Working Group established by the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee to look at asset management issues – that the Chair together with Councillors H.L.I. Jones and Gwyneth Kensler form this Committee's representation on that working group.

Working Group established by the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee to consider issues arising from Professor Hugh Pennington's E-coli Public Inquiry – In response to a request for one member to represent the Resources Scrutiny Committee on that Working Group, Members agreed that Councillor J. Cahill should be their representative.

Sickness Absences – Members agreed that the report they had sought to provide an in-depth analysis comparing sickness absence levels per Directorate should be removed from their Work Programme as statistics were already being provided to the Committee on a twice yearly basis.

Performance Appraisals and Sickness Absence – Members agreed that this matter should take the form of an information report in the first instance.

Worksmart – Members agreed to include in their Forward Work Programme a report to provide information on the costs of implementing the Worksmart pilot in Caledfryn.

RESOLVED that –

- (a) *the work Programme as detailed in Appendix 1 be approved subject to the above amendments;*
- (b) *an information report be prepared ahead of September's meeting to inform Members (a) of the financial costs of the support provided by the Council's Legal Department to the Social Services and Housing and Lifelong Learning Directorates over the last three financial years; and (b) the number of staff at different levels in the Legal Department who specialized in supporting the two Directorates;*
- (c) **Working Group established by the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee to look at asset management issues** – *that the Chair together with Councillors H.LI. Jones and Gwyneth Kensler form this Committee's representation on that working group;*
- (ch) **Sickness Absences** – *Members agreed that the report they had sought to provide an in-depth analysis comparing sickness absence levels per Directorate should be removed from their Work Programme as statistics were already being provided to the Committee on a twice yearly basis;*
- (d) **Performance Appraisals and Sickness Absence** – *Members agreed that this matter should take the form of an information report in the first instance; and*
- (dd) **Worksmart** – *Members agreed to include in their Forward Work Programme a report to provide information on the costs of implementing the Worksmart pilot in Caledfryn.*

249 SENIOR MANAGEMENT RESTRUCTURING

The Chair referred to Councillor G. Williams' concerns in respect of various aspects of the Senior Management Restructuring exercise, i.e. scrutiny of job descriptions, membership of appointment panels, resulting pressure of work arising from reduction of senior posts in the structure, and Members agreed that his concerns should be noted in the minutes and relayed to the Chief Executive and to the Personnel Department.

Members also agreed that enquiries should be made on whether the Council was actively exercising its duty of care to staff in senior management posts who were not on the flexible working system; whether a record was kept of the actual hours those officers worked per week/month and how the local authority was exercising its duty of care.

RESOLVED that *Councillor G. Williams' concerns in respect of the Senior Management Restructuring exercise should be referred to the Chief Executive and to the Personnel Department.*

The meeting concluded at 1.45p.m.
