

COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the County Council held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin LL15 1YN on Thursday, 31 January 2013 at 2.00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillors Ian Armstrong, Raymond Bartley (Vice-Chair), Joan Butterfield, Jeanette Chamberlain-Jones (Chair), Bill Cowie, Meirick Davies, Richard Davies, Stuart Davies, Bobby Feeley, Carys Guy-Davies, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Martyn Holland, Colin Hughes, Alice Jones, Huw Jones, Pat Jones, Gwyneth Kensler, Geraint Lloyd-Williams, Margaret McCarroll, Jason McLellan, Barry Mellor, Win Mullen-James, Bob Murray, Dewi Owens, Merfyn Parry, Arwel Roberts, Gareth Sandilands, David Simmons, David Smith, Bill Tasker, Julian Thompson-Hill, Joe Welch, Cefyn Williams, Cheryl Williams, Eryl Williams and Huw Williams

ALSO PRESENT

Chief Executive (MM), Head of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer (GW), Head of Finance and Assets (PMcG), Head of Revenues and Benefits (KJ) and Democratic Services Manager (SP)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brian Blakeley, Ann Davies, James Davies, Hugh Evans, Rhys Hughes, Hugh Irving, Peter Owen and Barbara Smith

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

There were no urgent matters raised.

4 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill (lead member for Finance and Assets) introduced a report (previously circulated) on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. He reminded members that Council had adopted a new scheme to provide council tax support on the 8 January 2013. However, the Welsh Government had then amended their regulations on the 24 January and were making £22million available to local authorities in Wales to increase protection for affected residents from 90% to 100% protection.

Councillor Thompson-Hill advised that the Council was required to adopt the amended scheme before the end of January if it wished to take advantage of the discretionary elements which offered enhanced protection to residents.

The Head of Finance and Assets informed members that Denbighshire Council would receive £840K to finance the discretionary elements. He confirmed that the changes also meant that the Council would not have to send out demand notices to residents for amounts that would have been payable by affected residents with the associated likelihood that not all sums owed would be recoverable.

The Monitoring Officer replied to a query and confirmed the legal and constitutional position for Council revisiting a decision it had made earlier in the month.

Several members queried whether the additional funding would be sufficient to allow the Council to lower its council tax next year. The Head of Finance and Assets reported that the sums involved would not equate to a fall in 1% of the Council Tax but that the draft budget was being reviewed as a result of the income and because collection costs were being avoided. He added that it was not certain whether the Welsh Government would be able to fund 100% protection for longer than one year, but the Council was prudently viewing it as potentially one year funding only.

Members discussed the UK Government's decision to reduce protection in the Council Tax Benefits Scheme which was expected to be permanent. If the Welsh Government decided not to continue to fund the shortfall for longer than a year then local authorities in Wales will need to consider whether the cuts would be passed onto affected residents.

Council also considered the 4 discretionary elements of the new scheme individually.

RESOLVED – that

- (i) Council adopts the Council Tax Reduction Schemes and Prescribed Requirements (Wales) Regulations 2012, as amended by the 2013 Regulations;*
- (ii) The standard 4 week extended payment period given to people after they return to work, when they have been in receipt of a relevant qualifying benefit for at least 26 weeks, be adopted;*
- (iii) The Council adopts the discretionary provisions to disregard part or the whole amount of war disablement pensions and war widows pensions when calculating income;*
- (iv) The Council adopts the discretionary provisions to provide more than the minimum information prescribed as part of the notification of decisions procedures;*
- (v) The period for which backdated Council Tax Support claims may be considered for working age customers be set at 3 months prior to a claim; and*

(vi) That a task and finish group, to include the Group Leaders, reviews the future implications of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.